



## **Cinematic Narratives of Tribal Experiences**

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### **Abstract**

The tribal people and their communities are always an integral part of the Indian society who are known for their unique and special ways of living, culture and traditions. However, they have also been portrayed in films in different ways; while on one hand, they have often been portrayed as “uncivilized people” with weird makeup and loud and exaggerated styles of speaking. On the other hand, they have been also portrayed as people co-existing with nature, with their own set of occupations and livelihoods along with their problems, realistically. With

the rise of the Pan-Indian films such as RRR, Jawan and Kantara featuring actors from various regional film industries and being released and dubbed in various Indian languages, the concept of pan-Indian films has also received a lot of traction and attention among the film fraternity and people. In addition to this, the pan-Indian films have also been very successful commercially and they have been very well received by the people across the country. Interestingly, these films have also brought up this issue of representation of tribal people to the forefront as some of the Pan-Indian films either feature tribal people and communities in the leading / supporting roles or them playing key roles in the development of the plots in the films. With their ability to influence or even alter the attitudes and perceptions of the people towards the tribal people and communities, this is a trend which should be studied and analyzed. This study aims to study and analyze the manner and type of portrayal of the tribal people and the tribal communities and also their roles and importance in the movies through a content analysis of the selected Pan-Indian movies.

**Keywords:** Pan-Indian films, Indian cinema, Tribal people, Representation, Content Analysis.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **Pan-Indian films**

The release of the Telugu film *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) directed by S.S.Rajamouli and starring Prabhas, Rana Daggubati, Tammanaah Bhatia and Ramya Krishnan and dubbed and released in languages such as Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam, was a pivotal moment in the Indian cinema. It had caught the attention of the audience through its amazing cast, grand visuals and a narrative based on the Indian epics. It had introduced many elements that transcended the boundaries of language and state and had also reformulated “the narratives of South-Indian cinema”. It also contributed to a wider “Pan-Indian cinematic experience”.

However, releasing and dubbing Indian films in various languages was a practice which had already existed since the 1950s when films made by production companies such as the New Theatres Production Company and other Bengali production companies such as the East Indian Films dubbed and released their films in Hindi and Bengali. Putta (2023) explained that the release of the films by these production companies in Hindi and Bengali played a major role in increasing the market of the Bengali film production companies, giving them access to a bigger audience across India and it also ensured their viability in the early 1950s.

The 1959 Kannada film *Mahishasura Mardini* which was directed and produced by B.S.Ranga and featured actors Rajkumar, V.Nagayya, Udaykumar and Narasimharaju. It was released in seven languages and thus it was also an early example of a Pan-Indian film.

### **Development of the concept of Pan-Indian films**

One of those directors who had attraction Pan-Indian attention was the Tamil director Mani Ratnam. His film *Roja* (1992) was one of the major contributions to the narrative of Pan-Indian cinema. This Tamil film had transcended the boundaries of language and culture and thus it enjoyed commercial success at the national or Pan-Indian level by dubbing the film in multiple languages. The focus of the film on the identities of Tamilian and Kashmiri identities and it prompted reflections on issues on national and regional identity. The film had established a narrative of transcendence by recognizing regional distinctions and “its interactions with the broader national framework”.

His multilingual films such as *Bombay* and *Dil Se* “exceeded their original linguistic contexts” and were about global issues and themes which resonated with people from various regions and states across the country. (Putta, 2023).

Another Tamil film maker who had contributed to the cultivation of the Pan-Indian appeal is S.Shankar. His films often were released in different languages starting from *Indian* (1996), which featured the famous Tamil actor Kamal Hassan in the lead role. The film was also dubbed in Hindi

along with some changes and released as Hindustani, which became a box-office success and it also replicated its success when it was released in Telugu and Malayalam.

Some of his other films such as *Anniyan* (2005), *Sivaji: The Boss* (2007), *Endhiran* (2010) and *2.0* (2018) also became huge box-office hits and they were based on universally relevant themes, addressed social problems and technological advances. Thus, as people could relate to these themes of his films, Shankar's films also contributed "to the Pan-Indian narrative". (Putta, 2023).

Although these films attract the attention of the audience at the Pan-Indian level, they were only standalone attempts as the succeeding films were not to replicate their success at the box-office and thus preventing these types of films into a popular cinematic movement in India.

However, the magnificent success of the film *Baahubali* attracted the attention of the national and regional media houses, as it was not a small feat which was achieved by a regional film in India. Taking note of the success achieved by the film, many other similar types of films released at the Pan-Indian level followed suit and some of them also became blockbusters such as *Pushpa: The Rise-Part 1* (2020), *KGF: Chapter 2* (2022) and *Jailer* (2023). These box-office successes successfully "broke the resistance" for regional and especially South Indian films at the national level, thus enabling many more Pan-Indian films to be produced and released nationwide. Thus, it has led to the rise of Pan-Indian films.

