

1 **Marginalized Masculinity on Screen: Indian Male Portrayals in Hollywood Films**

3 **Abstract**

5 This paper explores the representation of Indian male characters in Hollywood
6 films and how such portrayals influence broader perceptions of Indian masculinity using R.W.
7 Connell's theory of hegemonic and marginalized masculinity. Indian male characters in
8 Hollywood films are often given character traits which place them outside Hollywood's
9 dominant heteronormative ideals. These portrayals come from the intersection of race, class,
10 sexuality and ethnicity. Hollywood pushes certain groups of men, particularly racial
11 minorities, outside the accepted ideal of masculinity. The roles given to Indian male
12 characters often lack physical or sexual confidence and keep them on the margins of
13 Hollywood's dominant and heteronormative masculinity. The paper uses textual analysis of
14 select Hollywood films from the 1930s to the present, spanning the earliest portrayals of
15 Indian men to those in recent years.

17 **Keywords:** Hegemonic masculinity, Marginalized masculinity, Representation, Sexuality,
18 Emasculation, R.W. Connell

20 **Introduction**

22 Although representation of Indian men in Western media (particularly Hollywood)
23 has undergone various shifts throughout its cinematic history, there remains a persistent
24 pattern of marginalization and emasculation. Unlike their western counterparts, Indian male
25 characters in Hollywood are rarely depicted as sexually desirable or physically dominant.
26 While Western male actors are frequently portrayed through idealized notions of masculinity
27 embodied by muscular physiques, romantic agency, and assertiveness, Indian men in
28 Hollywood seldom receive similar representation. They are depicted as stereotypical
29 caricatures, such as nerds, cab drivers, shopkeepers, or a sidekick, lacking both sexual and
30 narrative centrality. On the contrary, Indian women are portrayed as exotic, hyper-sexualized
31 and dwell in a condition of virginal cleanliness. They are depicted as free from sexual
32 experience or knowledge until White masculine characters initiate them into the realm of
33 sexuality (Singh, 2020).

35 Indian men are usually shown as more effeminate, awkward and usually less desirable
36 compared to their Western counterparts. As the film industry with the most global influence,
37 Hollywood plays a significant role in tailoring narratives around race, gender, and identity.
38 The falsified recurring portrayal of Indian men in Hollywood films reinforces dominant racial
39 hierarchies. Indian men are tossed towards the lower end of entrenched ideals of hegemonic
40 masculinity. Such representation reflects cultural biases and influences how they are
41 perceived in global pop culture. This paper explores the construct of Indian male characters
42 in Hollywood cinema through the lens of marginalized masculinity. Drawing on Connell's
43 theory of hegemonic masculinity, the study examines how these portrayals shape cultural
44 perceptions of Indian men. The study also calls for a reimagining of Indian masculinity
45 within mainstream media.

47 **Marginalized Masculinities**

49 Masculinity is usually seen as traits, actions, or roles associated with men, and is
50 shaped by society. From a theoretical perspective masculinity is socially constituted (Martin

51 1986). The impact of biology on masculinity is a highly debated topic. Masculinity is not
52 specific to any one biological sex. People of any gender can exhibit masculine or feminine
53 traits. The 1970s saw a surge of scholarly interest in masculinity in the US. Writers such as
54 Jack Sawyer helped initiate the discourse of the male liberation movement. During this
55 period, the literature on the female experience was expanding, and ideas like sex, gender, and
56 gender identity were being distinguished. The first wave of critical masculinity studies began
57 in the 1970s with the sex role paradigm which focused on issues of masculinity (Franklin
58 1987). Although there were variations in the studies conducted, their primary goals were to
59 show how socialisation and sex role learning are socially constructed aspects of masculinity.
60 There were also efforts made towards documenting how these processes are restrictive and
61 possibly even detrimental to men's psychological and even physical health (Goldberg, 1976).

62
63 Franklin(1987) states two points when examining the meaning of masculinity in the
64 United States. (1) The United States has lacked a unified definition of masculinity. (2) A
65 sizable percentage of American men have recently been considered for participation in the
66 masculine gender role. The author also outlines two major roles assumed by American males,
67 namely, the White masculine role and the Black masculine role. He also mentions the
68 omission of men from other races, as according to him, these men have not made an impact
69 on American Society that the white and black men have contributed. While, what Franklin
70 refers to as "others" have a significant population and contribution to present-day America,
71 the white and black men still define the dominant trait of being masculine. Franklin outlines
72 that what both these demographics consider to be masculine includes being able to accept
73 specific obligations and expectations related to dominance, competitiveness, Calvinist work
74 ethic, aggression, and violence.

75
76 Rajan (2006) states that films construct masculinities in relation to societal norms,
77 colonial legacies, diasporic identities and global media flow. Although her study focuses on
78 South Asian Cinema, the broader implications of her writing resonate with the narrow
79 framing of Indian masculinity in Hollywood. Cohan and Hark (2008) contend that portrayals
80 of masculinity do more than show individual characters—they also reveal society's
81 expectations for gender roles.

