

# Secularism and its contention in Bollywood films

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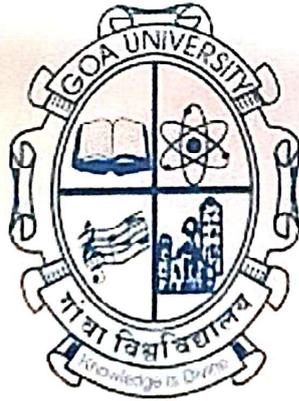
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "Secularism and its contention in Bollywood film" is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Master of Arts in Political Science at the D.D. Kosembi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Studies, Goa University under the Supervision of Mr. Ravaji Gaunkar and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations/ experimental or other findings given the dissertation. I hereby authorize the University authorities to upload this dissertation on the dissertation repository or anywhere else as the UGC regulations demand and make it available to any one as needed.



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This is to certify that the dissertation report "Secular and its contention in Bollywood Films" is a Bonafide work carried out by **Mr. Kiran Kalidas Parsekar**, under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts in Political Science Programme** at the **D. D. Kosambi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Studies, Goa University**.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Bollywood movies are known for their diverse blend of genres, from romantic dramas like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) to action-packed thrillers like *Jawan* (2023), all brought to life with vibrant song and dance routines. Music plays a crucial role in the immense popularity of these films. Not only that, but Bollywood movies also offer a window into the vibrant colour of Indian culture; from traditional beliefs and practices to breathtaking scenic landscapes. Dubbed as the "City of Dreams," Bollywood is the thriving hub of Hindi-language cinema in India. With its grand productions, larger-than-life characters, fairy tales, and everlasting melodies, this film industry has earned a global reputation as one of the largest in the world. The term "Bollywood" itself is a blend of Bombay and Hollywood, perfectly capturing its amalgamation of Eastern roots and Western influence.

The film industry has delivered a vast spectacle of cinematic masterpieces, from iconic classics like *Mother India* to cutting-edge hits *Sholay* (1975), captivating viewers across the globe. Bollywood's reach transcends borders, as audiences from all corners of the world are loved by its enchanting fusion of entertainment and cultural heritage. Bollywood recent releases like *Pathaan*(2023), *Jawan* (2023), *Rocky Rani Ki Prem Kahani* (2023) were celebrated by world audiences.

Secularism in the true sense is a belief system that separates religion from state and its civic affairs. The word 'secularism' originated in late medieval Europe. The introduction of the word

“secular” by the 42nd amendment simply made the secular nation of the Indian Constitution more apparent. No religion is given special status in India as a state. There is no such thing as an Indian state religion. This distinguishes it from theocratic regimes such as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and other Islamic countries. Secularism is a fundamental principle of the Indian Constitution’s basic structure. Positively, India advocates secularism by granting equal religious freedom to all religions. It stands for all citizens’ right to freedom. Explaining the meaning of secularism as adopted by India, Alexandrowics writes, “India as a secular state guarantees constitutionally, freedom of religion to all persons and does not assign a special position to any particular religion.”

The glory of Indian cinema is praised for its boundless diversity, narrative techniques, and profound cultural depth, solidifying its position as a major player in the realm of popular culture. Within this vast landscape, Bollywood stands tall as one of the world's largest film industries, revered for its ability to mirror and impact societal norms. Rooted in the heart of Indian cinema is the core theme of secularism, a testament to the nation's inclusive values where individuals of varying religions, languages, and backgrounds peacefully coexist. Throughout its complex and multifaceted history, India's current socio-political climate has greatly influenced the representation of secularism in the vivid storytelling of the big screen. The focus of our study is to explore the ever-changing portrayal of secularism in Hindi cinema. India's film industry, affectionately known as "Bollywood," has a unique ability to captivate audiences of diverse backgrounds, transcending borders and languages. Beyond mere entertainment, it serves as a powerful platform for cultural representation and societal dialogue. Through its art, Indian cinema has the potential to shape public perspective, disrupt norms, and spark the desire for change. A recurring theme in this impactful storytelling is the concept of secularism.

In the vast and diverse country of India, secularism is more than just a legal concept enshrined in the constitution. It is a complex and dynamic concept that encompasses the peaceful coexistence of various religious and cultural communities. With its vibrant mix of religions, languages, and traditions, India has always embraced secularism as a unifying thread. This is precisely why the depiction of secularism in the realm of cinema holds such great importance, as it is a powerful mirror that reflects the fundamental values of our nation.

To fully understand the portrayal of secularism in Bollywood cinema, one must dive deep into the intricate historical and societal context. The fight for freedom, the devastating partition of the country, and the challenges of uniting a diverse nation have all left a profound impact on the collective consciousness. Themes of cultural diversity, national unity, and religious harmony are frequently explored in movies, as filmmakers grapple with the aftermath of major events that have shaped the country's identity.

As Indian society has evolved, so too has the portrayal of secularism in cinema. In the past, Bollywood films celebrated the harmonious nature of characters from different religious backgrounds, exploring themes of friendship, love, and communal harmony. Films like "Mughal-e-Azam" and "Mother India" were esteemed for their vibrant depiction of such narratives. However, the current socio-political climate has brought forth a new set of complexities and challenges in the world of filmmaking. Indian cinema has grappled with representing secularism, facing obstacles and sparking discussions. Filmmakers have had to navigate barriers such as censorship, societal expectations, and even personal danger when tackling sensitive issues.

Indian cinema plays a crucial role in molding public opinions and beliefs, making it an influential force in society. Its ability to swing societal perspectives, whether positively or negatively, cannot be overlooked. By analyzing audience responses and public discourse, the

impact of these on-screen narratives on society can be evaluated. With the constant evolution of India in the 21st century, this investigation also aims to contemplate the future of secularism in Indian cinema, considering the shifting attitudes and societal dynamics. Ultimately, the intricate link between Indian cinema and secularism is in a constant state of growth and holds immense significance.

This study aims to compare how the idea of secularism has evolved in the 21st century after the rise of BJP government in 2014. To analyze the idea of secularism we have focused on 4 films from the period of 2000 to 2023. My Name Is Khan (2010), Bajrangi Bhaijaan(2015), The Kashmir files (2022) and The Kerala Story (2023) are the four major successes of Bollywood cinema which showcases the evolving ideas of secularism through the different perspectives of film makers. My Name Is Khan and Bajrangi Bhaijaan portray the idea of secularism in a very positive way however The Kashmir Files and The Kerala Story targets the essence of secularism in India.

## **1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW:**

"Between Tradition and Modernity: Religious Themes in Indian Cinema" is a scholarly work by Rachel Dwyer, a renowned scholar in the field of Indian cinema. This book explores the representation of religious themes in Indian cinema and how they intersect with the broader cultural and societal shifts in India. Dwyer's research delves into the complexities of Indian cinema and its relationship with religion, tradition, and modernity. Instead of reducing cinema to a mere mirror of religious practices, Dwyer illuminates how it serves as a dynamic space for the active exploration, negotiation, and reimagining of these beliefs. Through a meticulous analysis

of a variety of cinematic genres, Dwyer reveals how religion is not just a surface spectacle, but a deeply ingrained aspect of daily life in India. In her compelling analysis, Dwyer takes center stage in Mumbai's bustling Hindi cinema world, affectionately known as Bollywood. But by skillfully venturing beyond just Bollywood, she uncovers the diverse landscape of Indian cinema. With expert finesse, her research delves into three key genres: the mythical, the devotional, and the dynamic blend of Bombay and Islamic culture.

"Religion and Secularism in Indian Cinema: The Transformation of Values" by Lotte Hoek, published in "South Asian Popular Culture" in 2012, explores the dynamic relationship between religion and secularism in Indian cinema. It discusses how Indian films have represented and transformed religious values and secular ideals within the context of the country's cultural and social changes.

"Secularism in Indian Cinema: Challenges and Prospects" by Shobhit Mathur, published in the "Journal of Arts & Ideas" in 2014, explores the concept of secularism in the context of Indian cinema. The article examines the challenges and opportunities that Indian filmmakers face when representing secularism in their works. It could discuss how cinema reflects the complexities of religious and cultural diversity in India and how it contributes to the ongoing discourse on secularism in the country.

"Indian Cinema: A Very Short Introduction" by Ashish Rajadhyaksha is part of the "Very Short Introductions" series published by Oxford University Press. It serves as a brief yet insightful

entry point into the world of Indian cinema. In this work, Rajadhyaksha navigates the diverse and complex landscape of Indian film, covering both its historical development and contemporary state. The book addresses the rich tapestry of Indian cinema, including its various regional industries and languages, and discusses key themes, genres, and influential filmmakers. It also delves into the socio-cultural and political dimensions of Indian cinema, highlighting its role in reflecting and shaping Indian society. As part of the "Very Short Introductions" series, this book offers an accessible and well-structured overview that is suitable for both newcomers to the subject and those looking for a quick, informative refresher on the topic. While it may not provide the depth of a comprehensive study, it serves as a valuable starting point for those interested in exploring the fascinating world of Indian cinema.

"Of Gods and Rascals: Secularism and Subversion in the Bollywood Genre Film" by Christopher Pinney, published in "Social Text" in 1997, is a notable work in the realm of Indian cinema and cultural studies. This article explores the complex interplay between secularism and subversion in the context of Bollywood genre films. His work delves into the ways in which Bollywood cinema engages with religious themes and socio-political issues, often subverting traditional norms and challenging established conventions. Pinney's analysis demonstrates how Bollywood movies serve as a reflection of India's diverse society and its ongoing negotiations with secularism, religious traditions, and modernity.

"The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History" by Jyotika Viridi is a significant and well-regarded work in the field of Indian cinema studies. Jyotika Viridi's "The

"Cinematic Imagination" offers a profound exploration of Indian popular films as a means of understanding and interpreting the social history of India. The book is lauded for its meticulous research and analytical approach, which allows readers to uncover the multifaceted layers of Indian society through the lens of cinema. Viridi takes a historical and cultural perspective, delving into how Indian popular films have portrayed, shaped, and sometimes challenged societal norms, values, and political landscapes.

"Amar Akbar Anthony: Bollywood, Brotherhood, and the Nation" by Kathryn C. Hardy, published in "Journal of Religion and Films" in 2017 explores the idea of secularism through the most notable Indian film Amar Akbar Anthony released in 1985. Books examines the story of three brothers who were separated in the childhood and were brought up in three different religion and finally made their assemble in the end.

"Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema" by Tejaswini Ganti has received acclaim for its comprehensive coverage and accessibility. Ganti's work is lauded for its insightful exploration of Bollywood's cultural and societal significance, effectively contextualizing films within the broader Indian cultural landscape. This dual role of Bollywood, as a mirror of Indian society and a shaper of its values, is a recurring theme of praise in literature reviews. Moreover, the book's success lies in its ability to deliver academic insights in a clear and approachable manner, bridging the gap between scholarly analysis and general readership. The impact of Bollywood on a global scale and its influence on the Indian diaspora are also subjects that Ganti expertly addresses. Additionally, her analysis of the Bollywood star system and the vital role of

music and dance in Hindi cinema resonates with reviewers, as does her examination of the industry's evolution over time. In summary, "Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema" stands as a widely acclaimed resource for understanding the multifaceted world of Bollywood, appreciated for its thoroughness and the accessibility of its scholarship, making it an essential reference for anyone interested in Indian cinema.

“From Padosi to My Name is Khan: The Portrayal of Hindu–Muslim Relations in South Asian Films” by Pankaj Jain, published in “Taylor and Francis Online” in 2011 explores how Muslims were portrayed in Indian Cinema. India–Pakistan partition, Hindu–Muslim violence, Hindu–Muslim friendly relations, and films about modern Muslim communities are the area of study in this article.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- How have Bollywood films portrayed the concept of secularism over the decades, and what are the key themes and narrative devices employed in these representations?
- What socio-political changes in India have had a notable impact on the way secularism is depicted in Indian cinema?
- How have iconic filmmakers, actors, and screenwriters in Indian cinema influenced the representation of secularism through their works, and what role do their personal beliefs and affiliations play in shaping these portrayals?

## **1.4 HYPOTHESIS:**

Over the decades, Bollywood films have undergone a noticeable evolution in their portrayal of secularism. What started as simplistic and optimistic depictions of religious harmony have now transformed into nuanced and extensive critical analyses. As these films explore key themes and utilize subjective elements, they offer a mirror to the shifting social and political landscape of India.

The dynamic socio-political climate in India has greatly impacted the portrayal of secularism in its cinema. With power dynamics, cultural norms, and religious discussions constantly shifting, Indian films are quick to mirror and respond to these changes. We propose that during times of heightened religious and political tensions, films either affirm or question preconceived notions of secularism. As new perspectives emerge within the industry and audience tastes evolve, we see more nuanced and realistic representations of the diverse fabric of modern-day Indian society.

In Indian cinema, iconic filmmakers, actors and screenwriters are very influential in representing the world hegemony in their works. Their personal beliefs and associations play an important role in the functioning of narratives, characters and global thematic issues, contributing to the diversity of perspectives in Bollywood films.

## **1.5 OBJECTIVES:**

- To Identify the Key Themes in selected Bollywood Films Representing Secularism
- To Analyze Characters as Vehicles for Secular Narratives.
- To Examine the Evolution of Secularism through changing political dynamics of India

- To investigate the influence of prominent filmmakers, actors, and screenwriters on the portrayal of secularism in Indian cinema, including their personal beliefs, political affiliations, and artistic contributions.
- To investigate the reception and perception of films with prominent secularism themes among Indian audiences through interviews.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY:**

The research methodology for this study involves taking a multifaceted approach to examine how secularism is depicted in movies. To collect data, we will carefully select Bollywood films from time periods and conduct a detailed analysis of their content. This analysis will focus on aspects, such as the narrative structure, character development, dialogues and visual elements that contribute to the portrayal of secularism. Additionally, we will gather data from articles, film critiques and interviews of filmmakers, actors and scholars to gain valuable contextual insights. By comparing the representation of secularism in Bollywood with cinema and international films we can better understand its nuances. Furthermore, historical context will be considered to explore how significant historical events and sociopolitical factors in India have affected the portrayal of secularism. Throughout the research process ethical considerations will be at the forefront to address any issues that may arise. With this methodology in place, we aim to analyze how secularism is represented and evolves, within Indian cinema.