The huge successes of these Pan-Indian films from South India have proven that the Indian film industry could no longer be divided into different states or regions as the producers from South India have started to perfect the practice of dubbing their films into Hindi and releasing them for the audiences in the Hindi speaking regions of the country. Thus, the Indian film industry is gradually merging into a single and unified film industry which could be accessed by anyone. (Majumdar, 2022). Shrikrishna (2022) also listed some common themes of the Pan-Indian films which are crucial for them to achieve box-office success such as "a predestined saviour, the rise of an oligarch, upholding every tenet of Hinduism and rewriting history."

## Tribals in Indian Cinema

The tribal communities and people have been portrayed in Indian cinema from a very long time in different and contrasting aspects.

They were and are still mostly portrayed as poor, uncivilized, uneducated and unintelligent people who were different from the mainstream human community, and they were also shown through depicting them as people with black skin, speaking loudly and in incomprehensible languages and wearing multi-coloured or even sometimes, the tribal women are shown also to be wearing dresses without no blouses.

The tribal women in films including films such as *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970) directed by the famous Indian director Satyajit Ray, were portrayed sexually and the cinematic gaze towards them was mostly urban as the films featuring them were directed by people, belonged to cities and were not from the tribal communities. They were “exoticised and reduced to being “child of the earth”.

In addition to this, tribal communities never had major roles to play in the films and they were just used for the purposes of inclusivity and symbolism in the films and another aspect of the on- screen representation of the tribals and especially tribal women, has been their “nomadic appearances.”

They were dressed in multi-coloured clothing and seldom with hanging necklines and they perform to the commercial music in films. The songs or lyrics too are not related to the music of the tribal communities portrayed by the characters. Thus, the tribal communities in India were eventually grouped and placed under these various stereotypes through their cinematic representation which continues from several films like *Vanamala* (1951) and *Madhumathi* (1958) to even till recent films like *Raavan* (2010) and *Mary Kom* (2016).

However, there are also films recently which portray a realistic and meaningful representation of the tribal community, its people and culture and to give insights into their

thoughts, feelings and the problems faced by them. Some of the examples of such films which have realistically depicted the tribal community and people are the Malayalam films *Velutha Raathrikal* (2015), *Udalaazham* (2018), *Unda* (2019) and the Tamil film *Jai Bhim* (2021).

The 2015 Malayalam film *Velutha Raathrikal* is about “the sexual and economic liberation” of the heroine. She is portrayed as a person who is studying in a college in Palghat, wears bright coloured clothing according to the latest fashion trends and has also won many events at school and college. The film also realistically portrays many of the problems faced by tribals and especially by tribal women such as language loss, loss of identity, desertion of their spouses and “struggles for survival. “

The film *Udalaazham* was famous for containing dialogues in both Paniya dialect, the language of the tribal community and Malayalam. It also had Adivasi actor Mani P.R. as the protagonist. It also featured a very strong tribal character and also showcases the issues of the clash between the practice of child marriages in the Paniya tribes and the POSCO Act.

The Tamil film *Jai Bim* depicts the daily life practices of the Irula tribes in Tamil Nadu very realistically while revolving around the issue of a lawyer who handles and argues the case of a man from the Irula tribe, who is said to have been disappeared when he along with the others were tortured very cruelly by the police when they were arrested on the charges of robbery.

### ***1.1 Study Methodology***

This study had adopted the methodology of content analysis to analyze and study the representation of the tribal community and people in some selected Pan-Indian films through the analysis of the mis-en-scene elements. All the films taken for analysis in this study were studied and elements of mis-en-scene such as decor, cinematography, costumes and acting were analyzed and studied in detail in the films.

Although films that have been released, marketed and dubbed in different Indian languages from the 1950s, films that have been released and dubbed in different Indian languages post the

release of the Telugu film *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) have been considered as Pan-Indian films and also which portrayed or depicted tribal communities and their cultures, were taken into consideration for the purpose of the study.

This is due to the reason that it was post the release and huge box-office success of the film and dubbing of the film in different languages, that the term ‘Pan-Indian cinema’ emerged in the Indian film industry and was widely used and acquired widespread popularity and currency. This had also led to similar type of films being produced. and portrayed and depicted tribal communities and their cultures, which was taken into consideration for the purpose of this study.

Although the film *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) and its sequel *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017) featured tribal communities, they were not considered for this study as research about the depiction and portrayal of tribal culture and communities has been analysed and observed in both films.