82
83 Cheng (1999) defines marginalization as the unequal treatment of disadvantaged or
84 peripheral individuals within social hierarchies. Cheng also argues that if anyone wants to
85 research gender, they should not presume that only men engage in "masculine" behaviours. In
86 contrast, only women and all women engage in "feminine" behaviours. According to Stacey
87 and Connell (1988), the definition of hegemonic masculinity changes with time and history.
88 Cheng (1999: p.297) states, "Hegemonic masculinity then is the currentideal". Domination,
89 aggression, competition, athletic ability, stoicism, and control are traits that define hegemonic
90 masculinity. To show hegemonic masculinity, aggressive conduct—if not plain physical
91 violence—is crucial. This gender performance must be continuously confirmed by "proving"
92 that people are in charge of themselves and others. Being aggressive or violent toward those
93 who are considered "feminine," such as women, gay men, and nerds, is one method to
94 "prove" hegemonic masculinity. Indian characters in hegemonic masculinities are closely tied
95 to the gendered performance of Euro-American males; other than being a white male, other
96 demographic characteristics considered important include being able-bodied, heterosexual,
97 Christian, or Jewish, belonging to the first world countries as opposed to the colonized men.
98 The division of work reproduces the polarisation between highlighted femininity and
99 hegemonic masculinity. Some professions, like the military, law enforcement, construction,
100 and firefighting, are considered hegemonically masculine.

101 Within this hierarchy, Indian men, mainly represented in Hollywood, are positioned as
102 marginal. The perceived distance between these characters and the hegemonic standard is
103 racial, cultural, and sexual. They are rarely portrayed as occupying hyper-masculine
104 professions or embodying traditional masculine power (e.g military leaders, action heroes or
105 dominant romantic leads). It is very common to see Indian men being cast into roles of nerds,
106 cab drivers and retailers, roles which are considered to be less masculine. Carrigan and
107 Connell (1985) acknowledge that masculinities and femininities are varied. According to
108 them, masculinities are not homogenous, unchanging, fixed, or undifferentiated. In any given
109 period of history more than single manifestations of masculinities and femininities can
110 coexist. This diversity gives rise to inter-group and intra-group conflict. The dominant group
111 must find a rationale for its supremacy. Cheng (1999) states that adherence to hegemony
112 determines whether a person belongs to the dominant or marginalized group. Members of the
113 dominant group are frequently conformers. According to Madrid (1988), when someone is
114 marginalized, they are viewed as one-dimensional and stereotypical.

115
116 The marginalization of Indian masculinity in Hollywood is a part of a broader
117 historical precedent in which even Asian men have often been denied the dominant masculine
118 role. Hiramoto and Pua (2019) point out how East Asian characters in James Bond films are
119 constructed as racial caricatures, and East Asian women, in contrast, are hyper-sexualized.
120 Paner (2018) and Shimizu (2012) dissect the marginalization and stereotyping of Asians in
121 American film, emphasizing the damage caused by fictitious representations and how they
122 carry over into real-world situations outside the cinema. Shah (2003) lays out four dominant
123 stereotypes of Asian and Asian Americans shaped by predominantly white producers in
124 Hollywood: (1) “Yellow Peril”, (2) “Dragon Lady”, (3) “Charlie Chan”, and (4) “Lotus
125 Blossom”. He refers to these tropes as “controlling images”, arguing that these negative
126 stereotypes give justifications for social control. Washington (2012) writes about the lack of
127 interracial relationships between Black and Asian characters in American prime-time
128 television shows. She notes not only in their scarcity, but also how, when such interracial
129 relationships do appear, the narratives and characterizations tend to maintain hegemonic
130 racial hierarchies.

131
132 Once Bruce Lee made his big feature in Hollywood with *Enter the Dragon* (1969), his
133 appearance marked a pivotal moment in disrupting how Asians are perceived in pop culture.
134 Lee’s portrayal of disciplined, physically dominant and charismatic East Asian masculinity
135 challenged Hollywood’s longstanding emasculation of Asian men. In recent years, films like
136 *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2022) represented a
137 significant shift in the visibility and validity of East Asian men as masculine figures. East
138 Asian masculinities are only recently breaking free from erasure and caricature. The parallel
139 struggles of Indian and East Asian men’s depiction of masculinity in Hollywood reflect how
140 Hollywood continues to control the boundaries of hegemonic masculinities.

141 142 **Marginalized sexualities**

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144 Sexuality plays a central role in the marginalisation of non-hegemonic masculinities.
145 Males who fall outside hegemonically masculine norms are often framed as homosexual or
146 asexual (Espiritu, 1996; Wong, 1999). Such framing strips Asian men of erotic agency and
147 reinforces their outsider status within dominant narratives of masculinity. The sexual
148 marginalisation of Indian men roots in colonial and racial hierarchies. At the start of the 17th
149 century, Indian labourers were brought to the US by British colonisers as servants for East
150 India Company personnel. During the American colonial era, there were records of some

151 enslaved East Indians in the US (Assisi, 2022). Court documents from the 18th century show
152 evidence that several Indians were kept as enslaved people in Delaware and Maryland
153 (Meyers &Perreault, 2006). Following the Exclusion Act's prohibition on Chinese
154 immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s, North American firms seeking workers turned
155 to India and other countries. Many Punjabis migrated to the US. These immigrants worked as
156 farm labourers or loggers. They became considered the least desirable of all races, referred to
157 as the "tide of turbans". The majority of the immigrants were men, and it was illegal for them
158 to bring wives or children with them. The law did not permit them to become US citizens.
159 Due to anti-miscegenation legislation, they were not allowed to marry local women. The
160 unmarried often found partners within Black or Hispanic communities (Vengoupal, 2021).
161 This exclusion was not only legal but symbolic. In the cultural imagination, Indian men
162 became perceived as outsiders racially, nationally and also sexually.