## **1.7 CHAPTERIZATION :**

### **1. Introduction**

Chapter I introduces the topic of secularism and its contention in Bollywood films. It provides the background of why this topic has been selected for the dissertation also it gives information about Bollywood and secularism in India. To know more about this topic literature reviews have been done on similar articles and books. Further objectives are written which will be fulfilled once dissertation is completed. Research questions and hypothesis are also mentioned in the introduction. To complete the study which type of methodology used is mentioned here. Introduction also delves with the scope of the study.

### **2. Historical Evolution of Secularism in Indian Cinema**

Chapter II gives a brief about the idea of secularism in world context and in Indian context. Further it discusses about the portrayal of secularism in Indian Cinema and how historical events has impacted on the idea of secularism through different decades.

### **3. Analyzing Selected Films: My Name Is Khan and Bajrangi Bhaijaan**

Chapter III discusses about two most acclaimed films of Indian Cinema which has portrayed secularism in their own way; My name is khan and Bajrangi bhaijaan. It analyses these two films through their film making and historical context. Also, it delves with the audience perception of those particular films.

### **4. Analyzing Selected Films: The Kashmir Files and The Kerala Story**

Chapter IV discusses about two most controversial films of Indian Cinema which has been acclaimed by certain section of the society but also criticized by majority. The Kashmir Files and The Kerala Story these two films are the most successful films of 2022 and 2023. This chapter

will analysis these two films through their background of film making. Also, it deals with the audience perception of those particular films.

## 5. Conclusion

Chapter V concludes this dissertation by comparing these four films and providing the final remarks. This chapter also analyses the audience reception and provides its final verdict.

## **1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY:**

The study, titled "Secularism and its contention in Bollywood films," delves deeply into a carefully curated selection of Bollywood movies. Its aim is to deeply explore the progression of secularism in Indian cinema, considering the cultural and political backdrop in which these films were produced. By thoroughly examining character interactions, dialogue, visual metaphors, and overarching themes surrounding secularism, this analysis offers insight into the intricate depictions that have evolved over the years. Though it does not aim to critique every Indian film, it effectively demonstrates the significant influence of a distinct subset.

This in-depth study presents a thorough analysis of Bollywood movies, unveiling the subtle nuances that distinguish each region. Additionally, ethical considerations are carefully woven into every aspect of this research, demonstrating a conscientious approach to sensitive themes. With a broad perspective, this investigation sets the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of the portrayal and evolution of secularism in Indian cinema, acknowledging its limitations and offering valuable insights into its potential evolution.

### **1.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

While conducting online survey, the researcher faced some limitation. Firstly, the researcher consider limited literature and data on secularism in bollywood films. The study is restricted to a limited number of respondent from the field of study due to time constraint. The finding of the study are mainly based on the responses provided by the respondents. Secondary data on the given topic was missing. Study restricted to time limit period.

## CHAPTER II

### EVOLUTION OF SECULARISM IN INDIA AND INDIAN CINEMA

#### 2.1 THE IDEA OF SECULARISM:

Secularism is a complex and ever-changing concept that has been shaped by many philosophical and historical factors. This study explores the intricate history of secularism, tracing its roots and evolution across diverse civilizations. Throughout history, secularism has experienced a captivating evolution, influenced by the profound insights of ancient philosophers, revolutionary periods such as the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and the immense societal changes caused by revolutions. From its early beginnings as a mere idea in the minds of Confucius and Carvaka, promoting moral principles beyond religious beliefs, to navigating the complexities of scholasticism during the medieval era, secularism has continuously evolved. With the rise of the Enlightenment, it emerged as a powerful concept championed by prominent thinkers like Voltaire and Locke, even being incorporated into pivotal documents such as the American and French Revolutions. The 19th century saw the rise of secular movements that eventually led to the establishment of secular states. The 20th century brought forth challenges, but also marked the global spread of secular values and the recognition of religious liberty. In the modern age, secularism is faced with the intricacies of a fast-paced world, shaped by the viewpoints of learned individuals such as Charles Taylor and Jose Casanova. Through the writings of Peter Singer, Paul Leff, and other notable authors, the story of secularism emerges as a powerful and ever-evolving element in the human narrative.

Secularism's roots can be found in ancient Greece, where the division between religion and government started to emerge. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle pondered the distinction between spiritual and political matters, laying the foundation for future discussions about the state's relationship with religious institutions. The Roman Empire, embracing different religions, contributed to the evolution of secularism. This concept involves the separation of state and religion, with the government treating all faiths equally. Ancient Rome supported religious diversity, allowing different religions to exist together. This attitude paved the way for future secular frameworks, laying the groundwork for more complex systems over time.

In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church held significant power and influence over European monarchies, leading to a close relationship between religious and political authority. However, the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods brought about transformative changes. Influential thinkers, like Voltaire and John Locke, promoted the concept of individual rights and freedoms, advocating for a disconnect between the church and the government. This marked a shift away from traditional religious dominance and laid the groundwork for modern democratic ideals. During the French Revolution, a transformation occurred in the relationship between the state and religion. Ideals like liberty, equality, and fraternity brought about a radical change in this dynamic. France embraced the concept of *laïcité*, ensuring strict separation between religion and the state. This model of secular governance became an example for countries worldwide.

In the United States, the First Amendment of the Constitution ensures the freedom of religious expression and prohibits the government from establishing a particular religion. This amendment protects the secular nature of the American political system and promotes a society that embraces diversity and pluralism in religious beliefs. As the 20th century dawned, secularism was confronted with obstacles in different parts of the world. The emergence of oppressive regimes

like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union exemplified how extreme beliefs could exploit or repress religious institutions for political advantage. However, following World War II, there was a resurgence of dedication to secular ideals as nations embarked on building democratic and inclusive societies.

In the second half of the 20th century, many countries around the world adopted secular governance, meaning that they separated religion from the government. This trend was particularly strong in Western Europe, where countries like France, Germany, and the United Kingdom enshrined secularism in their laws and promoted tolerance and religious diversity. In the modern era, the concept of secularism is adapting to evolving challenges and societal norms. The ongoing conversation between the principles of secularism and religious beliefs remains a key aspect of global governance and discussions on human rights. The story of secularism's growth around the world is a captivating one. It is rooted in ancient philosophical reflections, major historical turning points, and changes in society. Secularism, which supports governance and principles distinct from religious teachings, has been a cornerstone in various cultures since ancient Greece. The Enlightenment brought revolutionary ideas, while modern times posed new challenges. To grasp how secularism presents itself in the modern world, a journey through its extensive history is a must.

## **2.2 SECULARISM IN INDIAN CONTEXT:**

In India, the concept of secularism is deeply embedded in the nation's history, diversity, and constitutional ideals. It goes beyond theoretical debates and finds expression in the country's religious pluralism. India's historical journey, from the ancient principle of 'Sarva Dharma

Sambhava' (respect for all religions) to the Mughal era's emphasis on religious tolerance, has shaped a unique approach to coexistence among different faiths. This journey through time explores the effects of British colonialism in India and the development of the country's secular character after independence. Despite legal challenges like the Shah Bano case and the Ayodhya dispute, India's constitution enshrines its secular nature, enabling diverse communities to coexist peacefully in cities. Indian secularism is not just a scholarly concept but a lived experience where tradition and modernity, unity and diversity engage in a continuous dialogue. This ongoing discourse molds the collective identity of India, emphasizing inclusivity and tolerance.

India has a long and rich history of secularism, which is based on its religious diversity and coexistence. The ancient Indian concept of 'Sarva Dharma Sambhava' is central to this history. It encourages equal respect for all religions and the belief that various religious paths can coexist peacefully within Indian society. "Sarva Dharma Sambhava", an ancient philosophy, highlighted the interconnectedness of humanity's spiritual journey. The Vedic period, characterized by sacred hymns and scriptures, showcased a spirit of religious tolerance. It acknowledged the variety of deities and practices, promoting an environment where individuals could freely pursue their spiritual beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination.

During the Mughal era, Emperor Akbar's rule was marked by exceptional religious tolerance in India. He believed that a ruler should not meddle in religious matters and took proactive steps to incorporate various religious traditions. Akbar's endeavor to create Din-i Ilahi, a unified faith system, sought to foster harmony among individuals of diverse religions. His approach to coexistence was truly visionary and set an example for religious tolerance. The arrival of British colonial rule in India transformed religious relations. The policies of the British East India Company often favored certain religious groups, causing tensions and conflicts among

communities. The census operations conducted during the colonial period further classified people based on religious affiliations, contributing to the creation of separate electorates and reinforcing religious identities. In the aftermath of 1857, tensions between religious groups escalated, igniting religiously inspired political activism. This division within society set the stage for the partition of India in 1947, leading to the formation of independent nations: India and Pakistan.

Following independence, India created a constitution that emphasized secular values. The Indian Constitution embodies secularism as a cornerstone of its principles, demonstrating the country's dedication to fostering an egalitarian and religiously diverse society. This commitment became a legal obligation during the 42nd Amendment of 1976, a turbulent period in Indian politics and society. Adding the term "secular" to the Preamble was a decisive declaration of the state's commitment to secular governance, a testament to India's resolve to transcend religious lines and ensure religious freedom for all. Articles 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution are fundamental pillars of the nation's secular nature. These articles meticulously outline the right to religious freedom, emphasizing the liberty of individuals to choose, practice, and spread their religious beliefs. The Constitution recognizes that religious beliefs are deeply personal and intimate, hence granting individual freedom in matters of faith. Safeguarding these freedoms preserves India's diverse cultural and social fabric, where different religious practices harmoniously coexist, contributing to its unique identity.

The U.S. Constitution limits government interference in religious matters, emphasizing that the state should not influence personal religious beliefs or practices. The Constitution's framers, aware of past challenges and tensions related to religion, aimed to establish a system that safeguards religious autonomy. By committing to non-interference, the government creates a

secular state where individuals and communities are free to practice their religion without governmental interference.

In addition to the 42nd Amendment to the Indian constitution, which asserted the principle of secularism, other amendments and fundamental rights bolster this ethos. The 44th Amendment in 1978 specified that property rights are not fundamental, thereby reducing the chance of religious prejudice in property-related cases. Furthermore, the 86th Amendment in 2002 introduced Article 21A, which recognizes the right to education as a fundamental right, fostering inclusivity without religious discrimination. India's secularism is a flexible principle that adapts to the complexities of a diverse society. The judiciary is responsible for interpreting and upholding the secular provisions of the Constitution. Important court decisions have shaped India's understanding of religious freedom and secular governance, contributing to the country's evolving secular identity.

The Indian Constitution upholds secularism as a fundamental principle, reflecting a desire for a society that embraces religious diversity and strives for unity. This constitutional approach recognizes the critical balance between religious freedom for individuals and the need for the state to remain neutral and impartial towards religion. It signifies India's commitment to fostering an inclusive and harmonious society where individuals can fully engage in the nation's progress regardless of their religious beliefs. The journey toward secularism in the Indian constitution showcases the values and ideals that unite the diverse fabric of the Indian nation, transcending legal frameworks and symbolizing a shared destiny.

### **2.3 MAJOR CASES ILLUSTRATING INDIAN SECULARISM:**

#### **1. Keshavananda Bharati vs. State of Kerala (1973):**

The Keshavananda Bharati case, a landmark verdict of the Supreme Court of India in 1973, has lasting significance in Indian constitutional history, beyond its immediate focus on secularism. The case established the "basic structure" doctrine, which sets limits on parliamentary power and outlines certain fundamental principles that cannot be altered by ordinary legislative processes. This doctrine has shaped the interpretation and application of the Indian Constitution, forming a critical cornerstone of its jurisprudence.

The case focused on the constitutionality of the 24th Amendment, which sought to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling in the Golaknath case. The key question was the scope of Parliament's authority to modify the Constitution. The Golaknath decision had established that Parliament's amendment power was not limitless, and it could not affect the fundamental rights guaranteed in Part III of the Constitution. In the Keshavananda Bharati case, a panel of thirteen judges presided over a constitutional issue. Keshavananda Bharati, the petitioner, presented his argument that the Parliament's authority to modify the Constitution was not limitless and could not undermine its intrinsic framework. The core foundation of the Constitution consisted of fundamental attributes known as the basic structure, though it was not precisely defined. In a historic decision, the Supreme Court clarified that while Parliament can modify the Constitution, it cannot fundamentally change its core principles. The court emphasized that certain aspects of the Constitution, including federalism, democracy, separation of powers, and secularism, are integral to its identity and cannot be altered or eliminated by parliamentary amendments.

The Keshavananda Bharati case had a profound impact, establishing the fundamental structure doctrine. This doctrine protects the core principles of the Constitution from arbitrary alterations. Although the term "secularism" was not explicitly mentioned in the judgment, the recognition of the basic structure doctrine inherently safeguards the Constitution's secular nature. The Keshavananda Bharati case had a significant impact beyond its immediate resolution. It shaped how the law is interpreted and how the constitution is amended. It emphasized the constitution's ability to uphold its core values, like secularism, and the idea that any changes to the constitution must respect and protect these essential principles. Ultimately, the Keshavananda Bharati case defined the limits of parliament's power and ensured that the core values of the constitution, including secularism, are protected within the framework of the basic structure doctrine.