The non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling has been used to select Pan Indian films from the years 2015-2023 which portrayed tribal people and communities for this study. Thus, according to this technique: the following Pan-Indian films were chosen for the purpose of analysis in this study:

Title	Year	Language in which the film was produced	Director
<i>RRR: Roudram Ranam Rudhiram</i>	2022	Telugu	S.S.Rajamouli
<i>Kantara</i>	2022	Kannada	Rishab Shetty
<i>Jawan</i>	2023	Hindi	Atlee

The researchers watched the film *RRR* in its Tamil dubbed version in the Over-The-Top platform (OTT) Disney+Hotstar and the film *Kantara* in its original Kannada version in the Over-The-Top(OTT) platform Amazon Prime. They had also watched the film *Jawan* in the Tamil television channel Zee Tamil when it was dubbed into Tamil and broadcasted by the channel, for the purpose for analyzing them for this study. The researchers watched the films *RRR* and *Jawan* in Tamil dubbed versions as they were not familiar with the original languages of the films; Telugu and Hindi respectively.

### ***1.2.Literature review***

Sekhar (2012) noted that in the Malayalam popular film *Salt and Pepper*, the tribal chieftain who is being kidnapped by the protagonist and his team, is portrayed as a lifeless and senseless object rather than as a human being “with voice and urgency”. He also noted that the objectification of the tribal chief was a key component of “the representational discourse” and the tribal chief was kept in the house of the protagonist like an object in the museum. He also noted when the protagonist reconciles with the heroine in the film, the tribal chief was further pushed into the dark shadows and became invisible and never acknowledged.

He also explained that the life and destiny of the tribal chief was not considered even to be worth of pursuing and what happened to the tribal people was of little interest to the popular cinema and audiences. The tribals “are romanticized” and are celebrated for their ethnicity and “exotic values” whereas their struggles for livelihood and land problems were neglected in the mainstream cinema and their representations.

Divakaran (2017) in his study of the representation of the tribal people in Malayalam films, noted that the representations of the tribal community in the Malayalam films had frequently constructed images of beliefs, places and people and it was also influenced a lot by “the dominant ideology.” The ideology created stereotypical representations of the different tribal communities in Kerala and the principles of pleasure of the cinema created “a tourist gaze” towards the tribal communities as they sang and danced differently dressed up differently and used native jewellery.



Anupama (2023) in her study about the portrayal of Adivasi women characters in Malayalam parallel cinema, explained that the Adivasi women in mainstream Malayalam films were typical stereotypes and they occupied the “fringes of the narratives” in these films. They are portrayed as being victims of the many atrocities done to them and the violence meted out to them is depicted in such a manner it provides “a scopophilic pleasure” to the audience. It also noted that the Malayalam parallel cinema films portrayed the various problems faced by the tribal community such as high dropouts in schools, effects of displacement due to development, hypermasculinity, homosexuality and patriarchal domination.

Devi(2019) in her study about the film *Unda*, explained that the film creates a break in the hegemonic narratives of Adivasi representation and it also further explained rather than being a passive victim, Biju Kumar who portrayed the role of the Adivasi constable, was a person who, opposes caste abuses and even fought with another constable and retrieves his self-respect in the film.

She also noted that at a particular scene in the film the hero Mani Sir portrayed by Mammooty, asked his fellow team of police officers to listen what Biju Kumar said about the discrimination that he had been facing and the scene in the film when Biju also stated that he was contemplating about quitting the force, constituted a particular break in the usual dominant narrative styles in Malayalam cinema. This could be construed as by stating that the mainstream cinema should start listening to the stories and narratives of the marginalized communities.

Basu and Tripathi (2023) in their study about the representation of women in the film *Kantara* (2022), explained that as the mainstream Indian film industry was created to focus on the generation of profits, the representation of tribal communities and their communities becomes difficult. They also noted that the production of the film is very different from the mainstream films in India and the film also uses “an indigenous sensibility”. *Kantara* had also created opposition against the mainstream films which portray tribal communities in stereotypical representations.

They also noted *Kantara* had struck a balance between the Indian popular cinema and the Indian parallel cinema while representing the lives of the tribal communities in the screen.

### ***1.3. Research questions***

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the time, place and thematic significance of depiction of tribal culture in the films.
- To analyze how the tribal communities and their places are marginalized and how they are being mocked in the films.
- To analyze the politics of featuring and stereotyping of tribals in the films and to trace the aesthetical and ethical issues at stake.
- To identify and analyze the characterization and of tribal people and especially tribal women.

## **2. Discussions**

### ***RRR(2022)***

#### ***Décor***

The living environment and habitat of the Gond tribals in the film are presented as very lush, green and surrounded by trees in a very large and expansive forest in the introduction. Their homes are shown to be huts and made of straw and simple and other facilities such as their well to be very rudimentary and made up of clay or straw. They are also situated amongst the forests and huge wooden logs in the forest which also consists of birds. This setting emphasizes their poverty and living conditions.