163
164 The complexity of the intergroup conflict among Asian Americans and Euro-
165 Americans cannot be adequately explained by racism alone. In order to understand the
166 dissension, it is necessary to examine the underlying historical intergroup geopolitical
167 conflict (Cheng 1999). Although the US had a smaller military presence in Asia, Western
168 missionaries in India made serious efforts to spread Christianity. Impressions made by
169 Western media, advertisements, and Western higher education were more influential than the
170 missionaries' efforts. This more complex type of colonialism came to be known as post-
171 colonialism. Asians were devalued as conquered men on a collective basis. According to
172 Bederman (2021), civilization is a socially constructed discourse of the dominant group. It
173 associates white supremacy with the dominance of hegemonically masculine men. It is clear
174 from studying history, particularly colonialism and its discourse of modernization and
175 civilization, that the current incarnation of hegemonic masculinity is the most recent
176 reintegration of a lengthy and intricate history of dominance against marginalized groups and
177 alternative gender performances. These colonial legacies continue to inform the way Indian
178 men are portrayed in Hollywood even today. Their characters are often denied centrality and
179 rarely allowed to express physical or romantic intimacy without being seen as awkward or
180 undesirable. In contrast, their western counterparts are frequently depicted as hyper-
181 masculine, sexually desirable and assertive.

182 183 **Examining Representations of Indian Masculinities in Hollywood Films**

184
185 Building on this historical and cultural context of sexual and racial marginalization,
186 the study seeks to examine how Indian male characters are represented in Hollywood cinema.
187 Understanding these portrayals requires a focused analytical framework and a systematic
188 approach to film selection and analysis. The following objectives and methodology outline
189 how the study investigates the evolution of Indian masculinities on screen, the patterns of
190 marginalization, and the ways in which these characters navigate or are constrained by
191 dominant cinematic norms. The study aims to analyse the representation of Indian male
192 characters in Hollywood cinema using Connell's theory of hegemonic and marginalized
193 masculinity. The other objective is to explore the evolution of representation of Indian male
194 characters in Hollywood. The study is conducted by analysing 11 Hollywood films featuring
195 Indian male characters in prominent roles. These films span from the early 20th century
196 (when Indian characters first appeared in Western cinema) to the present era. The theoretical
197 framework for this analysis is grounded in Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's concept
198 of marginalized and hegemonic masculinities, as outlined in her book *Masculinities* (1996).
199 This diverse selection of films provides a historical cross-section of the evolving portrayal of
200 Indian male characters in Western cinema. The films are selected based on the following

201 criteria- (1) They feature Indian male characters in prominent roles. (2) They achieved
202 mainstream commercial or critical success. (3) The Indian characters contribute significantly
203 to the film's narrative.

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205 The films selected for the study are as follows –

206 (1) *Gunga Din* (1939)

207 (2) *Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book* (1942)

208 (3) *The Party* (1968)

209 (4) *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)

210 (5) *Short Circuit* (1986)

211 (6) *The Namesake* (2006)

212 (7) *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)

213 (8) *The Life of Pi* (2012)

214 (9) *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014)

215 (10) *The Gray Man* (2022)

216 (11) *Monkey Man* (2024)

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218 ***Gunga Din* (Stevens, 1939)**

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220 The film is adapted from Rudyard Kipling's colonial-era poem of the same name. The
221 titular character Gunga Din is one of the earliest portrayals of an Indian character in
222 Hollywood cinema. The role of Din is played by a white actor, Sam Jaffe. His skin is
223 rendered brown through make-up to match the colour of Indian skin. The role has Jaffe
224 portray exaggerated makeup and mannerisms that reduce Din to a racial caricature. The film
225 portrays Din as a loyal servant, a water bearer to the British soldiers, reflecting the colonial
226 perception of Indians as deferential, voiceless and eager to serve colonisers. Din's central
227 desire in the film is to become a soldier—to fight and serve, and to fight with honour like the
228 British men he idolises. In the final act, Din sacrifices his life by warning the British of an
229 ambush by the "Thuggee" cult. His unwavering loyalty to the British is presented as noble.
230 However, it ultimately serves as a validation of colonial rule. His depiction demonstrates how
231 early Hollywood viewed Indian men and reinforces colonial hierarchies.