## 2. Shah Bano Case (1985):

In 1985, a significant legal case in India, known as the Shah Bano case, made headlines. It highlighted the conflict between personal laws and secular principles in the country. Shah Bano, a Muslim woman, brought attention to this issue when she sought maintenance from her husband after their divorce, under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The crux of the matter lay in determining whether Muslim women were entitled to maintenance beyond the iddat period, a waiting period after divorce, under secular laws. The Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud, delivered a landmark ruling in favor of Shah Bano. The judgment unequivocally declared that Section 125 applied universally, without regard to the individual's religion. Chief Justice Chandrachud, in his opinion, emphasized that the law's fundamental spirit is egalitarian. He stressed that divorced women's maintenance is a universal right that goes beyond religious distinctions. The judgment places a strong emphasis on the principle of gender

justice, affirming that all citizens are entitled to the protection of their fundamental rights, regardless of their religious beliefs.

The Supreme Court decision's impact led to a nationwide discussion highlighting the immediate need for a Uniform Civil Code. Critics and supporters participated in intense debates, examining the delicate balance between following religious practices and a fair and equal society. In the wake of the controversy surrounding the Shah Bano case, the Indian government enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act in 1986. This law intended to address the economic rights of divorced Muslim women, exposing the challenges of harmonizing religious practices with principles of gender justice within the secular framework of the Indian constitution.

While the Act sought to provide a legal framework for maintenance, it was not without its share of criticism. Some argued that it fell short of establishing a comprehensive solution to the broader issues raised by the Shah Bano case. The nuanced complexities of balancing religious freedoms with gender justice persisted, fueling ongoing discussions about the need for broader legal reforms to ensure the welfare and rights of women in diverse religious communities. In essence, the Shah Bano case left an indelible mark on India's legal landscape, prompting reflections on the delicate interplay between personal laws, secular principles, and the quest for gender justice within a diverse and pluralistic society.

### 3. Ayodhya Dispute (1992)

On December 6, 1992, the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh became the epicenter of a deeply rooted religious conflict. The Ayodhya dispute revolved around the Babri Masjid, a structure that Hindus believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, while Muslims considered it a religious site

with historical significance. The dispute took a tragic turn when, on that fateful day, a large Hindu mob demolished the Babri Masjid. The destruction of the mosque raised profound questions about the rule of law in India and posed a severe test to the nation's secular fabric. The incident marked a stark violation of the principles that underpin a secular state, where the coexistence of diverse religious communities is fundamental. Legal proceedings swiftly followed the Babri Masjid's demolition, with numerous cases filed to determine the ownership of the contested site. The legal battle unfolded in various courts, including the Supreme Court, as parties presented their claims and arguments.

#### Chronology of Events:

- 1528: The Babri Masjid is believed to have been built during the Mughal era.
- 1853-1859: The first recorded incidents of communal tension over the site occurred during the British colonial period.
- 1949: Idols of Lord Ram were allegedly placed inside the mosque, leading to disputes.
- 1986: The Faizabad district court ordered the opening of the locks on the mosque, allowing Hindus to worship inside the disputed structure.
- 1990: The then-leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), L.K. Advani, embarks on a Rath Yatra (chariot journey) advocating for the construction of a Ram Mandir.
- December 6, 1992: The Babri Masjid is demolished by a large Hindu mob.

The Ayodhya dispute has left an indelible scar on Indian society, intensifying communal tensions and posing challenges to the nation's secular nature. The destruction of Babri Masjid stands out as a dark moment in India's history, highlighting the need for a strong legal framework to protect religious structures and prevent communal clashes. The ensuing legal battles and inquiries

endeavored to grapple with the religious, social, and legal consequences of the Babri Masjid demolition. The intricate and emotionally charged nature of the dispute illustrated the difficulty of reconciling religious beliefs with the ideals of justice, fairness, and the rule of law within a secular state. The settlement of the Ayodhya conflict, resulting in the construction of the Ram Mandir at the disputed site, was a pivotal moment in India's legal and social history. The resolution reflected the intricate process of harmonizing religious beliefs with legal requirements in a diverse society, igniting contemplations on its wider impact on India's dedication to secularism and communal cohesiveness.

#### 4. S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India (1994)

In 1994, the Supreme Court of India took up the important case of *State of Karnataka v. Union of India*, often referred to as the S.R. Bommai case. This case addressed the controversial issue of dismissing state governments when it was alleged that the constitutional machinery had broken down. The S.R. Bommai case played a pivotal role in interpreting Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, which grants the President of India the power to impose President's Rule in a state. In the case, the Supreme Court emphasized the significance of upholding the secular character enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The court unequivocally acknowledged secularism as an inseparable component of the Constitution's fundamental structure. It affirmed that the principles of secularism were essential to the constitutional framework and could not be compromised.

The Supreme Court of India's S.R. Bommai case set an important precedent in Indian constitutional law. The court ruled that the central government cannot dismiss a state government simply because it disagrees with the state government's policies. Instead, the central government can only dismiss a state government if there is a clear breakdown of law and order in the state.

This decision helps prevent arbitrary dismissals of state governments and ensures that the federal structure of the Indian political system continues to function effectively.

The S.R. Bommai case established significant principles that emphasized the crucial importance of upholding the secular framework of the state. It set a benchmark for ensuring that the dismissal of a state government should strictly adhere to constitutional mandates and should not be driven by political factors or disagreements over policy matters. The court's ruling emphasized the significance of the decentralized federal structure in India, where each state has a certain degree of independence. The court stressed that the dismissal of a state government should be an extraordinary measure used only when the constitutional machinery malfunctions entirely. This judgment safeguards against Article 356's abuse and supports the delicate balance of power between the central and state governments. The S. R. Bommai case significantly influenced the interpretation of Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, which provides for the dismissal of state governments. The case established secularism and federalism as fundamental principles of India's constitutional identity. It served as a landmark in protecting the democratic and secular values enshrined in the Constitution, setting a precedent for addressing future situations involving the dismissal of state governments.

#### **2.4 CHALLENGES TO INDIAN SECULARISM:**

Despite India's constitutional commitment to secularism, the country struggles with ongoing challenges that put to the test the resilience of its embrace of diversity and inclusivity. In India, recurring communal tensions pose a significant challenge to the principle of secularism. Religious clashes, often influenced by political and social factors, threaten the peaceful

coexistence of diverse religious communities. Incidents like the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, followed by communal riots, highlighted the fragility of these relationships and the potential for religious differences to fuel violence. Religious discrimination remains a significant challenge, raising questions about the impartiality of the state. Unfair treatment based on religious identity limits opportunities and presents legal issues for religious minorities. This discrimination in areas like education and employment underscores the difficulty in securing equal rights and chances for all citizens.

Debates on secularism often arise when religious practices clash with contemporary values. Conflicts over women's entry into religious spaces, like the Sabarimala temple case, exemplify the struggle to reconcile traditional beliefs with principles of equality and non-discrimination. The challenge lies in finding a delicate balance between honoring cultural and religious traditions while safeguarding individual rights. Ensuring religious freedom while preventing excessive state involvement remains a complex dilemma. While individuals should be free to practice and promote their religion without hindrance, cases of state intervention - whether through laws or official actions - spark worries about impartial governance. The debate over implementing a uniform civil code and regulating religious organizations showcases the ongoing struggle to strike a balance between individual liberties and the state's regulatory role.

Religion's involvement in politics complicates a secular society. Using religious identity for political advantage deepens divisions and erodes secularism's inclusivity. Political manipulation of religious sentiments for electoral gain challenges the realization of a genuinely secular democracy. In India, preserving secularism poses challenges as legal disputes related to personal laws, religious conversions, and conflicts involving temples and mosques create a complex legal landscape. Courts must navigate intricate legal and constitutional questions, where competing

claims based on religious grounds are often at play. The outcomes of these cases have significant implications as they shape how secular principles are interpreted and practically applied in the legal realm. Guaranteeing the key ideals of a secular and all-embracing society is paramount to handle current issues. Both civil society and policymakers need to collaborate in promoting tolerance, variety, and equivalent rights to ensure India's secular identity remains resilient in the face of ever-changing social, political, and cultural shifts.

## **2.5 PORTRAYAL OF SECULARISM IN INDIAN CINEMA:**

Understanding secularism in Bollywood involves analyzing both on-screen narratives and the lives of those working in the industry. Bollywood movies not only showcase onscreen brotherhood but also mirror the personal experiences of actors and industry professionals. The movies and the stars' lives influence fan followings and choices. Bollywood movies often show fraternity and teamwork among different communities, which can affect how people in society see these values. The way Bollywood actors and personalities live their lives can also affect how their fans see them and the behaviors they choose. The Bollywood community celebrates India's diverse religious festivals with enthusiasm, regardless of faith. Holidays like Holi, Diwali, and Eid are eagerly enjoyed, embodying the spirit of inclusion. Bollywood celebrities host Iftar parties during Ramadan, actively participate in Ganapati festivities, and embrace Christmas celebrations. These off-screen actions showcase Bollywood's secular values and promote unity and harmony among people of different faiths.

In Bollywood, several families are exemplars of secularism due to their varied marital and family connections. A prime illustration is Salim Khan's household, which is a testament to religious

harmony as its members come from different faiths. Salim Khan himself embodies this diversity through his marriages to Sushila Charak, a Hindu, and later to the respected Christian actress, Helen. The Khan family's secular beliefs were inherited and strengthened by the younger generation. Salim Khan's children married individuals from different religions, demonstrating their commitment to inclusivity and interfaith harmony. Sohel Khan married a Hindu named Seema Sachdev, while Arbaaz Khan married the Hindu actress Malaika Arora. Similarly, Salim Khan's daughter Alvira Khan married Atul Agnihotri, a Hindu actor, further reinforcing the family's secular ethos.

Like the Kapoor family, the Tagore-Khan family embodies religious diversity in Bollywood. Actress Sharmila Tagore, a key figure in the family, defied religious norms by marrying Muslim cricketer Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi. Their son, Saif Ali Khan, followed their footsteps, marrying Hindu actress Amrita Singh and later Kareena Kapoor. Sharmila's daughter, Soha Ali Khan, furthered the interfaith connections by marrying Hindu actor Kunal Khemu. These Bollywood families not only reflect the industry's secular ethos but also promote a larger message of unity amidst diversity. They demonstrate that love and respect can bridge religious differences, fostering a harmonious society.

Shah Rukh Khan, commonly known as the "King of Bollywood," is not only a celebrated figure in the film industry but also an advocate of secularism within his family. His personal life mirrors a colorful mosaic of religious diversity, where he harmoniously blends Hindu and Muslim practices, promoting unity and understanding. Through his marriage with Gauri Khan, a Hindu, SRK showcases an example of inclusivity in relationships. By embracing each other's backgrounds and nurturing an environment where their children experience both Hindu and Muslim customs, they exemplify secularism within their family. The Khans' festivities showcase

their adherence to secular values. They enthusiastically partake in festivals from different religions, such as the Hindu Diwali and the Muslim Eid, demonstrating their acceptance and respect for various beliefs. Additionally, the Khans' choice of names for their children, which combines Hindu and Muslim names, is a meaningful gesture of unity. Their children's names—Aryan, Suhana, and AbRam—symbolize the harmonious blend of their parents' diverse cultural backgrounds.

To fully comprehend the depiction of secularism in Indian cinema, we must embark on a historical expedition through the evolution of Bollywood. The silver screen has consistently served as a mirror, capturing and reflecting the ever-changing landscape of Indian society, politics, and culture. In the pre-Independence era, when Indian cinema was in its nascent stages, films largely revolved around social and mythological narratives. These stories subtly celebrated the nation's rich cultural tapestry. As the Indian freedom struggle intensified, cinema cautiously echoed the collective desire for a unified and secular India. Movies like *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Draupadi* (1931) portrayed the Hindu myths in Indian cinema. However, within same time the era of social issue cinema started such as *Nava Sansar* (1941) *Dhool ka Phool* (1959), and *Waqt* (1965).

However, the era of secularism has been always shown in Hindi cinema directly or indirectly. *Padosi* (1941) film shows an Indian village where communal harmony thrives as people from different backgrounds coexist peacefully. At the heart of this unity are Pandit (Mazhar Khan), a Hindu, and Mirza (Gajanan Jagirdar), a Muslim, who, besides being close friends, serve as the respected elders of the village, ensuring the well-being of each other's families. However, tranquility is disrupted when Onkar, an industrialist with plans to construct a dam in the village, arrives. Pandit and Mirza, along with fellow villagers, oppose Onkar's project. Seizing the

opportunity, Onkar endeavors to sow seeds of discord and mistrust between the two communities and their long-standing friendship. A destructive act, such as setting fire to a house, leads to Mirza mistakenly blaming Pandit and his son as the culprits. Under pressure from the villagers, Mirza is forced to cut off his friendship with Pandit, causing tension and ultimately leading to the construction of a dam. The story takes a tragic turn when the dam collapses, bringing Pandit and Mirza together in a selfless effort to save lives, which ultimately results in their joint sacrifice for the benefit of the community.

Hum Ek Hain (1946) movie portrays 'Zamindarin Ma,' a landlady, as an emblem of compassion during a drought. Witnessing the plight of impoverished villagers, she selflessly distributes grains, a life-saving act of generosity. In the story, Rahmaan Chacha, a Muslim employee of 'Zamindarin Ma,' brings three children to her care. They include two boys, one from a Christian family and the other from a Muslim family, and a girl from the disadvantaged 'Bhangi' caste, whose parents succumbed to the harsh conditions of the drought. "Zamindarin Ma," a symbol of compassion, cares for all three children as her own, showering them with equal love and kindness. The melodious tune of the song "Hum Ek Hain" embodies the spirit of oneness, resonating as an anthem of unity.