In a later scene in the film which introduces one of the protagonists , Komaram Bheem who is from the Gond tribe, features natural settings and locations in the forest such as a lake and trees. It also features the tribals setting up traps and working on medicinal remedies from plants. This scene establishes the knowledge of the Gond tribe members regarding natural remedies and also that they also occasionally work as hunters who hunt wild animals in the wild.

## ***Cinematography***

In the opening scene of the film, a long pan shot is followed which zooms into the forests and shows the British officers standing beside a hut in the forest. The camera then zooms to the Governor's wife and then only it zooms and focuses on the child, Malli who is drawing hyena on the latter's hands using a peacock feather. This shot is followed by a pan shot which focuses on the tribals who are squatting or sitting in the sand around the wife of the Governor and looking at her. Then the camera through another pan shot shifts and depicts followed by some British officers sitting in the benches. These shots establish the power and superiority of the British governor's wife and other British officers and also the respect and obedience of the tribals towards the former.

The introduction shot of Bheem is through a pan shot which is followed by an extreme close up shot of his face and him applying an ointment on his face and then it zooms out to show him and his muscular body to establish that he is a very powerful tribal man who also has knowledge about medicinal remedies.

After the other protagonist of the film Alluri Sitarama Raju(Ram Charan), who is a police inspector in the British Raj, and he takes up the responsibility to arrest Bheem, there is a scene in the film when his uncle tells him that this is a path of the snake which they have taken and thus they would not be able to find it once they leave it, there is an close up shot of Sitarama Raju's face as he bangs his hands on the bridge due to his inability to catch Bheem, followed by another close up face of Bheem's face who is feeling confused about how to rescue Malli who is standing below the bridge just below Raju. This shot illustrates the contrasting goals of both Raju and Bheem in a nutshell.

## ***Costumes***

In the introductory scenes of the film, some of the tribals are shown to be bare-chested and wearing dhotis while they are sitting on the floor or squatting around the place while some of the tribals are wearing dirty shawls around their bodies and the tribal ladies are wearing black bindis along with some designs consisting of dots in their heads and wearing sarees without blouses.

The tribals are also shown to be brown-skinned people and they also have dark eyelashes and when Komaram Bheem is also introduced in the scene, he is also to be bare-chested and is wearing a trouser and is drinking natural concoctions. He is also wearing a chain consisting of a bone at the centre of it. Thus they are shown to be "very primitive , poor and backward " people who are living in the forests . However , during

his stay in Delhi, Bheem is the only person from the tribal community in the film who dresses up neatly and comfortably.

When Bheem is invited to the party at the Gymkhana Club by Jenny, Sitarama Raju dresses Bheem in a suit and a formal shirt and pant and applies some cream to his face. Thus a tribal man is given a makeover and groomed by a man from the mainstream society ( Sitarama Raju) in order to attend the party organized by the Britishers(the elite) in the mainstream society, which is a temporary type of dress and is based on the occasion.

Another change in attire for Bheem occurs when he enters into the Governor's palace in a truck to rescue Malli during a party organized for the Governor. He is dressed in a black shirt and pants along with black stripes around his face and he leaps out of the truck along with other animals such as bear, wolf and tiger which attack and kill the British officers. Although he is dressed in a shirt and pant, the colour of his attire and the group of animals reinforce Bheem is a very powerful, angry and ferocious tribal man, which is one of the stereotypes associated with the tribals.

### ***Acting***

The Gond tribal community people in the film are very submissive, respectful and naive people. This is illustrated through a scene when the British officer throws some coins at Malli's mother while the Governor's wife takes Malli away, the tribals initially misunderstand this as a gesture of appreciation for Malli's singing and applying hyena to the Governor's wife. Later they become shocked when they realize that the British are taking Malli away from them and the coins which they had thrown to her mother were an indication that they had "brought her". They shout and alert Malli's mother about this and this indicates that they are illiterate people.

Where Malli is singing and applying hyena on the hands of the Governor's wife, Malli is smiling and cheerful. However, later onwards when Malli is taken away by the Governor and his wife and is kept in their palace, she becomes very sad and disillusioned and she does not want to talk or mingle with Jenny, the niece of the Governor and the others. But she stills applies hyena to the other British ladies in the palace . These scenes establish Malli as a very nice but submissive girl to the British. She becomes happy and relieved when she sees Bheem in the palace who has come to see her.

Komaram Bheem is a very powerful, courageous and compassionate man with exceptional superhuman strength. He is also affectionate and sympathetic towards animals such as tigers and he also apologizes to the tiger which he had killed, saying that he had used it(the tiger) for his own needs.