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233 ***Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book* (Zoltan, 1942)**

234

235 The film is based on Rudyard Kipling's book of the same name, starring Sabu Dastagir
236 as Mowgli, the main protagonist, marking one of the earliest appearances of an Indian actor
237 in Hollywood. Mowgli is a young Indian boy who grew up in the woods of Seoni and was
238 raised by wolves. His adventures include forming bonds with various animal companions.
239 Mowgli is fully scantily clad except for a loincloth wrapped around his waist. While the film
240 portrays Mowgli as brave and resourceful, it reflects colonial attitudes that see Indians as
241 primal. His identity remains firmly tethered to the wild, an outsider to civilization. Through
242 the Western gaze, Mowgli becomes a symbol of unsoiled nature—an innocent being. The
243 Western gaze also eroticizes and simplifies the complexities of the lives of indigenous
244 people. This portrayal of Mowgli aligns with Connell's concept of marginalized masculinity,
245 a form of masculinity that is systematically excluded from dominant ideals due to culture and
246 historical positioning. Although Mowgli is central to the film's story, he is denied access to
247 the traits most closely associated with Hollywood's hegemonic masculinity. Instead, he is
248 exhibited as docile, animalistic and peripheral to the valorized civilized world in the film.
249 Such representation bolsters a racial and cultural hierarchy in which Indian men are
250 delineated as physically present but socially absent from the dominant ideal.

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The Party (Edwards, 1968)

The central character in *The Party* is Bakshi, a socially inept Indian man. The role is played by Peter Sellers, an English actor. Just like in *Din* Sellers plays an even more exaggerated depiction of an Indian character. He employs a stereotypical English accent and awkward social mannerisms. His face is coloured brown to reflect the skin complexion of Indians. In the film, Bakshi is mistakenly invited to a high-society Hollywood party. The film centres on his social ineptitude and clumsiness, and its humour derives from his inability to conform to Western norms and behaviour. Bakshi is portrayed as alien, socially inept, awkward and infantilized. He is often the subject of ridicule rather than empathy. His character has no romantic arc, nor is he afforded emotional or intellectual depth. The film explores the themes of miscommunication and cultural differences and shows the Indian as an alien unable to navigate the Western world. Such a portrayal exemplifies how Indian men in mid-20th-century Hollywood were framed as objects of comedy and cultural confusion. They are usually shown as non-threatening, effeminate, and emasculated. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, Bakshi's character exists entirely outside the dominant structure; he is excluded, mocked, and rendered invisible in terms of agency or desire. Such representation can influence the audience's perception of Indian men in pop.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (Spielberg, 1984)

In the second instalment of the popular Hollywood franchise *Indiana Jones*, Famous Indian actor Amrish Puri plays the antagonist Mola Ram. Puri is well known for his villainous roles in numerous Bollywood films. Ram is portrayed with a terrifying presence and dread. Ram and his cult perform dark rituals, human sacrifices, and indulge in exaggerated savagery. The film shows Mola Ram as grotesque and terrifying. He is a symbol of mystic brutality rather than a human antagonist who has depth or motive in his character. While Mola Ram displays power and authority, his portrayal is not empowering. His masculinity is framed as deviant and threatening. His depiction aligns with the trope of the racialized "other" whose power must be subdued by the white hero. Antagonists in Hollywood films are often depicted with greater depth, expanding to emotional complexity, psychological nuance, or even charisma. Examples include Ivan Drago, with a striking physical appearance, in *Rocky IV* (1985), Gordon Gekko, a good-looking but ruthless corporate raider, in *Wall Street* (1987), and Hans Gruber, a calm and suave criminal mastermind, in *Die Hard* (1988). Mola Ram is presented as pure evil, irrational, inhuman, without much depth or charisma. The film was also widely criticized for its xenophobic depictions of India. The film associates Indian culture with barbarism and superstition. His presence underscores how even powerful Indian male characters are denied sexual or heroic agency in Hollywood narratives.

Short Circuit (Badham, 1986)

Once again, in *Short Circuit*, the Indian character Ben Jabituya is played by American actor Fisher Stevens in "brownface". Another decision emblematic of Hollywood's historical tendency to exclude actual Indian actors while simultaneously caricaturing Indian identity. Jabituya is a colleague of fellow scientists, and the main protagonist is Newton. Jabituya is a scientist—a stereotypical nerd who is awkward and socially inept. He speaks in English with an exaggerated Indian accent and a tendency for malapropisms. These traits are implemented

301 for comedic effect rather than building a character with depth and relatability. His portrayal
302 fits squarely within the stereotype of the “nerdy, non-threatening Asian man,” a trope that
303 reinforces the perception of Indian men as intellectually competent but socially and sexually
304 inept. Fisher also reprised the role in a 1988 sequel to the film. Ben’s character arc lacks any
305 romantic or sexual agency; instead, it is entirely framed in terms of comic absurdity and
306 cultural otherness. Ben’s “Indianness” is exaggerated to the point of parody. This portrayal
307 reduces the character to a collection of surface-level quirks and reinforces the marginalization
308 of Indian Masculinity in Western Media. This lack of emotional depth aligns with Connell’s
309 theory of marginalized masculinity, where racial and cultural minorities are systematically
310 excluded from hegemonic masculine ideals. Such portrayals not only reflect a lack of
311 representation but an active distortion that renders Indian men invisible in terms of power,
312 desire and complexity. Fisher had later apologized for playing the role, stating his casting
313 was insensitive.