Another classic movie Dhool Ka Phool (1959) a Muslim man finds an abandoned Hindu baby in the jungle. He shows compassion and decides to take care of the baby as his own. This act of kindness becomes a central theme in the film, with a popular song emphasizing the message of human unity beyond religious or societal divisions. The song says: "Tu hindu Banega na musalaman Banega insaan ki aulad hai insaan banega"

Coolie (1983) the idea of secularism unfolds, exemplified by the opening scene where a Muslim sister ties a Rakhi to her Hindu brother. The film's essence is captured when Vahida Rehman's

character refuses to succumb to the antagonist, proclaiming, “Ek Hindustani Pak-damn Aurat Ke Liye Uske Shauhar ki Kutiya Mahleo se Jyada Keemat Rakhti Hai” (For an Indian woman, her husband’s humble abode holds more value than a magnificent palace). This dialogue resonates deeply, reflecting the film's overarching theme of the intrinsic worth of love and familial bonds. The narrative takes a dramatic turn when a Hindu uncle, despite losing a hand in the process, valiantly saves the young Iqbal from a perilous situation. Furthermore, Amitabh Bachchan's portrayal of Iqbal, a Muslim character, adds another layer of inclusivity as he navigates the complexities of love, professing his affection for Julie D’ Costa, a Christian girl played by Rati Agnihotri. The film beautifully weaves together diverse cultural and religious threads, portraying a vivid tapestry of unity and harmony.

In the 1970s, Indian cinema underwent a major change with the emergence of "masala" films. These films blended different genres and featured action-packed, fun scenes. Amidst this commercial trend, films like "Amar Akbar Anthony" (1977) became known for their secular messages. Manmohan Desai, the director of the film, highlighted religious diversity in a unique way by featuring three main characters – Amar, Akbar, and Anthony – who represented the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian faiths. During a dynamic period in Indian cinema, a trend emerged where several films explored themes of unity in diversity and religious harmony. "Amar Akbar Anthony," a cinematic masterpiece, was not an isolated instance of this trend. Other films like "Bobby" (1973), directed by Raj Kapoor, and "Choti Bahu" (1971), also delved into these themes. These films exhibited how mainstream Bollywood skillfully incorporated secular values into their narratives, encompassing inter-religious relationships and love stories between individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. This trend appealed to a broad audience and conveyed compelling messages of religious tolerance and communal harmony.

The horrifying events of the 1980s and 1990s, including the Bhagalpur riots (1989), Kashmir riots (1989), Babri mosque demolition (1992), Bombay Riots (1992-93), and the Kargil conflict (1999), instigated a cinematic trend portraying Muslims in Hindi cinema as less patriotic and often linked with terrorism. Films like *Roja* (1992), *Sarfaroosh* (1999), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Gadar Ek Prem Katha* (2001), *Fanaa* (2006), *Kurbaan* (2009), *My Name is Khan* (2010) portrayed Muslims as a terrorist by linking their religion with terrorism.

However, after 2010 movies changed a lot. They don't have the same bad guys as they used to in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, movies don't portray religions in the same way anymore. In the past, characters' clothes and accessories would show what religion they belonged to, but now that's not the case. Instead, movies are more likely to be comedies, fiction, mysteries, or thrillers, and they often talk about current social and political problems. In recent years, Bollywood has witnessed a surge in films that boldly confront religious hypocrisy and challenge conventional societal norms. These movies, such as *"OMG"* (2012), *"PK"* (2014), and *"Dharma Sankat Mein"* (2015), have ignited thought-provoking discussions among audiences, prompting them to question long-held beliefs and examine the complexities of religious practices. This transformative trend in cinematic storytelling marks a significant departure from traditional Bollywood narratives and reflects a more progressive approach to addressing religious themes in contemporary Indian cinema.

*Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), tells a touching story about religion and humanity. It follows Pavan, a Hanuman worshiper played by Salman Khan, who meets and helps a mute Pakistani girl named Munni, who is disconnected from her family. During India-Pakistan conflicts, the movie goes beyond religious and political divisions to show how love and kindness are important. Pavan tries his best to get Munni back to her family, which shows how empathy and unity can break

down religious walls. The story shows that despite different religions and countries, everyone is connected by their shared humanity. The film received huge appreciation from audience of Pakistan.

Mulk (2018), is a thought-provoking film that addresses pertinent issues related to religious identity, prejudice, and communal harmony. The story revolves around a Muslim family in Varanasi who becomes involved in a terrorism case when one of their members becomes involved in extremist activities. As the legal battle unfolds, the film delves into the complexities of religious perceptions, challenging stereotypes and preconceived notions. Through its nuanced storytelling, "Mulk" examines the impact of religious bias on individuals and communities. It encourages viewers to question ingrained prejudices and highlights the importance of unity in the face of divisive forces. The film champions the idea that the actions of a few individuals should not be generalized to an entire community, fostering a message of inclusivity and understanding.

However, in recent years Indian society has become intolerant and the certain political parties are spreading hate and using the idea of Us vs Them in the name of nationalism in certain films. They are spreading their propaganda in the name of religion. In 2017, Karni Sena protested the movie Padmavat claiming that director has distorted history in the film by showcasing love between Rani Padmini and Allaudin Khilji. Also, in recent times films like Kashmir files (2022) and The Kerala Story (2023) has questioned the idea of secularism in the Indian films.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYZING SELECTED FILMS:

#### MY NAME IS KHAN, BAJRANGI BHAIIJAAN, THE KASHMIR FILES AND THE KERALA STORY

##### 3.1 MY NAME IS KHAN (2010):

"My Name Is Khan," a 2010 social drama directed by Karan Johar and co-written by Shibani Bathija and Niranjan Iyengar, features Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol in pivotal roles. Produced through a collaboration between India, the United Arab Emirates, and China, the film delves into the fictional narrative of Rizwan Khan, an autistic Muslim. Khan embarks on a journey across the United States to meet the President following the Islamophobic discrimination faced by his Hindu wife, Mandira Rathod, post the 9/11 attacks.

Rizwan Khan, a Muslim residing in Borivali, Mumbai, alongside his brother Zakir and mother Razia, experiences a unique upbringing due to his autism. His journey is marked by special tutoring and unwavering support from his family, particularly his mother, amidst growing jealousy from Zakir, who eventually relocates to San Francisco. Following Razia's demise, Zakir welcomes Rizwan to live with him and his wife Haseena, who identifies Rizwan's condition as Asperger syndrome. Rizwan finds employment with Zakir and crosses paths with Mandira Rathod, a Hindu woman, and her son Sameer, leading to a marriage and a blended family in Banville.

Their harmonious life takes a drastic turn after the events of September 11. Mark Garrick, a neighbor and journalist, perishes while covering the war in Afghanistan, triggering a ripple effect

of prejudice and hostility towards the Khans. Amidst societal turmoil, tragedy strikes the neighborhood when Sameer is fatally injured during a confrontation. Mandira, consumed by grief, blames Rizwan for their son's death, challenging him to clear their tarnished reputation by proclaiming his innocence to the President of the United States.

Taking Mandira's words to heart, Rizwan embarks on a heartfelt odyssey, first aiming to meet President George W. Bush and later President-elect Barack Obama. Along the way, he forges unexpected bonds, including a friendship with Mama Jenny and her son Joel in Wilhemina, Georgia. Rizwan's journey is not without obstacles; he faces discrimination, wrongful accusations, and even physical harm. However, his unwavering determination to seek justice and spread a message of peace ultimately prevails.

Despite facing adversity, Rizwan's resilience shines through, aided by the support of newfound allies and his unyielding belief in the power of humanity. His encounters with prejudice and violence culminate in a poignant meeting with President Obama, where his simple declaration, "My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist," resonates with profound significance. In the end, Rizwan's quest for acceptance and understanding leaves an indelible mark, inspiring others to confront their biases and embrace compassion.

### **3.1.1 CRITICAL PERCEPTION:**

My Name Is Khan received glowing reviews not only from domestic critics but also from overseas publications, affirming its universal appeal. Overseas reviewers echoed the sentiments of their Indian counterparts, praising the film for its powerful performances and compelling storytelling.

On the popular review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, the film boasts an impressive 83% approval rating from 29 critics reviews, with an average score of 6.7 out of 10. The consensus among critics on the site highlights the film's reliance on strong performances to convey an emotionally resonant narrative, blending contemporary themes with the timeless allure of Bollywood melodrama.

Metacritic, another prominent review aggregator, provided a slightly more subdued assessment, assigning "My Name Is Khan" a score of 50 out of 100 based on reviews from 7 critics. This score indicates a range of "mixed or average" reviews, suggesting a degree of variance in critical opinions. Overall, the positive reception from both domestic and international critics underscores the film's ability to transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with audiences worldwide. Its poignant themes, coupled with exceptional performances, have cemented its status as a standout achievement in Indian cinema, earning acclaim on a global scale.

"My Name Is Khan" garnered widespread acclaim upon its release, with critics lauding its direction and the stellar performances of its leads, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol. Taran Adarsh, in a glowing 4+1/2-star review, hailed Shah Rukh Khan's portrayal as the pinnacle of his career, emphasizing that no amount of praise could adequately capture the depth of his performance. Adarsh also commended Kajol's casting, noting her undeniable chemistry with Shah Rukh Khan and describing her performance as a tour de force.

Raja Sen of Rediff.com observed that director Karan Johar had crafted his first mature film, one that not only inspired and enlightened but also evoked genuine happiness. Sudhish Kamath noted Rizwan's character as an epitome of goodness, commending Johar's restraint in depicting the narrative with subtlety and depth.

Bhavishek Shah of *The Hindu* hailed the film as a milestone in the careers of both the director and its lead actors. He praised Shah Rukh Khan for his immersive portrayal of a character with Asperger's syndrome, seamlessly embodying every nuance with authenticity. Savera R. Someshwar highlighted Kajol's multifaceted performance, applauding her ability to breathe life into her character with a range of emotions.

Pratim D. Gupta, writing for *The Telegraph*, extolled Shah Rukh Khan's exceptional performance, describing his presence as the emotional anchor of the film. Gupta expressed excitement over the reunion of Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, anticipating their on-screen chemistry once again. Minty Tejpal, in the *Bangalore Mirror*, recognized the film's global appeal, noting its exploration of themes such as Islamophobia and the African American community, catering to an international audience.

Manish Gajjar of *BBC* praised Shah Rukh Khan's performance, applauding his versatility as an actor and considering it among his best. He also commended Kajol for her portrayal of Mandira, particularly in the latter part of the film, where her character's emotional depth is showcased.

Minu Jain of *The New Indian Express* hailed Karan Johar for venturing into a genre beyond his usual romantic fare, describing the film as a poignant journey through post-9/11 America towards humanism. Similarly, Mayank Shekhar of the *Hindustan Times* appreciated Johar's departure from traditional Bollywood musical cinema and commended Shibani Bathija's screenplay for its compelling narrative.

Subhash K. Jha praised the film as a flawless work, noting its impeccable content, tone, and treatment. Anna M. M. Vetticad found the story of "My Name Is Khan" deeply moving, admitting that it brought her to tears.

Anupama Chopra hailed Shah Rukh Khan's portrayal of Rizwan as the standout element of the film, recognizing his performance as a driving force behind its success. Similarly, Sukanya Venkatraghavan of Filmfare rejected the notion of pigeonholing "My Name Is Khan" as a simple narrative of triumph over adversity, instead highlighting its broader themes of humanity, tolerance, and redemption, which resonate deeply throughout the film. Kaveree Bamzai of India Today emphasized the significance of Shah Rukh Khan's presence in the film, suggesting that his performance alone merits viewing, regardless of its underlying message. This sentiment was echoed by Rajeev Masand, who emphasized the importance of the film's cast while acknowledging the significance of its message of religious tolerance.

Mid-Day's Sarita Tanwar appreciated the understated nature of the film, except for a dramatic sequence involving Rizwan's intervention in a flood-hit town, which stood out amidst the subtlety of the rest of the narrative. However, Ajit Duara of Open magazine offered a harsh critique, dismissing the film as an extravagant yet hollow endeavor, criticizing Karan Johar's direction and the performances of the cast.

Indroneil Sarkar of Ananda Bazar Patrika expressed dissatisfaction with the film's heavy subject matter and suggested that certain scenes, such as the flood sequence in the second half, could have been omitted for a more cohesive narrative. Vinod Mirani of Box Office India criticized the film for its leisurely pace and perceived lack of focus, while Ajay Brahmataj of Dainik Bhaskar found fault with the screenplay's execution despite praising Johar for tackling a complex subject.

Maithili Rao of Man's World felt that the film's impact waned in the second half, particularly due to an overabundance of dramatic elements, such as the flood scene. Deepa Gahlot of The Afternoon Despatch & Courier concluded that the film failed to elicit a strong emotional response, ultimately leaving viewers feeling disconnected and disengaged.

Rachel Saltz of The New York Times observes that "My Name Is Khan" is part of a small subset of Hindi films exploring the experiences of Indians in post-9/11 America, alongside titles like "New York" and "Kurbaan." Saltz finds the Bollywood perspective on America intriguing, even when the narrative takes on a fairy tale quality. She highlights the film's unique portrayal of the relationship between black Americans and Indians, particularly Muslims, as a point of interest. Saltz praises Karan Johar's adept direction and Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy's evocative score for effortlessly eliciting emotional responses while imparting lessons on Islam and tolerance.