He is also very affectionate towards his fellow tribal people such as Malli and his close friend Sitarama Raju who the former calls as “Anna”(Brother) and he has a great knowledge of natural remedies. This is reflected through the scene in which he creates a natural remedy for Sitarama Raju when he is bitten by a banded Kait snake which was actually summoned by his fellow tribal person Letchu to escape from Raju’s custody. He had created this remedy by using a burning piece of coal and detura roots. Letchu communicating with the snake in the film, also establishes that the tribal people can communicate with animals.

When Bheem removes the religious string which was given to him by the village and is about to put it on Sitarama Raju who is still yet to recover from the snake bite, another person from his community, Peddaraya asks him why is he removing this string now as it was given to him by their village and removing it would lead to problems for him. However, Bheem smiles and replies that this string is more important for his brother Sitarama Raju. Peddaraya’s question about removing the religious string states implicitly that the tribals are very religious and superstitious.

When Bheem hears from Sita about Sitarama Raju’s true intentions later in the film when she tells him about Raju in detail, he becomes very sad and shocked. He also says that being the tribal that he was, he had beat him up with these two hands. These scenes establish the tribals as unintelligent people, who are very harsh and emotional and also cannot think and take decisions by themselves.

When the tribals plan to rescue Malli, Bheem asks a fellow tribal person to take note of the sounds of the first and second gates before they enter into the Governor’s palace to rescue Malli. Then the tribal person accurately observes the sound of opening and closing of the first and second gates of the palace from quite a distance and thus it is established that the tribals are people with exceptional hearing abilities.

### ***Kantara (2022)***

#### ***Décor***

The world of the film Kantara is very realistic and when the tribal people are first introduced in the film in 1847, they are shown to be standing in front of the forests and this establishes that they are living within the

forests and also share a deep connection with the forests. However, their houses and other places are not shown.

Their villages and homes are introduced and established better once the film moves forward to the narratives in the year 1970 and 1990 and their homes are shown simple huts on sand. Most of the roads in their villages have roads made of sand and some roads which are made out of concrete roads, which are in the highways near the checkpoints established by the Forest Department later in the film. Their village has also other facilities such as grocery shop and tea shop which are also made up of huts and only some buildings in the village are well constructed.

The house of the protagonist, Shiva (Rishabh Shetty) contains very old items such as tape recorder and this illustrates that the tribal people are very poor.

When Shiva's father is performing the Bhootha Kola in 1970, fires have been lit up in huge tubes very along the two directions leading to the temple very brightly and the women of the village are very enthusiastically tying up the flowers and the people are also worshipping him during the Bhooth Kola as he is performing and there are also instruments played during this festival. People are also showering flowers upon Shiva's father as he becomes the Panchurli and performs the Bhooth Kola. This also illustrates that the tribal people are very religious and devout people and the importance given to the Bhooth Kola festival.

### ***Cinematography***

When the king asks the tribals to give their Panchurli to him, an elderly tribal man initially denies it and replies to the king that he could ask whatever from them and they would give it to him, but not their God. However, the camera shifts to a close up shot of a man with a yellow bindi and long hair who suddenly becomes possessed by the Panchurli and agrees to go with the king.

He also asks about what would he give in return and when the king says that he would give anything that the Panchurli demands for, the Panchurli shouts, which is reverberated across a very large area. Then the Panchurli demands that the king should give the land until which his voice had reverberated to the tribals and the king also agreed. The close up shot here is used to focus on him as he slowly becomes the Panchurli God and also to give more importance to his divine nature and his demand from the king as a God.

When Shiva's father has changed dress and performs the Bhooth Kola, he is introduced as the Panchurli performing the Bhooth Kola through an extreme close up shot of his face with makeup and

headgear to emphasize his new identity and also to emphasize that he is now the Panchurli and is going to perform the Bhooth Kola.

Later on, when the Panchurli is confronted by the descendant of the king regarding his verdict, about the matter of returning the land of his ancestors whether it is the normal human or the Panchurli speaking, this is followed by a hip level shot which captures the shocked reaction of the Panchurli after hearing the later and also starts shivering as he becomes nervous. Then he runs off into the forest screaming and everyone in the village also runs after him, feeling concerned.

A young Shiva also becomes concerned and shocked when he follows his father into the forest and the latter had disappeared into the forest. This is captured by a close up shot which illustrates the shock and bewilderment of the young boy at this situation. This eventually becomes a trauma of his childhood and this is emphasized through a series of close-up shots of the Bhooth Kola appearing in his life and dreams as he becomes older and Shiva becomes very scared whenever he dreams of or sees the later in his life. However, during a key moment in the film when Shiva is jailed along with his friends for allegedly trying to kill the forest officer Murali, he is awakened by a person crying and when he goes to see who is crying, he sees a silhouette of the back of the Bhooth Kola in low key lighting, which is not actually much visible and he is surprised. However, when he turns back and sees the Bhooth Kola staring at him in his face, he becomes shocked and runs back to his cell.