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315 ***The Namesake (Nair, 2006)***

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317 Namesake is adapted from JhumpaLahiri's 2008 novel of the same name. The story
318 follows the life of Ashok Ganguli, a first-generation Bengali immigrant. He, along with his
319 son Gogol, moves to the US in search of better opportunities in life. The film explores
320 cultural dislocation, the tension of cultural integration, and the challenges of identity
321 formation within the Indian-American diaspora. Ashoke represents an emotionally restrained
322 man shaped by duty, trauma, and resilience. Ashoke's masculinity is rooted in emotional
323 restraint and familial responsibility. His masculinity is one which prioritizes stoicism and
324 duty over intimacy. His identity is not hyper-masculine but relatively subdued. It is rooted in
325 responsibility and personal sacrifice. Ashoke's character embodies the struggles of the
326 immigrant experience, balancing his traditional values with the challenges of adapting to a
327 new culture. While he is portrayed with respect, he is not framed through the lens of sexual
328 agency or physical assertiveness. Ashoke's son Gogol struggles with his ethnic identity and
329 frequently feels torn between the Bengali customs of his Indian heritage and the American
330 culture around him, also feeling ashamed by his Indian name. While Gogol has a romantic
331 arc in the film, these relationships are shaped by tension about his perceived cultural
332 differences and cultural baggage. *The Namesake* offers one of the more multidimensional
333 representations of Indian men in Hollywood; they still exist outside the hegemonic
334 masculinity. Ashoke’s masculinity is gentle and stoic, lacking the physical dominance or
335 sexual charisma associated with dominant Western male archetypes. Gogol’s struggles
336 throughout the film show how Indian men, even when assimilated, continue to remain
337 “othered”. Both characters fall outside Hollywood’s dominant ideal. Neither is physically
338 imposing nor sexually valorized. Their masculinity is defined by internal conflict, emotional
339 restraint and social marginality. This representation fits well in the context of Connell’s
340 framework of marginalized masculinity, where men of colour are given only partial inclusion
341 but are still denied full access to hegemonic ideals of power, desirability, and normative
342 masculinity. *The Namesake* presents a shift from a stereotypical caricature to more complex,
343 human portrayals, but the men still remain essentially positioned outside the sexualized,
344 dominant framework of hegemonic masculinity.

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346 ***Slumdog Millionaire (Boyle, 2008)***

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348 The film is set in India and primarily casts Indian actors. The main protagonist, Jamal,
349 is played by actor Dev Patel. Jamal resides in the slums of Mumbai with his brother Salim.
350 They live a poverty-stricken life and turn to begging and crime. Jamal gets a chance to be a

351 contestant in a popular TV show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, where he gets a once-in-a-lifetime
352 opportunity to turn his life around by winning a huge cash prize. The film centres around
353 Jamal's resilience and romantic devotion to his love interest Latika; he is portrayed as
354 innocent, passive, and emotionally driven. Although Jamal is positioned as the romantic lead,
355 his desire is framed as more of an emotional longing than a sexual agency. His love for
356 Latika is portrayed as pure and chaste, almost childlike. It is devoid of erotic complexity.
357 Jamal's love interest, Latika, also serves as a symbol or object of rescue rather than an
358 autonomous partner. Such a depiction of a relational dynamic also reinforces a pattern where
359 Indian men in Hollywood are permitted romantic narratives only when they conform to
360 submissive, emotionally vulnerable, or morally pure masculinities. Despite being the film's
361 protagonist, Jamal is denied the characteristics of physical dominance, assertiveness, or erotic
362 charisma. This fits well with Connell's theory of marginalized masculinities. While the film
363 humanizes its protagonist, it also perpetuates a limited and desexualized framing of Indian
364 masculinity, one that fits the Western gaze's preference for docile and pitiable brown bodies
365 over powerful and sexually assertive ones.

367 ***The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Hallström, 2014)**

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369 *The Hundred-Foot Journey* offers a rare portrayal of an Indian Male character who is
370 both central to the film's narrative and also granted a romantic and professional agency. The
371 protagonist, Hassan Kadam, is played by Manish Dayal. Hassan relocates to rural France
372 with his family following a traumatic experience in India. In France, he meets his culinary
373 rival Mirren, who owns a French restaurant beside his. Initially adversarial due to the
374 competitive nature of their restaurants, their dynamic evolves into a mentor-mentee
375 relationship. The characters begin to bridge the cultural gap and eventually develop a
376 romantic relationship, culminating in a kiss on-screen. Their romance is portrayed with
377 tenderness, mutual respect, and visible on-screen intimacy. This shows a notable departure
378 from the desexualized representations typically assigned to Indian men in Hollywood.
379 Hassan's character embodies traits of self-confidence, ambition, and sensitivity. Unlike
380 earlier depictions of Indian men as being nerds, asexual, or subservient, Hassan is charismatic
381 and skilled; he is shown as sexually desirable without being reduced to a stereotype.
382 Although he does not fit into the mould of the hyper-masculine Hollywood action hero,
383 Hassan asserts a soft masculinity that is both modern and multidimensional. *The Hundred-*
384 *Foot Journey* signals a subtle shift in the Hollywood gaze, suggesting the possibility of a more
385 empowered and complex representation of Indian men on screen.