According to Kirk Honeycutt of The Hollywood Reporter, "My Name Is Khan" bravely delves into the pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment in America, a topic largely avoided in mainstream American cinema. Honeycutt commends the film for shedding light on issues of racial profiling and the struggles faced by Muslim-Americans, while also noting Shah Rukh Khan's opportunity to showcase his talent to a broader audience. He describes the 162-minute journey as worthwhile, acknowledging the film's relevance and impact.

Jay Weissberg of Variety describes "My Name Is Khan" as a densely packed and immensely enjoyable drama. He praises the film's confident cinematography and exceptional production design, which enhances the storytelling experience. Weissberg particularly highlights the chemistry between Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, noting Kajol's natural warmth that enriches their on-screen relationship, making it more believable and endearing.

Despite its shortcomings, including a criticized flood subplot and the omission of certain topics like the Iraq War, Sight & Sound's Naman Ramachandran acknowledged Shah Rukh Khan's compelling performance as a saving grace for "My Name Is Khan." Ramachandran recognized Khan's ability to carry the film despite its flaws, highlighting his talent and charisma as instrumental in elevating the overall experience.

Itrath Syed of The Georgia Straight praised the film as a multilayered and politically nuanced work that demands emotional engagement from its audience. While acknowledging moments of melodrama, Syed appreciated director Karan Johar's portrayal of the American experience, particularly in highlighting the prevalence of fear and suspicion among people of color in the country.

Mark Jenkins of NPR described "My Name Is Khan" as a bold fusion of Bollywood's flamboyant style and Hollywood's American setting. However, Jenkins expressed ambivalence towards Shah Rukh Khan's portrayal of Asperger syndrome, questioning the authenticity of his characterization. Despite this critique, Jenkins recognized the film's audacious approach and emotional impact on viewers.

### **3.1.2 CONTROVERSIES:**

Shah Rukh Khan, the renowned actor, revealed his personal experience of facing heightened security measures at airports due to his last name and religion, a situation reminiscent of his character Rizwan Khan in "My Name Is Khan." During a visit to the United States in August 2009 to promote his film and participate in cultural events, Khan encountered a delay upon arriving at Newark Airport in New Jersey. Immigration officers detained him for questioning for over an hour (Khan claims it was closer to two hours), seeking clarification about the purpose of his visit.

According to reports, Khan's name had triggered an alert in the immigration system, prompting officials to conduct further inquiries. Timothy J. Roemer, the American Ambassador to India,

assured that Khan, as a global icon, was a welcome guest in the United States, and the embassy sought to understand the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Khan recounted his experience, stating that officials cited his common name as the reason for the security check. Despite providing necessary documentation and contact information, including details of his stay and professional engagements, Khan found himself subjected to additional scrutiny. He was taken to a room where several individuals, mostly South Asians, were undergoing secondary visa checks. Despite attempts by some officers to vouch for him and the recognition from fellow travelers, Khan was informed that such procedures were standard protocol.

Khan was permitted a single phone call; he was unable to use his own phone and had to rely on assistance from officials at the Indian Consulate for his release. Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel assured that the matter would be further investigated with U.S. officials.

Elmer Camacho, a spokesman for the US Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, defended the questioning as part of routine screening procedures for foreign travelers, emphasizing its standard nature.

The incident sparked widespread debate and commentary, with Indian politicians, actors, and citizens expressing outrage and concern. Demonstrations erupted in India in response to the incident, reflecting the public's frustration with perceived discriminatory practices.

In an unexpected turn, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger extended an invitation to Khan for dinner to ease diplomatic tensions arising from the incident.

Subsequently, during a promotional appearance on a British talk show in February 2010, Khan recounted an unsettling experience at Heathrow Airport in London. He claimed that female

security staff had printed and presented him with a naked image captured by a newly installed body scanner. Khan's comments reignited debates over privacy concerns and the potential misuse of advanced security technologies, sparking further scrutiny of airport screening procedures in both the United States and Britain.

The incident shed light on the challenges faced by individuals of certain backgrounds when traveling internationally, prompting discussions about the implications of racial profiling and security measures. Khan's experience served as a reminder of the importance of addressing biases and ensuring fair treatment for all travelers, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

Following Shah Rukh Khan's criticism of the exclusion of Pakistani cricket players from the 2010 Indian Premier League (IPL), he faced condemnation from Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist political party. The party's backlash led to protests and calls for boycotts of Khan's film "My Name Is Khan" in India.

In response to the controversy, Khan defended his remarks, asserting that he merely expressed a desire for people to visit his country and denying any intent to make anti-national statements. Despite calls for him to apologize, Khan maintained his position, stating that he was willing to engage in dialogue with Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray to address the issue.

Initially, Shiv Sena backed down from their demand to block the release of "My Name Is Khan" after assurances that the film would be allowed to screen in theaters without hindrance. However, on 17 February 2010, incidents of violence erupted as individuals disguised as moviegoers attacked cinemas and booking centers. Director Karan Johar and distributors sought additional security measures from the police.

In response to the escalating tensions, Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ashok Chavan threatened to withdraw security cover for Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray. The Maharashtra government mobilized the State Reserve Police Force to protect cinemas screening the film, leading to multiple arrests and heightened security measures.

Despite the disturbances, the distributor, Fox Star, affirmed that "My Name Is Khan" would proceed with its scheduled release date, and the film premiered to full theaters across India. The incident highlighted the intersection of politics and entertainment in India, underscoring the challenges faced by artists expressing their views in a charged socio-political climate.

### **3.1.3 A SECULAR FILM?**

In the landscape of Indian cinema that often grapples with religious tensions, *My Name Is Khan* (2010) stands out as a film that weaves a narrative of tolerance and understanding in the face of prejudice. Directed by Karan Johar, the film tells the story of Rizwan Khan, a Muslim man with Asperger's syndrome, who embarks on a cross-country journey across the United States after a personal tragedy to meet the American President and change his perception of Muslims post-9/11.

*My Name Is Khan* delves into the complexities of identity in a world increasingly divided by religion. Rizwan, despite facing prejudice and suspicion due to his faith and disability, remains steadfast in his belief in the inherent goodness of people. His journey becomes a quest not just to meet the President but also to bridge the gap between how he sees himself – a loyal American – and how he is perceived by others solely based on his religion.

The film actively challenges stereotypes associated with Muslims. Rizwan, with his gentle demeanor and unwavering moral compass, dismantles the notion of Muslims as a monolithic threat. The narrative humanizes the Muslim experience in America, showcasing the challenges they face but also highlighting their patriotism and contributions to society.

At its core, *My Name Is Khan* is a celebration of humanity. The film emphasizes the power of love, compassion, and understanding to overcome prejudice. Rizwan's journey allows him to connect with people from various backgrounds, fostering empathy and challenging preconceived notions. He encounters kindness and acceptance from unexpected corners, showcasing the inherent good that exists within people despite societal biases.

The film's success in promoting a message of tolerance lies in its effective storytelling. By presenting Rizwan as a relatable and endearing protagonist, *My Name Is Khan* allows the audience to connect with his struggles and triumphs on a personal level. This emotional connection fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Muslims and the importance of dismantling religious prejudice.

Despite its positive message, *My Name Is Khan* isn't without its nuances. Critics argue that the film's portrayal of Islamophobia in America might be somewhat simplistic, not fully capturing the complexities of the issue. Additionally, the film's focus on an individual narrative might not comprehensively address the broader societal and political forces that contribute to religious discrimination.

While it may not offer a completely comprehensive exploration of religious prejudice, *My Name Is Khan* takes a significant step towards promoting understanding and empathy. The film's enduring popularity highlights a yearning for stories that celebrate human connection and

challenge the idea that religion is a source of division. In a world grappling with religious tensions, *My Name Is Khan* serves as a reminder of the importance of looking beyond labels and recognizing the shared humanity that binds us all.

### **3.2 BAJRANGI BHAIJAAN (2015):**

"*Bajrangi Bhaijaan*," released in 2015, is an Indian Hindi-language comedy-drama film directed by Kabir Khan. The screenplay, co-written by Kabir Khan and V. Vijayendra Prasad, offers a heartwarming tale based on an original story. Produced by Salman Khan, Rockline Venkatesh, and Kabir Khan, the film features Salman Khan in the lead role alongside debutante Harshaali Malhotra, Kareena Kapoor Khan, and Nawazuddin Siddiqui.

The narrative follows Pawan Kumar Chaturvedi, a devout follower of the Hindu deity Hanuman, who sets out on a remarkable journey. His mission? To reunite a mute six-year-old Pakistani Muslim girl named Shahida with her family across the border. Stranded in India without her mother, Shahida's poignant story becomes the catalyst for Pawan's journey, which is marked by encounters with diverse characters and unforeseen challenges.

As Pawan navigates through the complexities of borders, cultures, and prejudices, "*Bajrangi Bhaijaan*" delves into themes of humanity, compassion, and the power of empathy. Through its blend of humor, drama, and heartfelt moments, the film resonates with audiences, offering a poignant reflection on the universal bonds that transcend geographical and religious divides.

In the serene hills of Sultanpur, Jhelum, Pakistan resides a six-year-old girl named Shahida, who unfortunately, is mute. One fateful afternoon, while playing on a hillside, Shahida accidentally falls from a precarious perch. Hours pass, and when she doesn't return home, the villagers

mobilize a search party. Eventually, they discover her, clinging to a branch, unable to call out for help due to her disability.

Concerned for their daughter's well-being, Shahida's parents and neighbors deliberate on a course of action. An elderly villager suggests a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, India, believing it will bring solace and perhaps even restore Shahida's voice. However, Shahida's father, skeptical of obtaining a visa due to his past military service and strained relations between India and Pakistan, reluctantly allows her mother Razia to undertake the journey alone.

The trip proceeds as planned until a fateful night on the train journey back home. While the train halts for repairs, Shahida, noticing a trapped sheep, ventures out to assist it. In a heart-wrenching twist of fate, the train unexpectedly departs before Shahida can return, leaving her stranded. Desperately trying to catch up, she boards a freight train, unwittingly heading in the opposite direction and ending up in Kurukshetra, India.

Meanwhile, Shahida's frantic parents search for her in vain, unable to secure an immediate return visa to India. Alone and unable to communicate, Shahida encounters a kind-hearted stranger, Pawan Kumar Chaturvedi, during a religious celebration. Pawan, a devout Hindu devoted to Lord Hanuman, takes pity on the girl, whom he affectionately names Munni, and offers her shelter.

Despite initial hurdles, Pawan accommodates Munni in his home in Delhi, where he resides with his fiancée Rasika and her conservative father, Pandey. Initially wary due to Munni's presumed Muslim identity, Pandey reluctantly allows her to stay for a month. As days pass, Munni, still grieving her separation from her parents, struggles to adapt to her new surroundings.

Pawan, driven by empathy and his devotion to Lord Hanuman, gradually forms a bond with Munni, nurturing her like his own daughter. Their journey together unfolds against the backdrop of Pawan's own struggles, from his humble beginnings to his present challenges.

However, their newfound harmony is shattered when Munni's true identity as a Pakistani Muslim is revealed. Pandey, enraged by the revelation, demands her expulsion from their home. Despite Pawan's promise to seek help from the Pakistani embassy, bureaucratic obstacles and societal prejudices thwart their efforts.

As a last resort, Pawan turns to a dubious travel agent, only to discover Munni's perilous fate at the hands of human traffickers. Determined to right his wrongs and reunite Munni with her family, Pawan embarks on a perilous journey across borders, encountering allies and adversaries alike.

With unwavering resolve and the help of a determined journalist, Chand Nawab, Pawan navigates through obstacles, facing arrest and adversity, all for the sake of Munni. Their journey leads them to a chance encounter that may hold the key to Munni's long-awaited reunion with her family.

As the stakes escalate, Pawan's selflessness and courage inspire a groundswell of support from both Indian and Pakistani citizens, transcending borders and prejudices. Despite facing imprisonment and torture, Pawan's unwavering resolve ultimately triumphs, leading to a joyous reunion that transcends boundaries and celebrates the power of compassion and humanity.

### 3.2.1 CRITICAL PERCEPTION:

According to Rotten Tomatoes, Bajrangi Bhaijaan garnered positive reviews from 88% of 17 critics, earning an average rating of 6.4/10.

In India, Bollywood Hungama awarded the film 4.5 out of 5 stars, praising it as Salman Khan's finest work to date, showcasing his best performance yet. Srijana Mitra Das from Times of India rated it 4 out of 5 stars, lauding Salman Khan's daring portrayal and highlighting the compelling storytelling. Filmfare's Rachit Gupta applauded the movie's inspirational quality, rating it 3.5 out of 5 stars.

Archita Kashyap of Koimoi awarded the film 3.5 out of 5 stars, describing it as a quintessential Hindi film experience filled with grand entertainment. Raja Sen of Rediff.com gave it a similar rating, acknowledging its sentimental and predictable nature yet praising its overall heartwarming impact.

CNN-IBN's Rajeev Masand gave the film 3 out of 5 stars, criticizing its lengthy runtime but acknowledging its engagement factor and superior storytelling compared to other Salman Khan blockbusters. Anupama Chopra of Hindustan Times commented on the film's simplicity and manipulative tactics yet conceded its effectiveness, particularly in preserving Salman Khan's larger-than-life persona while allowing room for character growth.

In a review for Mint, Uday Bhatia praised the film's emotional resonance and the standout performance of Harshaali Malhotra, emphasizing its ability to evoke laughter and tears effortlessly.

Internationally, Chinese critics acclaimed the film for its parallels to the epic Journey to the West and its resonant theme of unity across cultures. Similarly, Japanese audiences rated it highly for its universal message of connection and understanding across borders and beliefs.