This scene of the Bhooth Kola staring at Shiva is captured through an extreme close up shot which highlights the importance of this scene and also reasserts Shiva's recurring dream and his trauma.

Later on when Shiva is told by his lover Leela that his cousin Guruva has been murdered, Shiva becomes very shocked and when he starts to think about it, the images of seeing the Bhooth Kola crying in darkness and him staring at him in his face, instantly springs up in his mind.

Then Shiva realizes that the Bhooth Kola was trying to tell him about a great tragedy which had befallen Guruva, who had been performing the Bhooth Kola. Thus the scene of the silhouette of the Bhooth Kola crying in the darkness in the cell was filmed using low key lighting to visually inform Shiva and the viewers of the tragedy which has befallen Guruva who has been performing the Bhooth Kola.

## ***Costumes***

The dress and clothing worn by the tribal people are clearly designed and developed according to the various historical periods in the movie in 1847, 1970 and 1990. In 1847, the tribals who were standing in front of the king were wearing dirty white cloth and were bare-chested and the man who been possessed by the Panjurli had a yellow mark in his head and had long hair.

More than a hundred years later, in 1970, while the young Shiva was neatly dressed and wearing a yellow and red checkered shirt and his father, who was performing the Bhooth Kola was also a wearing a dhoti and a shawl along with earrings and a chain. He also had a tuft of hair and a red bindi on his head. The women including his mother were wearing gold and black chains and sarees without any blouses while the rest of the men were dressed neatly in a shirt and dhotis and the women wore flowers during the celebrations.

In 1990, the women were now dressed in sarees with blouses. However while the female protagonist of the film, Leela who is working in the Forest Department, wore brightly coloured sarees while the rest of the women wore simple and old sarees. The men were also dressed in pants and shirts while some of them also wore shirts and lungis.

The protagonist Shiva, was bare chested and wore an orange lungi and an orange scarf on his head during the Kambala race. However, except that, during the rest of the film, he always wore a shirt and a lungi. The clothes of the villagers and other characters serve as an important indicator of their financial status and prosperity in *Kantara*.

When Shiva's father performs Bhooth Kola, he is shown to be applying tumeric and is very nicely dressed as with a pink dress along a diamond like shape in his face with black and red marks along with a huge headgear, a necklace and two bangles in his face along with a rose garland and a jasmine garland.

## ***Acting***

The tribals are very respectful and subservient towards the landlord Devandra Suttur and his family and they always sit down in front of him and do not enter into his house. Even when a person from Devandra's house hits a man from Shiva's village, Shiva hits him and does not go inside the house. Shiva only enters inside his house towards the ending of the film when he finds out that he was the one who had killed Guruva and thus changes his attitude towards him.



Most of them, excluding Leela, are illiterate people who do not know how to submit documents for a request to the government regarding the land issue and they are also chided by the landlord's lawyer regarding this in a scene. They also possess having knowledge of natural remedies and also curing people.

However, on the other hand, they are now courageous people who would not tolerate injustice and atrocities and they would raise their voices to assert their rights and fight against the atrocities. This is illustrated through the scenes of their confrontation with Murali and the Forest Department officers and when they all unite and fight against Devandra Suttru and his henchmen in the climax.

Shiva's father is a very spiritual and devout person who believes that the human beings do not own anything in the world and everything in the world is owned by the God.

When Shiva's father is possessed by the Panjurli during the Bhoota Kola, he becomes a very strong willed, frank and smiling Panjurli(God) who questions about what would happen to the peace that he had given to the king and his descendants for all this while, if he returns back the land which the king had given back to them, when a descendant of the king asks him to return the land to him.

He also further firmly states that he would give the verdict of this matter in the "stairs of the court" and this prophecy became true when he died by vomiting blood in the court. However, he becomes very angry and shocked and runs away into the forest, replying to the descendant of the king who had doubted his prophecy as God, then he would never come back if he was a God.

Shiva is a very courageous and brave man who always fight for his rights and also against injustice against himself, his fellow villagers and community. However he does not want to perform Bhooth Kola due to the incident of his father's disappearance while performing Bhooth Kola in his childhood and his shock and trauma about it. But he changes and takes up the mantle of performing the Bhooth Kola in the ending of the film when he chases a wild boar which leads him to the same circle of fire beneath the tree like in his childhood and realizes the truth about it through a voice which says that the light predicts the present and future.

He is a very practical person when he chides his friends when they are in hiding as they were being searched for the police, that they should be thinking about the future instead worrying about what has happened.

Mahadevappa, the elderly man whom Shiva visits to prepare his gun and also to smoke tobacco, is an intelligent and wise man who advises him that the bad and darkness should not actually destroy him. He also makes Shiva to realize that his assumptions about Guruva's murderer might be wrong and tells him that Guruva and Devandra went together in a jeep but while returning, only Devandra came in his jeep. Thus, he makes Shiva to doubt if Devandra could have killed Guruva and leads him to the path of truth about the murder.