387 ***The Life of Pi* (Lee, 2012)**

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389 Suraj Sharma plays the titular character Pi. The Indian boy is characterized as being
390 deeply spiritual and intelligent. Raised in a multicultural environment, Pi is introduced to
391 multiple religions. The plot revolves around Pi's struggle as he embarks on a life-changing
392 journey of survival and self-discovery. After a shipwreck leaves Pi adrift on a small boat in
393 the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger. The film's focus is on themes of faith, imagination,
394 and endurance. The film places Pi within a metaphorical and philosophical framework rather
395 than one grounded in physical action or romantic plot. Pi's journey is internal. The film
396 emphasizes emotional and spiritual growth rather than external demonstrations of masculine
397 power. Pi is not positioned as a romantic or sexual object. This deviates from the typical
398 Western coming-of-age narrative where adolescents experience sexual awakening or
399 romantic entanglement. Pi's journey is devoid of such elements. His masculinity is depicted

400 as introspective, empathetic, and emotionally complex, qualities which are often feminized or
401 marginalized within the hegemonic framework.

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406 ***The Gray Man* (Russo and Russo, 2022)**

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408 *The Gray Man* is an action thriller in which VenkateshPrabhuKasthuri Raja,
409 professionally known as Dhanush, plays "Wolf," a skilled mercenary. Wolf's character is
410 notable for traits such as combat expertise, discipline, and honourable conduct. These are
411 traits typically associated with masculinity in the action genre. It is a rare departure from
412 Hollywood's traditional depiction of Indian men. As a Lone Wolf, the character is portrayed
413 as physically dominant, poised, and formidable. He also manages to defeat the film's main
414 protagonist, played by Ryan Gosling, in hand-to-hand combat. Lone Wolf possesses many
415 traits aligned with hegemonic masculinity—strength, stoicism, and martial prowess—but he
416 is narratively marginal, with minimal backstory. His purpose in the film is functional: to
417 serve as a stylish, exotic obstacle for the protagonist. From the perspective of Connell's
418 theory, Wolf occupies a hybrid position. He is temporarily aligned with hegemonic
419 masculinity through his competence and physical dominance, but still remains marginalized
420 in racial narrative terms. At the end, the world is yet another hurdle for the white protagonist
421 to defeat and become a hero. His presence marks progress in the physical representation of
422 Indian masculinity, although there is a lack of focus on sexual desirability, keeping him out
423 of the hegemonic core.

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425 ***Monkey Man* (Patel, 2024)**

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427 Dev Patel made his debut feature film release with *Monkey Man*, which he directed.
428 He also starred as the main protagonist in the film. It marks a striking departure from
429 Hollywood's historical portrayal of Indian men as passive, desexualized, or peripheral. In
430 *Monkey Man*, Patel plays Kid, a vengeful underground fighter navigating a violent criminal
431 underworld. The film incorporates Indian mythology, political commentary, and Western
432 action aesthetics to create a protagonist who is muscular, aggressive, emotionally intense, and
433 physically dominant—traits traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity. Compared
434 to earlier depictions of Indian men, who are usually emasculated or sidelined, *Monkey Man*
435 offers a rare instance in which an Indian man occupies the whole narrative, physical, and
436 emotional space of a traditional action hero. Kid is strong and motivated, driven by trauma,
437 grief, and righteous anger. His body is glamorized through combat and cinematic framing,
438 aligning with popular action heroes such as Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* (2006). While
439 examining through Connell's lens, Kid challenges the historical positioning of Indian men
440 within marginalized masculinity. He is central to the film's plot, desiring, aggressive, and
441 sexually viable. The film signals an important cultural shift by showing that Indian male
442 characters can now anchor Western action films without being reduced to comic relief,
443 passive intellects, or background stereotypes. However, it is important to point out that
444 Hollywood's traditional power structure did not initiate this significant transformation; rather,
445 it was an Indian-origin filmmaker himself. Dev Patel takes a big step in suggesting that
446 genuine representational change often comes from within the marginalized community. This
447 also shows that for Indian men to be portrayed with depth, power, and sexual agency in
448 Western media, it frequently requires Indian storytellers to take authorship of the narrative.