### 3.2.2 CONTROVERSIES:

Some religious organizations objected to the title, "Bajrangi Bhaijaan," as "Bajrang" can have associations with the Hindu nationalist group Bajrang Dal. Director Kabir Khan clarified that he intended to reclaim the word for a message of unity (India TV News: <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/salman-khans-bajrangi-bhaijaan-faces-trouble-over-its-title/>).

The soulful song "Bhar Do Jholi Meri" landed in a copyright dispute. The makers were accused of not obtaining proper rights from the inheritors of the original qawwali singers, the Sabri Brothers (India Today: <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/bollywood/story/bajrangi-bhaijaan-salman-steers-clear-of-bhar-do-jholi-controversy-kabir-khan-aa-j-ki-party-281478-2015-07-09>).

The seemingly lighthearted "Chicken Kuk-Doo-Koo" song was interpreted by director Kabir Khan himself as a political statement on religious divides and dietary restrictions in India (OpIndia: <https://www.opindia.com/2022/05/chicken-kuk-doo-koo-song-bajrangi-bhaijaan-beef-controversy-political/>).

### 3.2.3 A SECULAR FILM?

In the often-divisive landscape of Indian cinema, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) stands out as a film lauded for its message of religious tolerance and understanding. Directed by Kabir Khan, the movie tells the story of Pawan, a devout Hindu man from India, who embarks on a remarkable journey to reunite a mute Pakistani girl, Munni, with her family in Pakistan.

The film's core strength lies in its ability to transcend religious boundaries. Pawan, despite his strong Hindu faith, never views Munni with suspicion or prejudice due to her being Muslim. He takes it upon himself to ensure her safe return to Pakistan, facing numerous challenges along the way. This selfless act highlights the power of human connection that can bridge religious divides.

Both Hinduism and Islam are depicted with respect in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. The film showcases religious customs and traditions without mockery or judgment. Pawan's unwavering faith is portrayed positively, while Munni's situation doesn't lead to negative generalizations about Muslims. This balanced portrayal fosters empathy for characters from both faiths.

The film actively avoids perpetuating religious stereotypes. Pawan isn't a stereotypical hyper-nationalist Hindu, and the people he encounters in Pakistan are not portrayed as villains simply because of their religion. Instead, the audience sees a spectrum of individuals on both sides of the border, some helpful and some not, highlighting the complexities of human nature that transcend religious affiliations.

At its core, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is a celebration of shared humanity. The film emphasizes the common threads that bind people together, regardless of their religion. Pawan and Munni's bond transcend language and cultural barriers, showcasing the power of love, compassion, and a shared desire to help one another.

The film's success in promoting a message of religious tolerance is largely due to its effective storytelling. By weaving a heartwarming narrative with relatable characters, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* appeals to audiences on an emotional level. This emotional connection allows viewers to connect with the film's message on a deeper level, fostering a sense of empathy and understanding across religious divides.

Despite its positive intentions, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* hasn't been without its critics. Some have argued that the film simplifies the complexities of the India-Pakistan relationship, offering a somewhat idealistic portrayal. Additionally, the film's focus on an individual story might not fully capture the broader political realities that often fuel religious tensions.

While it may not be a perfect portrayal of interfaith relations, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* stands as a powerful testament to the potential of cinema to promote peace and understanding. The film's enduring popularity highlights the audience's desire for stories that celebrate human connections and bridge religious divides. In a world often grappling with religious conflict, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* serves as a beacon of hope, reminding us of the power of empathy and the importance of seeing each other as fellow human beings.

### **3.3 THE KASHMIR FILES (2022):**

"The Kashmir Files," a 2022 Indian Hindi-language drama film directed by Vivek Agnihotri, revolves around the 1990 exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from Indian-administered Kashmir. The storyline, although fictionalized, centers on the events leading up to the exodus, presenting them as a genocide, a depiction disputed by scholars. The film alleges that these facts were suppressed through a conspiracy of silence. Starring Mithun Chakraborty, Anupam Kher, Darshan Kumar,

and Pallavi Joshi, the plot follows a Kashmiri Hindu college student who, raised by his exiled grandfather, is shielded from the circumstances of his parents' deaths. Upon his grandfather's demise, the student, initially believing the exodus to be benign, becomes determined to uncover the truth surrounding his family's tragedy. The narrative shifts between the student's present-day quest in 2020 and his family's struggles thirty years earlier. Released in theaters on March 11, 2022, "The Kashmir Files" has achieved significant commercial success.

The film "The Kashmir Files" intricately weaves between two timelines: the harrowing events of 1989-1990 in Kashmir and the contemporary setting of 2020. In the backdrop of 1989-1990 Kashmir, Islamic militants unleash terror, forcing Kashmiri Pandits to flee the valley with threats of conversion, exile, or death. Pushkar Nath Pandit, a teacher, endeavors to protect his son Karan from accusations of espionage. Amidst escalating violence, Pushkar's friend Brahma Dutt intervenes, but faces repercussions for advocating for Karan's safety. Tragically, Karan falls victim to militant commander Farooq Malik Bitta's brutality, leaving Pushkar and his daughter-in-law Sharda devastated.

Struggling for survival, Pushkar's family finds refuge with their journalist friend Vishnu Ram, only to encounter further tragedy when militants betray their sanctuary. The Pandit community, displaced and destitute, seeks refuge in Jammu, while Pushkar pleads for justice and resettlement. Fast forward to 2020, when Pushkar raises Sharda's son Krishna in ignorance of his family's tragic past. Krishna, a student at ANU, becomes entangled in the web of Kashmiri separatism under the influence of his professor Radhika Menon. As memories of the past resurface through the recollections of Pushkar's friends, Krishna confronts the truth about his heritage.

Krishna's journey unfolds as he contests the student elections, challenging the Government of India's stance on Kashmir and exposing the atrocities faced by his community. In a quest for

justice, Krishna ventures to Kashmir, encountering Bitta and unearthing the painful realities of his family's demise. Returning to Delhi, Krishna delivers a powerful speech at the university, shedding light on the untold stories of Kashmiri Hindus. His revelations spark both resistance and support, ultimately igniting a discourse on justice and remembrance. "The Kashmir Files" masterfully juxtaposes past trauma with present-day reckoning, urging audiences to confront the enduring legacy of loss and resilience in Kashmir's tumultuous history.

### **3.3.1 CRITICAL PERCEPTION:**

"The Kashmir Files" has elicited a diverse range of critical evaluations, reflecting the intricacies and contentious nature of its portrayal of historical events.

Reviewers such as Shubhra Gupta from *The Indian Express* and Rahul Desai of *Film Companion* have offered pointed critiques, highlighting the film's perceived lack of nuanced storytelling and its alignment with a particular political agenda. Gupta, for instance, underscores the potential of the film to serve as propagandistic material, arousing deep-seated emotions among Kashmiri Pandits. Desai goes further, characterizing the film as a work of "fantasy-revisionism," lamenting its absence of clarity and empathy towards its subjects.

Tanul Thakur's review in *The Wire* takes a particularly critical stance, condemning the film for its monotonous narrative and inert storytelling, which, according to Thakur, serve to promote a Hindu majoritarian viewpoint while distorting historical truths. Asim Ali of *News Laundry* echoes these sentiments, accusing the film of exploiting the plight of Kashmiri Pandits to advance a narrow Hindu nationalist agenda.

In contrast, some reviewers, like Stutee Ghosh of *The Quint* and Jagadish Angadi of *Deccan Herald*, offer more nuanced perspectives. Ghosh acknowledges the film's compelling portrayal of the Kashmiri Pandit experience while expressing a desire for greater complexity in its storytelling. Angadi praises elements such as the film's non-linear narrative and robust dialogue, highlighting its intense and thought-provoking nature.

Avinash Lohana of *Pinkvilla* and Rohit Bhatnagar of *The Free Press Journal* strike a middle ground, acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses in their assessments. While Lohana appreciates the film's performances and meticulous research, he critiques its lack of balance. Bhatnagar, meanwhile, recognizes the film's flaws in screenplay and performance but admires the overall effort invested. In sum, "The Kashmir Files" has ignited a fervent debate among critics, reflecting the multifaceted layers of its storytelling and the complex historical and political context it seeks to navigate.

Singapore's censorship board, in collaboration with cultural and security ministries, opted to ban the film. Their concern was that the movie's portrayal of Muslims could be inflammatory and disrupt the delicate balance of religious harmony within the country's diverse population. This decision reflects Singapore's long-standing approach to maintaining social cohesion. The ruling People's Action Party has a history of taking proactive measures to ensure racial and religious tolerance.

Opinions among Kashmiri Pandits regarding "The Kashmir Files" vary significantly, with some finding it to be a cathartic and emotionally resonant experience, while others express criticism and concern. Journalist Rahul Pandita, who himself experienced the exodus from Srinagar, described the film as providing an "emotional catharsis" for many Pandits. He emphasized the profound impact the movie had on those who lived through the traumatic events depicted.

Additionally, a Kashmiri Hindu immigrant to New Zealand praised the film as a faithful representation of the exodus experience, suggesting that it could foster greater understanding if viewed by Muslims to grasp the complexities of the conflict from the Pandit perspective.

However, not all Pandits share this sentiment. Sanjay Tickoo, President of the Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti (KPSS), voiced criticism of the film, citing misrepresentations and expressing concerns that it may contribute to a sense of insecurity among Kashmiri Pandits still residing in the Kashmir Valley. Overall, the reception among Kashmiri Pandits is varied, with some finding solace and validation in the film's portrayal of their experiences, while others voice reservations and caution regarding its impact and accuracy.

### **3.3.2 CONTROVERSIES:**

"The Kashmir Files" wasn't without its legal troubles. Before release, a lawsuit in Uttar Pradesh expressed concern that the film might demonize Muslims and spark violence. This challenge was dismissed on technical grounds. Another lawsuit came from the widow of a soldier killed during the Kashmir conflict. She argued the film inaccurately portrayed events surrounding her husband's death and sought to block the film's release. The court sided with her partially, ordering the removal of specific scenes. Additionally, various petitions were filed across India aiming to stop screenings due to worries about the film potentially inflaming religious tensions.

"The Kashmir Files" enjoyed a surge in popularity thanks in large part to its endorsement by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Key figures within the party, like Smriti Irani and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, actively promoted the film. This backing, along with positive coverage by pro-government media outlets, fueled its commercial success. The BJP's

influence extended to several states they control, where "The Kashmir Files" was declared tax-free, and officials encouraged public viewings. Some states even offered special screenings or paid leave for government employees to attend. Despite this dominance, opposition parties in some states called for similar tax breaks, and BJP legislators nationwide bought out theater screenings to allow free viewings.

The film "The Kashmir Files" has been a lightning rod for controversy. Director Vivek Agnihotri presents it as an unflinching portrayal of the "truth" about the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits during the Kashmir insurgency. However, critics argue the film takes significant liberties with history. Agnihotri frames the exodus as a "genocide" deliberately hidden from public discourse. He suggests the Kashmiri Pandit experience was the sole focus of human rights abuses in the region, aligning with Hindu nationalist views. Critics see this as Islamophobic and fueling Hindu nationalism. The film has been slammed for focusing solely on violence against Hindus by Muslims, while ignoring broader human rights violations. Critics point to the conflation of real events spread out over a decade into a single fictional narrative. Comparisons have even been drawn between Agnihotri and Nazi propagandists due to the film's perceived historical revisionism and manipulation.

Several specific scenes in the movie have been disputed by those directly affected. Additionally, the film assigns blame for the exodus to the then-ruling Congress party, even though it occurred under a BJP-supported coalition government. Agnihotri refutes accusations of propaganda, claiming the film merely exposes terrorism. He also denies any intention to create religious divides. "The Kashmir Files" remains a contentious film. While some see it as a long-overdue acknowledgement of Kashmiri Pandit suffering, others view it as a dangerous distortion of history that inflames religious tensions.

"The Kashmir Files" transcended the silver screen and sparked real-world tensions. Screenings were disrupted by Hindutva activists chanting slogans advocating violence against Kashmiri Muslims and Indian Muslims in general. One particularly disturbing instance involved members of the Hindu Jagran Manch, a right-wing group, calling for the shooting of "traitors to the nation." Director Agnihotri, in a controversial move, defended these actions as freedom of expression.

The film's impact wasn't limited to rhetoric. A Kashmiri Pandit activist who dared to criticize the movie for exploiting the Pandit community was targeted by a mob believed to be linked to the BJP. Social media became a breeding ground for further division, with videos surfacing of audience members calling for boycotts of Muslim-owned businesses. The chilling effect extended to journalists as well. Indian Muslim journalist Rana Ayyub felt unsafe and humiliated during a screening, enduring verbal abuse and threats to return to Pakistan. These incidents highlight the film's potential to exacerbate existing religious divides and create a climate of fear for Indian Muslims.

The Kashmir Files is believed to have contributed to the communal violence that erupted during the 2022 Ram Navami riots. The film depicts the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus in the 1990s, focusing on violence perpetrated against them by Muslims. Critics argue this portrayal paints all Muslims as bloodthirsty supporters of militants and downplays the broader context of the conflict.

This one-sided narrative appears to have inflamed tensions. In Khargone, a scene from the film involving a gruesome killing was reenacted with makeshift weapons. A BJP leader used the film to stoke fears, suggesting similar violence could befall other regions if Hindus didn't learn a

lesson. In Uttarakhand, viewers reported feeling a sense of needing to defend themselves against a perceived threat from local Muslims. These incidents highlight the potential of the film to exacerbate religious divisions and incite violence.

### **3.3.3 A SECULAR FILM?**

The Kashmir Files, a 2022 Hindi film directed by Vivek Agnihotri, sparked a firestorm of debate upon its release. While the film portrays the plight of Kashmiri Hindus during the exodus of the 1990s, its portrayal of events and its subsequent reception raise questions about its secular credentials.