Guruva, Shiva's cousin is a very soft-spoken and devout man who is also affectionate towards Shiva. His self-respect and integrity is reflected when he denies Devandra's request help him regarding the matter of returning the land to him citing it is impossible to speak like how Devandra wanted as it is a matter concerning God.

Shiva's lover, Leela is an educated woman who works as a forest department guard due to the influence of the Devandra and she is very sad but helpless when she had to take part in the land survey in her village and she faces the ire of everyone, including her lover Shiva. She has great love and affection towards him but is also a frank person who also states openly to him, that he had treated her very badly in the issue of the land survey although it was not her mistake. She also replies to Shiva when he asks her to resign from her job, that she will also lose all the efforts taken by her to secure her job if she resigns.

Shiva's mother Kamala is also a courageous but affectionate woman who openly questions Devandra in the climax of the film about what he has done for their village for her to remember him and also chides and beats her son due to the concern that she has for his future.

### ***Jawan (2023)***

#### ***Decor***

The tribals who had saved Vikram Rathore and nursed him back to health after he had been thrown from a helicopter after he was shot by the antagonist Kaali Gaikwad, are shown to be living near the ocean in simple huts among nature with forests behind them and during the scene in which Vikram Rathore is standing in front of the village goddess, there is also a huge village goddess statue behind along with some huts which also establishes that the tribals are living a very simple life, are not very wealthy and very religious.

### ***Cinematography***

After Juju(Sangay Tsheltrim) starts narrating what happened to Vikram Rathore after he was shot by Kaali Gaikwad and thrown from a helicopter, it is followed by a cut shot to explain what happened.

When Vikram Rathore(Shah Rukh Khan) falls into the ocean after being shot by Kaali Gaikwad(Vijay Sethupathi) and thrown from a helicopter, he actually falls down in an ocean. This is followed by a tracking shot which shows some tribal people from the Northeast along an ocean who discover him struggling in the ocean and they are surprised to see him.

Then this is followed by a cut shot which cuts to Shah Rukh Khan standing in front of a female goddess, looking confused and this is illustrated by a full shot of him which implies that he has recovered but he does not know who he is as he has forgotten everything. It is followed by another cut shot to the present in which Juju, who is a police officer now, narrating that as a young boy, he had promised Vikram Rathore that he would find out who he is.

Then the camera shifts back to the past, through a rapid cut shot where a young Juju is shown promising to Vikram Rathore. Thus this shot also is important as it establishes that Juju is a tribal man. The use of rapid cuts and dissolves through this flashback sequence and this sequence moving fast establishes that this flashback is not important to the narrative of the film and only is used to establish and explain how Vikram had survived after thrown from the helicopter.

### ***Costumes***

Initially when Juju is introduced to us a police officer who opposes Azad and his associates who hijack a metro train, he is shown to be a very muscular and well-built man dressed in a black shirt and pants which also serves to signify that he is a police officer who is very strong and powerful, as black is a colour which is often associated with the police force.

However when Juju appears with Vikram Rathore and his associates who come to the rescue of Azad, after he was badly attacked by Kaali's man and when he starts to narrate the flashback, he is shown to be wearing an orange shirt. This also indicates that Juju is no longer only a police officer and he also has another identity which would be revealed as he tells the story: he is from a tribal community.

The young Juju along with some tribal people who discover Vikram in the ocean are shown to be neatly dressed in kimonos.

## *Acting*

Except for Juju who plays a key role in finding out about Vikram Rathore and reuniting him with his teammates and eventually with his son Azad, no one from his fellow tribal community has substantial roles to play in the film.

Although Juju initially angrily opposes Azad but is defeated by him and held captive. He is later released by Azad during the metro train hijack, his attitude towards Azad changes when he spots the symbol on a bag in the train, which he had seen in Vikram's hands in his village when he was young. Then he starts going to various places to find out more about Vikram Rathore and realizes the truth about him. Then his character undergoes a change when he initially realizes that Vikram was reported as a traitor in the newspapers and was shocked.

However, determined to find out more about him, he resumes his investigation and then gathers all the information about Vikram Rathore. These scenes illustrate that Juju is a very intelligent, analytical and rational person. As Juju tells about his promise to Vikram that he would make him realize how he is, he smiles and says that he had fulfilled his promise now (by reuniting him with his teammates and his son) and stares at Vikram. This also establishes that Juju is a very affectionate and trustworthy person who keeps his word.

## **3. Conclusions**

This study analyzed the portrayal and representation of the tribal people and their community in three Pan-Indian films: *RRR*, *Jawan* and *Kantara*. It was observed that these three films had a male from the tribal community (Komaram Bheem, Juju and Shiva) who played key roles to help to propel the narratives of the films effectively.