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450 **Early Depictions and Contemporary Shifts in Indian Masculinity**

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452 Connell's writing on hegemonic masculinity is crucial in understanding the structured
453 absence and distortion when it comes to the depiction of masculinity of Indian men in
454 Hollywood. Hegemonic masculinity is not simply about dominant traits attributed as
455 masculine; it is about the position of power upheld through the subordination of alternative
456 masculinities. These subordinated forms may include those influenced by race, ethnicity,
457 class or sexuality. In Hollywood, Indian masculinity stands in contrast to the dominant model
458 of masculinity, not because Indian men are one-dimensional or lack agency inherently.
459 However, they are instead deliberately situated within a cinematic logic that upholds
460 Hollywood's idealized masculinity as the default. The analysis of Hollywood films across
461 nearly a century reveals persistent patterns in the representation of Indian men as
462 marginalized, desexualized, and subordinate to the hegemonic norms of their Western
463 counterparts. The analysis shows how Indian men are portrayed in Hollywood cinema from
464 the early days of the industry to the present day. In early films such as *Gunga Din* (1939), the
465 Indian character Din can be viewed through a postcolonial lens. The film is adapted from a
466 poem by the same name written by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling worked in India during the
467 British occupation. Americans were first exposed to Indian men as servants to the British
468 when the East India Company brought enslaved Indians to the US. The preconceived notion
469 that Indians were servants of Englishmen was prevalent in early Hollywood cinema. In
470 *Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book*, also based on a book by Kipling of the same name, the main
471 character Mowgli is still seen from a postcolonial perspective as an exotic "noble savage", a
472 trope in Western literature and film that romanticises non-Western cultures. This depiction
473 contrasts the primal purity associated with living in harmony with nature with the perceived
474 corruption of civilisation. Indian male characters were portrayed as either loyal colonial
475 subjects or primal innocents.

476

477 Following World-War II, the US allowed Indian Immigrants to settle in America and
478 become American citizens following the Luce-Celler Act of 1946. Indian immigrants began
479 assimilating into urban life, but were still seen as outsiders. In *The Party* (1968), we see the
480 Indian character Bakshi, utterly devoid of Western social etiquette, trying to fit in among the
481 Americans. Indian men in Hollywood were devoid of autonomy, complexity, or erotic
482 presence. These roles fit Connell's concept of marginalized masculinity, where men of colour
483 are subordinated within Hollywood's hierarchies of race, gender, and power.

484

485 As Indian immigrants in America began seeking higher education, many ventured
486 into the sciences and IT. According to Kendall (1999), a "nerd" is typically seen as an
487 asexual, high achiever in school particularly in math and science, highly skilled with
488 computers, and has a high IQ, but who is also socially awkward, collects knowledge-related
489 items, particularly computers, enjoys science fiction, has poor personal hygiene, wears
490 haphazard clothing and places an emphasis on functionality rather than sentimental and
491 sensual décor. Jocks, unlike nerds, are portrayed as popular and athletic. The "jocks vs.
492 nerds" stereotype has its roots in traditional notions of identity, social order, and high school
493 groupings. It presents two groups with radically different traits. Jocks are typically portrayed
494 as sexually attractive and incredibly self-assured. Their popularity and athleticism let them
495 approach love and sexual endeavours with confidence and perhaps aggression. Conversely,
496 nerds are sometimes depicted as sexually inexperienced, awkward, or even ugly, which
497 serves to further marginalise them in the social hierarchy of high school or college. While
498 Indian nerds in Hollywood are never in short supply, as seen in the example above in *Short*

499 *Circuit*, Fisher Stevens plays *Ben Jabituya*, an Indian scientist and engineer in brownface; he
500 is portrayed with a stereotypical "nerdy" personality, complete with an Indian accent.

501
502 The complicated intergroup interactions between sex, gender, sexuality, race, religion,
503 coloniality, and class are exemplified by their marginalization as nerds. In addition to heavy,
504 hazardous, filthy, skilful, and fascinating labour, hegemonic masculinity is linked to mobile
505 and/or moving equipment, such as fighter jets, aircraft carriers, tanks, lathes, and welding
506 torches. Light, less hazardous, clean, dull, and unskilled labour with stationary equipment,
507 such as calculators, copiers, fax machines, and telephones, is linked to emphasized femininity
508 (Game & Pringle, 1984). The "Indian-ness" of the characters was caricatured to show them as
509 being alien and different, and always as something to be made fun of. To be an Indian
510 character on screen meant adopting stereotypical Indian accents and mannerisms. These
511 characters were usually, if not always, very shy, timid, and unconfident. They were rarely
512 depicted as being sexually motivated or desirable. These characters were mostly one-
513 dimensional.

514
515 The 21st century marked a gradual shift toward more nuanced portrayals, driven by
516 globalization and increasing cross-cultural awareness, as a result of mass adoption of internet
517 technologies. The Indian characters on the screen began to have more nuanced personalities,
518 rather than just another stereotypical Indian character thrown into the film for amusement.
519 These changes can be seen in films such as *The Namesake* (2006), *Slumdog Millionaire*
520 (2008), *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014), and *The Life of Pi* (2012). In recent years, there
521 have been few attempts to put Indian characters in high-stakes action scenarios, such as in
522 *Extraction* (2021) and *Monkey Man* (2024). Gupta (2016) discusses the increase in the
523 presence of Indian-American characters on American television, attributing it to societal
524 shifts in the U.S., growing ethnic diversity, and the global expansion of the market for
525 American TV Programs, suggesting a future with more nuanced and realistic depictions of
526 Indian Americans on television.