The Kashmir Files presents a harrowing account of violence perpetrated against Kashmiri Hindus by Muslim militants during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The film doesn't shy away from depicting the brutal killings and forced displacement that the community faced. However, critics argue that this portrayal is a one-sided narrative that paints all Kashmiri Muslims with the same brush. The film has been accused of demonizing the entire Muslim community in Kashmir, overlooking the role of some Kashmiri Muslims who helped their Hindu neighbors during the exodus.

Questions have also been raised about the film's historical accuracy. Critics point out that The Kashmir Files simplifies a complex situation. The exodus of Kashmiri Hindus was a consequence of a confluence of factors, including the rise of militancy, political instability, and the radicalization of some sections of the Kashmiri population. The film, however, presents a blacker and whiter picture, focusing solely on Muslim violence against Hindus. This selective

storytelling has been criticized for overlooking the violence faced by Kashmiri Muslims at the hands of security forces and for downplaying the role of some political players in stoking the fires of communal tension.

The Kashmir Files' most significant impact has arguably been on social harmony in India. The film's graphic portrayal of violence has been accused of inflaming religious tensions and reopening old wounds. Incidents of violence against Muslims have been reported following the film's release, highlighting the potential dangers of such one-sided narratives. Critics argue that a more nuanced portrayal that acknowledges the suffering of all communities caught in the crossfire would have been a more responsible approach.

The film's immense popularity and the emotional response it evoked made it difficult to have a balanced discussion about the events it depicted. Supporters of the film often dismissed any criticism as attempts to whitewash the violence against Kashmiri Hindus. This stifled any meaningful discourse on the complexities of the situation in Kashmir and the factors that led to the exodus.

While the film shines a light on the plight of Kashmiri Hindus, it does so at the expense of a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict. A truly secular film would strive to depict the human cost of violence on all sides of the conflict, acknowledging the suffering of Kashmiri Muslims as well. It would also explore the broader historical and political context that led to the tragic events of the 1990s.

The Kashmir Files serves as a reminder of the importance of responsible storytelling, especially when dealing with sensitive historical events. While it's important to acknowledge the suffering of Kashmiri Hindus, it shouldn't come at the cost of demonizing another community or glossing

over the complexities of the situation. A more nuanced and balanced portrayal would have fostered empathy and understanding, rather than deepening existing divides. The film's legacy is a cautionary tale, urging filmmakers to strive for historical accuracy and present multiple perspectives when tackling such sensitive subjects.

### **3.4 THE KERALA STORY (2023):**

The 2023 Hindi film, *The Kerala Story*, directed by Sudipto Sen, caused controversy for its plot and alleged basis. The story centers around women from Kerala who are forced to convert to Islam and become part of the Islamic State terrorist group. Promoted as a true story, the film taps into the Hindu nationalist ideology of "love jihad," a conspiracy theory that demonizes Muslim men who supposedly lure Hindu women into relationships for the purpose of conversion. Critics argue that *The Kerala Story* is factually inaccurate, spreading misinformation about mass conversions and recruitment of Hindu women.

*The Kerala Story*, a 2023 Hindi drama film, tells the story of young women from Kerala who fall victim to a sinister plot. The film portrays them as being manipulated by extremists into converting to Islam. This initial conversion is just the first step, as the women are then allegedly pressured into joining the violent terrorist group ISIS.

However, it's important to be aware of the controversy surrounding the film. Marketed as a true story, *The Kerala Story* has been criticized for lacking factual basis and promoting a specific viewpoint. The film feeds into the "love jihad" theory, a contentious idea that Muslim men use romantic relationships to convert Hindu women. Critics argue that *The Kerala Story* spreads

misinformation by suggesting there are mass conversions and recruitment of Hindu women into ISIS.

#### **3.4.1 CRITICAL PERCEPTION:**

The Kerala Story was critically panned by reviewers. On Rotten Tomatoes, it garnered a mere 14% positive rating. Critics slammed the film for its poor quality and its dangerous agenda. NDTV's Saibal Chatterjee called it a propaganda piece masquerading as a movie, while Shubhra Gupta of The Indian Express criticized its portrayal of Muslims as one-dimensional villains. Scroll.in's Nandini Ramnath felt the film's sole purpose was to spread Islamophobia. Anuj Kumar of The Hindu described it as a poorly made attempt to stir up hatred based on misinformation. Deepanjana Pal of Film Companion echoed these sentiments, calling it a fear-mongering tool that exploits real tragedies for political gain. Sowmya Rajendran of The News Minute concluded that the film reduces women to pawns in a religious and ideological war.

#### **3.4.2 CONTROVERSIES:**

The Kerala Story's central claim of mass conversions and large-scale recruitment of Hindu and Christian women into ISIS from Kerala sparked major controversy. The film's teaser featured a character alleging 32,000 women (about twice the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden) were missing and joined ISIS. This number, however, was demonstrably false. Critics pointed out it was based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations of data.

While the story drew inspiration from the real-life experiences of three women who converted and joined ISIS with their husbands, the film's scale was wildly exaggerated. Experts estimated only around 100-200 Indians total joined ISIS, with a small fraction from Kerala. The film's inflated numbers even surpassed ISIS's entire strength.

Facing legal challenges, the filmmakers removed promotional materials with the false figure. However, the film itself continued to repeat these claims, even upping the number to 50,000 at one point. Ultimately, under further pressure, the director conceded that all figures in the film were fictionalized and not based on reality.

The Kerala Story received backing from India's ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and its ideological affiliate, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This political support wasn't subtle. The BJP used the film for political messaging during Karnataka state assembly elections. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself endorsed the film at a rally, claiming it exposed a conspiracy and accusing the opposing Indian National Congress party of backing terrorism. BJP President J.P. Nadda even organized special screenings and invited young Hindu girls to attend. Additionally, states governed by the BJP, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, made the film tax-free. The RSS mouthpiece, Organizer, further fueled the fire by calling the film a "dangerous truth."

The Kerala Story faced strong opposition in Kerala, the state it portrayed. Both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian National Congress, the two dominant parties in the state's history, condemned the film. They accused it of spreading misinformation that fuels religious divisions, aligning with the agenda of the Sangh Parivar, a right-wing Hindu nationalist group. This disapproval wasn't limited to Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, another South Indian state, protests

erupted against the film. These protests involved the Naam Tamilar Katchi party and various Muslim political organizations.

The Kerala Story's portrayal of events incited public backlash, particularly in the South Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Protests erupted in both regions condemning the film. In Tamil Nadu, the controversy apparently led the Tamil Nadu Multiplex Association to halt screenings altogether. The filmmakers, however, contested this claim, arguing that political forces were censoring the film. A similar situation unfolded in Kerala, where the film received poor reception.

The Kerala Story's release wasn't smooth sailing. Before it hit theaters, petitions challenging the film's potential to incite religious discord were filed in various courts across India, including the Supreme Court. These petitions were ultimately dismissed, but the courts did order the removal of promotional materials containing the false claim of 32,000 women converting and joining ISIS. Despite legal approval, the film faced further hurdles. West Bengal banned The Kerala Story entirely, citing concerns about hate speech and rising communal tensions. This ban was challenged by the filmmakers and subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court. However, a victory came with strings attached. The filmmakers were forced to include disclaimers acknowledging the film's fictionalized nature and the inaccuracy of the figures it presented.

### **3.4.3 A SECULAR FILM?**

The 2023 Hindi film, The Kerala Story, landed with a thud and a spark. While the film itself garnered scathing reviews and accusations of misinformation, it ignited a firestorm of controversy around its portrayal of religious tensions in India.

At the heart of the story lies a group of young women from Kerala who are allegedly manipulated into converting to Islam and eventually joining the ranks of ISIS. Marketed as a true story, the film quickly drew criticism for its lack of factual basis. The central claim of mass conversions and large-scale recruitment of Hindu and Christian women into ISIS from Kerala was demonstrably false. Experts pointed out the figure of 32,000 conversions used in the film's promotion stemmed from misunderstandings and misinterpretations of data. The actual number of Indians who joined ISIS is estimated to be around 100-200, with a small fraction originating from Kerala. The film's inflated numbers even surpassed ISIS's entire strength.

This blatant disregard for accuracy wasn't the only issue. The film fed into the controversial "Love Jihad" theory, a conspiracy theory suggesting Muslim men target Hindu women for conversion through romantic relationships. Critics slammed this portrayal as Islamophobic and lacking any basis in reality. The narrative of vulnerable Hindu women being preyed upon by Muslims fueled anxieties and religious divisions, especially in light of the film's political backing.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in India, and its ideological affiliate, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), actively endorsed *The Kerala Story*. This support wasn't subtle. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself used the film for political messaging during Karnataka state assembly elections, claiming it exposed a conspiracy and accusing the opposing Indian National Congress party of backing terrorism. The BJP President even organized special screenings and invited young Hindu girls to attend. Additionally, states governed by the BJP made the film tax-free. The RSS mouthpiece further fueled the fire by calling the film a "dangerous truth."

This political endorsement fueled the flames of controversy. In Kerala, the state the film portrayed, both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian National Congress

condemned the film. They accused it of spreading misinformation that fuels religious divisions, aligning with the agenda of the Sangh Parivar, a right-wing Hindu nationalist group. This disapproval wasn't limited to Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, another South Indian state, protests erupted against the film. These protests involved the Naam Tamilar Katchi party and various Muslim political organizations.

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On the eve of release, several petitions were filed in various courts across India, including the Supreme Court, challenging the film's potential to incite religious discord. These petitions were ultimately dismissed, but the courts did order the removal of all promotional materials containing the false claim of mass conversions. Despite legal approval, the film faced further hurdles. West Bengal banned *The Kerala Story* entirely, citing concerns about hate speech and rising communal tensions. This ban was challenged by the filmmakers and subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court. However, a victory came with strings attached. The filmmakers were forced to include disclaimers acknowledging the film's fictionalized nature and the inaccuracy of the figures it presented.

*The Kerala Story* serves as a cautionary tale. While filmmakers have the right to explore sensitive topics, doing so with blatant disregard for facts and a focus on inflaming religious tensions is irresponsible and dangerous. The film's trajectory, from its controversial claims to its political backing and ultimate backtracking on factual accuracy, highlights the need for more

responsible storytelling, especially when dealing with sensitive issues of religion and national security.

### **3.5 FAITH AND POLITICS IN BOLLYWOOD: COMPARISON OF FOUR FILMS**

The landscape of Indian cinema reflects the ever-evolving political and social climate, particularly regarding the concept of secularism. Here's a comparative analysis of four films - My Name Is Khan (2010), Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015), The Kashmir Files (2022), and The Kerala Story (2023) highlighting how they portray religious tensions amidst India's changing political dynamics.

#### **My Name Is Khan (2010): A Plea for Tolerance in the Post-9/11 World**

Released in the aftermath of 9/11, My Name Is Khan tackles Islamophobia in the United States. Rizwan Khan, a Muslim man with Asperger's syndrome, embarks on a journey to change the American President's perception of Muslims. The film promotes tolerance and understanding, emphasizing the power of love and empathy to overcome prejudice. Rizwan's story humanizes the Muslim experience, challenging stereotypes and showcasing their patriotism. This film emerged during a period of heightened global tension, offering a message of unity that resonated with audiences yearning for interfaith understanding.

#### **Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015): Bridging Borders Through Shared Humanity**

Bajrangi Bhaijaan stands out for its portrayal of human connection transcending religious boundaries. Pawan, a devout Hindu man from India, helps Munni, a mute Pakistani girl, reunite with her family. The film celebrates shared humanity, showcasing the power of compassion and

a desire to help one another. Both Hinduism and Islam are depicted with respect, avoiding stereotypes and promoting empathy for characters from both faiths. This film arrived amidst a period of relative calm between India and Pakistan, offering a heartwarming narrative that resonated with audiences seeking stories that transcended national and religious divides.

### **The Kashmir Files (2022): A Shift Towards Hindu Nationalism?**

The Kashmir Files marked a significant shift in the portrayal of religious tensions in Indian cinema. The film depicts the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus during the 1990s, focusing on violence perpetrated against them by Muslim militants. Critics argue it presents a one-sided narrative, demonizing Kashmiri Muslims and overlooking the complexities of the conflict. The film's release coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalism in India, and its political backing by the ruling BJP fueled controversy. This film reflects a growing emphasis on Hindu identity and a more assertive stance on national security, sparking debates about historical accuracy and the potential for such narratives to inflame religious tensions.

### **The Kerala Story (2023): Fabrication and its Dangers**

The Kerala Story generated controversy for its fabricated narrative about mass conversions of Hindu women to Islam and their recruitment into ISIS. The film feeds into the Islamophobic conspiracy theory of "Love Jihad," furthering religious divisions. Unlike the previous films, The Kerala Story doesn't attempt to bridge divides but rather uses misinformation to stoke fear and distrust. This film's emergence aligns with a growing trend of online disinformation and religious polarization in India.

### **Secularism in Flux: A Changing Landscape**

These four films showcase the evolving concept of secularism in Indian cinema. *My Name Is Khan* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* represent a more inclusive vision, promoting tolerance and understanding between religious communities. However, *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story* reflect a shift towards narratives that emphasize Hindu identity and highlight perceived threats from other religious groups. This coincides with the rise of Hindu nationalism and a more assertive Indian foreign policy.

The future of Indian cinema in navigating religious tensions remains to be seen. While films like *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story* raise concerns about the potential for misinformation and divisiveness, there's still hope for stories that promote empathy and understanding. Indian cinema has the power to be a force for good, fostering social harmony and reminding audiences of the shared humanity that transcends religious differences.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY:**

The primary focus of this chapter is to present and analyze the data collected from respondents through surveys conducted via Google Forms. This chapter serves as a comprehensive exploration of the quantitative and qualitative insights gathered from participants regarding their perceptions and interpretations of secularism, religious diversity, and social issues as depicted in the selected Bollywood films: *My Name is Khan*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, *The Kashmir Files*, and *The Kerala Story*.