In *RRR*, Bheem is one of the primary protagonists of the film. In the film his bravery and refusal to bow down before the Britishers when he was being whipped by his friend Sitarama Raju in public, spurred the public in Delhi to revolt against the British.

This also inspired Raju to revolt against the British openly instead of working with and double-crossing them to achieve his goal of providing weapons to everyone.

Juju is the person who eventually reunites Azad and Vikram Rathore in *Jawan* by seeing the symbol in the bag in the metro train hijack and makes the connection between it and Rathore, when he remembers

seeing it on the latter's hand in his village. He eventually makes Vikram Rathore to realize who he is and reunites him with his erstwhile teammates and son which is one of the major crucial points in the film.

Shiva is the protagonist in *Kantara* who always fights and stands up for the rights of his community and clashes with the forest officer Murali when the latter questions him, his community and traditions, by saying that they had lived here even before the government came into place and thus questions him about why do they need permission from the Forest Department and the government.

Interestingly, the three films emphasize the healing quality of the tribal community, the tribal people as people who live within the forests and their knowledge about the natural remedies. This is used to propel the narratives of the films forward by curing or saving the protagonists. In addition, the film *Jawan* featured a police officer from the tribal community Juju who is an intelligent and analytical person which is a departure from the conventional portrayals of tribals as illiterate, innocent and naive people in mainstream cinema.

However, on the other hand, *RRR* portrayed tribals are poor, illiterate, naive, unintelligent, religious, emotional people with superhuman strength and exceptional hearing abilities. It also portrayed them as people who are not neatly dressed and believe in superstitions, which is in line with the conventional portrayals of them in Indian cinema. It also reinforces the existing stereotypes of them in the society.

It also portrayed tribals being mistreated and abused by the British officers who beat them up and called them as "rubbish" and "mantlepiece", thus objectifying and commodifying them. It also reinforced the stereotype of them as criminals, which was present in the colonial era through a scene, in which a British officer asked how could they catch a tribal man without any criminal record when the British government announces that Bheem must be captured.

The tribal people are also subjected to ill-treatment in *Kantara* when they are beaten up badly by the Forest Department officers and are killed mercilessly by the landlord Devandra and his henchmen in the climax. After Shiva leaves after entering into Devandra's house, Devandra asks his henchmen to clean his house with water, thus indirectly implying that his house has become polluted due to Shiva's entry. Devandra also asks for water to clean his hand after talking with Shiva and touching his hand. These scenes reflect the prejudice and discrimination that they faced at the hands of the elite and the officers from the Forest Department.

Even *Kantara* who portrayed tribal people as brave, devout, affectionate and courageous people who would fight for their land and rights and realistically portrayed their culture, living conditions and the problems which they face, also portrayed them as poor and illiterate people and that they also smoke, drink and consume drugs. This is a trend which should be addressed in future research as blockbuster Pan-Indian films such as *RRR* can influence and even impact the thinking and attitude of Indians towards tribals.

Another key finding from this study is that the lack of agency and proper characterization of the tribal women and attitude towards them in the three films. Except for Malli in *RRR*, who says a couple of dialogues, none of the tribal women have proper character arcs and have something to say and Malli is simply being dragged away from her mother and her native place by the Britishers. Malli also does not resist and eventually resigns to be living in the Governor's palace half-heartedly.

Although Kamala and Leela speak a couple of dialogues in *Kantara*, Shiva often behaves towards Leela without her consent, a couple of times in the film and Murali, who is her superior officer, treats and speaks of her very badly when he catches her red-headed with Shiva and also during a couple of moments in the film.

*Jawan* does not even feature tribal women in the flashback sequence and this depiction of tribal women in Pan-Indian films could be addressed further in future research.

In addition to this, the tribal community and culture are not given much importance in *RRR* and *Jawan* and simply form an insignificant part of the plots to introduce the hero or to save him and to move the narratives forward.

What is more surprising in *Jawan* is that the flashback sequence of how Vikram Rathore is saved gets over very quickly in a couple of minutes without explaining it properly but rather through a series of images, fast editing and cut shots. This illustrates the unimportance of this flashback sequence in the film. The tribal background and community of Komaram Bheem is not even revisited or towards the ending in *RRR*. Rather than the tribal culture and identity of Bheem, the friendship and bonding between Bheem and Raju after the former goes to Delhi to rescue Malli is given more importance and forms the crux of the plot. This treatment of tribal community and culture in Pan-Indian films could be addressed in future research.

The limitation of this study is the small number of films chosen for analysis to the criteria adopted and further studies could take a more wider time frame and criteria and involve a much larger sample of films and analyzing them from a wide variety of perspectives such as semiotics and narrative analysis.

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