527
528 It should be noted that this pattern of marginalisation and desexualisation of Indian
529 masculinity is not confined to Hollywood films but also to American Television. Characters
530 such as Apu Nahasapeemapetilon in *The Simpsons*, Baljeet in *Phineas and Ferb*, and Raj
531 Koothrappali in *The Big Bang Theory* and many other television shows typify the recurring
532 trope: the Indian man as socially awkward, asexual, comical, and culturally alien. These
533 characters are rarely given romantic or sexual plots, and when they are, it is often played for
534 humour or discomfort. Just like their cinematic counterparts, these characters reinforce the
535 emasculated masculinity of Indian men. Davé (2013) and Gottschlich (2015) analyse popular
536 Television shows such as *The Simpsons*, *ER*, *Numb3rs*, discussing how the Indian American
537 Characters in these series reflect a broader stereotype, including the "model minority" myth,
538 that often depict Indian men as highly educated and successful but also reinforce narrow,
539 limiting views of their identity. The consistency of such tropes across media formats
540 highlights the structural nature of the issue and emphasises a need for a broader re-evaluation
541 of the framing of Indian men in global pop culture.

542 These patterns also support Connell's idea that hegemonic masculinity is shaped by
543 history and culture. What counts as the "ideal" form of masculinity is not something fixed or
544 natural. Instead, it is kept in place through media, social institutions, and repeated portrayals.
545 Hollywood, being the most influential film industry in the world, not only shows images of
546 masculinity but also plays an active role in creating and controlling its boundaries. This study

547 highlights how Indian masculinity in Hollywood is not only pushed to the margins but is also
548 deliberately constructed. The analysis exposes the lack of proper representation and shows
549 how Western media continue to promote racial and hierarchical versions of masculinity
550 through repetition and omission.

551 **Conclusion**

552 While there is considerable improvement that can be seen in the portrayal of Indian
553 men in Hollywood cinema, especially in the 21st century, the legacy of marginalisation,
554 emasculation, and desexualisation remains deeply embedded. Indian masculinity has long
555 been cast as subordinate to dominant Hollywood's masculine ideals. Even when Indian
556 characters are granted complexity or romantic arcs, as seen in *The Namesake* or *The*
557 *Hundred-Foot Journey*, they are rarely allowed the erotic or physical agency to a similar
558 level that is afforded to Western male leads.

559 Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity shows the structural nature of this
560 marginalization. Indian men in Hollywood are systematically positioned as outsiders to
561 dominant masculinity, ceded as passive, awkward, overly spiritual, or emotionally sensitive
562 rather than sexually viable or physically commanding. In contrast, many Hollywood leads,
563 such as James Bond, Frank Martin, and Tyler Durden, to name a few, ooze sex appeal with
564 their body sexualized and glorified on the screen. Indian men in Hollywood are never
565 portrayed in this way. As opposed to Indian men, Indian women are often fetishized and
566 sexualized in Hollywood. This absence is all the more striking when contrasted with Indian
567 cinema, where Indian male actors such as Shah Rukh Khan, HrithikRoshan, or John Abraham
568 routinely embody sexualized, heroic, and emotionally rich masculinities. Thus showing that
569 the issue is not about cultural incapacity but cinematic framing. Indian men are not inherently
570 unfit for such characters; they are simply excluded from such roles in Hollywood. Indian men
571 are mostly seen playing characters that are effeminate and non-threatening. Hollywood action
572 stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone can be seen as heroes in violent,
573 sexual, muscular, and physical ways. They serve as a role model for action-hero aspirants.
574 Smaller and physically weaker men and women, homosexuals, and those from the third
575 world, all of these variations are subjected to domination by physical strength and size, if not
576 outright violence. (Cheng, 1999). There is no Indian character equivalent to Rambo and the
577 likes in Hollywood cinema.

578 Balaji (2007) points out that Indian masculinity in global media is frequently filtered
579 via a neoliberal, Western gaze. Such depiction flattens complexity in favour of marketable,
580 sanitized Identities. While this reflects Connell's premise of marginalized masculinities, it
581 also introduces a consumerist layer, where the Indian masculinity is made to fit in contrast
582 with the dominant narratives. Hollywood's depiction of Indian men shows the process of
583 global negotiations, how certain masculinities are exported while others are made invisible.
584 Over the years, improvements have been made regarding the depiction of Indian men in
585 Hollywood cinema, but there is still a long way to go. Indian men do not yet appear in hyper-
586 masculine roles that live up to the hegemonic ideals of masculinity set by Hollywood's
587 standards.

588 Recent films such as *Monkey Man* challenge the status quo, but as the paper argues,
589 such portrayals remain rare and are often authored by Indian creators themselves. Thus
590 suggesting that representational equity still requires reclaiming narrative power from within
591 the margins. Indian men are rarely shown in hyper-masculine roles that match Hollywood's

592 dominant ideals of masculinity. They are seldom or, if at all, portrayed as sexually viable and
593 desirable in the same way as their Western counterparts. Such portrayals can strongly
594 influence how society views Indian men, particularly given Hollywood's worldwide reach.
595 Hollywood continues to influence how people around the world see race, gender, and
596 attractiveness. Absolute equality in representation will remain out of reach until Indian men
597 are shown not only as intellectuals or supporting characters, but also as complete romantic
598 and heroic leads with their own agency, depth, and desirability.

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