The methodology employed for data collection aimed to capture a diverse range of responses and perspectives from the audience. Google Forms surveys were utilized to facilitate a structured and efficient collection of data, incorporating both multiple-choice and Likert scale questions for quantitative analysis, as well as open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights. The data analysis process involved organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the survey responses to identify key themes, patterns, and trends related to secularism and its portrayal in the selected films.

In this chapter, the data will be presented and discussed in detail, highlighting the demographic information of respondents, quantitative findings, and qualitative insights. Through a systematic analysis of the collected data, this chapter aims to offer a nuanced understanding of audience reception and interpretation of secularism in Bollywood cinema, providing valuable insights that

will inform the broader discussion and conclusions presented in the following chapters of this dissertation.

#### **4.2 SAMPLE SIZE AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR:**

The survey was distributed to a total of 40 respondents who voluntarily participated in the study. The sample comprised individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, including varying age groups, genders, religions, and occupations. While the sample size is relatively small, it provided a manageable and focused group for in-depth analysis and insights into audience perceptions.

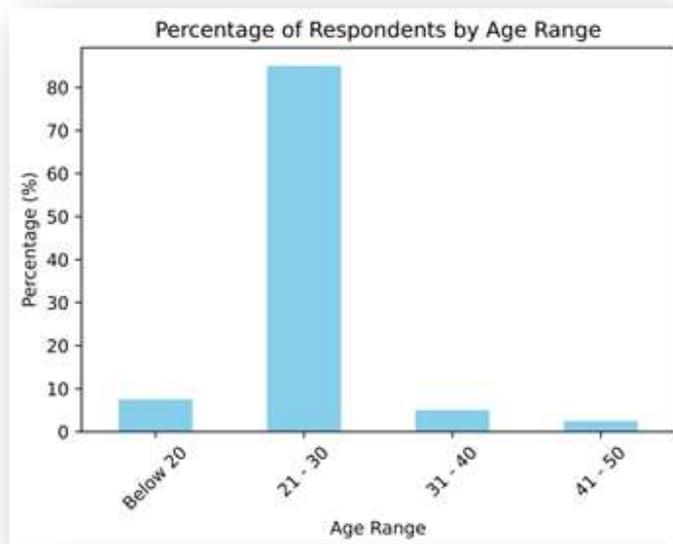
The demographic factors influencing respondents' perspectives and interpretations will be discussed in detail in the following section, offering insights into the diverse range of participants contributing to this research.

##### **4.2.1 AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS:**

The following table 4.1 shows the age of respondents.

**Table 4.1**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Below 20	03	7.5
21 - 30	34	85
31 - 40	2	5
41 - 50	1	2.5



**Figure 4.1**

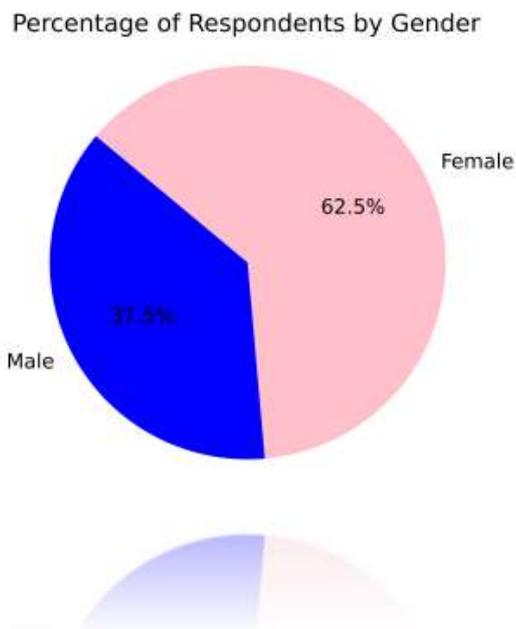
This bar graph above presents the age distribution of 40 respondents to the survey; a prime focus is on young and youngish people. The largest number of respondents is in the 21-30 years bracket, with 85% percent representing that age group and totaling 34 individuals. Fewer are younger than twenty years, making up just under a tenth of those surveyed (7.5%). The two responses belong to the thirty-one-forty years range or constitute five percent of the sample. There were fewer numbers for older age groups: one respondent in the forty-one-fifty years' range or two and a half percent.

#### 4.2.2 GENDER OF RESPONDENTS:

The following table 4.2 shows the gender of respondents.

**Table 4.2**

Gender	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	15	37.5
Female	25	62.5



**Figure 4.2**

The pie chart demonstrates a noticeable difference in the representation of males and females among the 40 respondents. Women constitute most of them, comprising 62.5% of the sample with 25 individuals. But men form less than one-half of the sample, that is only 15 respondents or 37.5%. The gender ratio presents a higher number of women than men in this study where

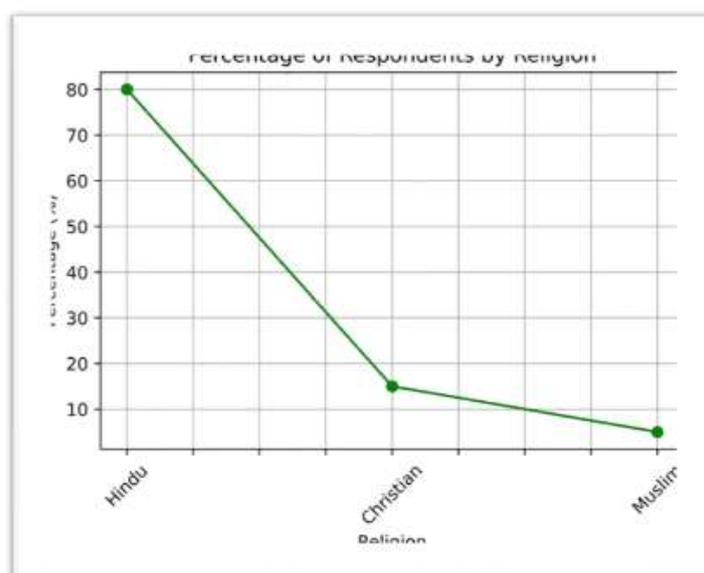
women are more represented by far. The data reveals that female participation in this survey was stronger compared to that of males as manifested by their over-representation here.

#### 4.2.3 RELIGION OF RESPONDENTS:

The following table 4.3 shows the religion of respondents.

**Table 4.3**

Religion	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Hindu	32	80
Christian	6	15
Muslim	2	5



**Figure 4.3**

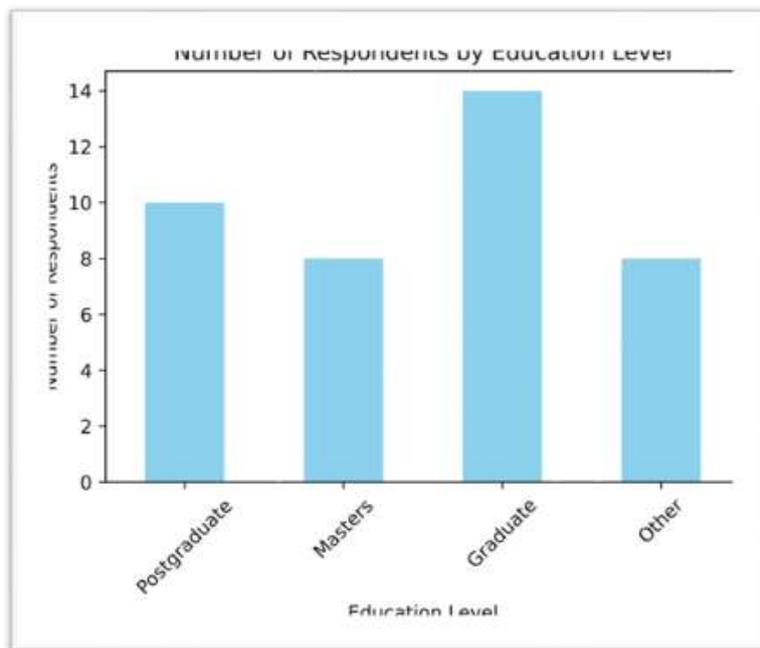
The distribution of religions among the 40 respondents shows that they are mostly Hindu with 80% of the sample identifying themselves as Hindus, totaling 32 individuals. Christians are the next important religious group, comprising 15% of the sample with six individuals. Muslims form the fewest number of religious practitioners in this study, constituting only 5% or two people out of a total sample size of forty. This information implies that most respondents were Hindu, followed by Christians, while Muslims made up less but significant part of respondents. It is important to note that in this study, the highest population belonged to Hindus when grouped according to different religions.

#### **4.2.4 EDUCATION QUALIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS:**

The following table 4.4 shows the education qualification of respondents.

**Table 4.4**

<b>Education qualifications</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Graduation	28
Post graduation	12



**Figure 4.4**

It emerged that most of the 40 respondents in the survey had a first degree. Out of 40 respondents, 28 (70%) reported having completed their first degree. On the contrary, there are fewer postgraduates represented in the sample, but this figure is also significant – with twelve people having a Masters’ degree. These results demonstrate that there are more undergraduates among respondents whereas postgraduates remain a considerable minority in sample. The distribution reveals that most of the respondents have a degree and some of them went on to further their education with higher degrees through post-graduation.

### **4.3 AUDIENCE OVERVIEW: MY NAME IS KHAN**

The audience has responded in a variety of ways from my Name is Khan —this indicates its effectiveness and the different themes it has portrayed. Several commentators, though,

appreciated the movie especially for the strong performance – Shah Rukh Khan played the main role and they said that he really nailed it, that is his performance was the main pillar of the film. Everything from the storyline which deals with loving someone, but being rejected because of they are, to the discrimination and prejudice brings viewers a lot of emotion and attention to the suffering experienced by the oppressed groups. The respondents reacted meaningfully to the film's thorough depiction of Islamophobia, including the Fuhrer syndrome that developed after the 9/11 attack when people in general became prejudice against Muslims. Some approved of the portrayal while others found that it stereotyped Muslims. Participants admitted that the film's realism, comprising its music and the storytelling, made them a beneficial viewing. Nevertheless, some fed back that the movie is against their delight because of a biased perspective or unrealistic storyline, under which some of events or stereotypes are implicated. After all, the movie "My Name is Khan" does seem to have had a lasting impact on the mass of the viewers, as is seen in its presentation of topics like religion, inequality and stereotypes.

The responders have shown typical reactions to the cinematic representation of secularism in the film "My Name is Khan". A lot of observers commended the film for its secularism attitude. They mentioned that it captured embracement, co-existence, and equality among people with different religious faiths. They did applaud the movie for giving the message of tolerating, understanding and unifying together while holding that can overcome religiously differences and it is love and compassion which can build a bridge between two religions. Among the respondents, some of them particularly indicated that the film had some secular values like the main couple could be from other religions such as the actor playing Shah Rukh Khan praying.

Besides that, somebody argued about the accuracy of the secularism subject in the film. Others opined that the film took up too much time to portray Islam as triumphant over notably

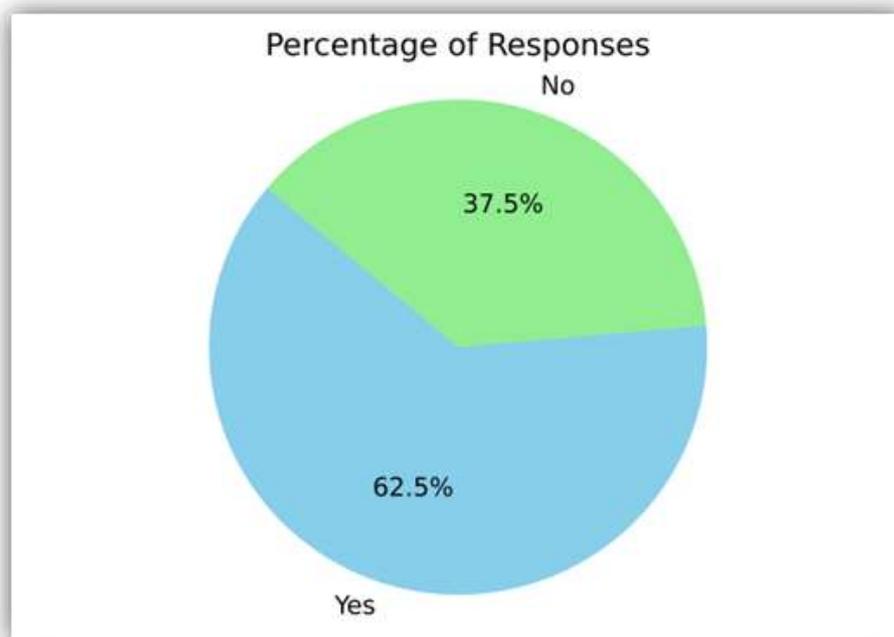
discernible non-Islamic outlook. Similarly, many people submitted comments arguing negligent representation of the secular standpoint or made claims of it having an Islamic agenda. Generally, to the viewers of the movie, "My Name is Khan" characterized them as the Muslim people. Furthermore, it shows positive secularism which means respecting everybody regardless of religion. However, some viewers were critical or doubtful of the way the director was putting it up. It seems that the movie version of secularism reflected the community in different ways, evoking varying discourses and other viewpoints with regards to peaceful coexistence and secular ideals.

#### 4.3.1 TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WATCHED THE FILM

The following table 4.5 shows the number respondents who watched or not watched the film.

**Table 4.5**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	25	62.5
No	15	37.5



**Figure 4.5**

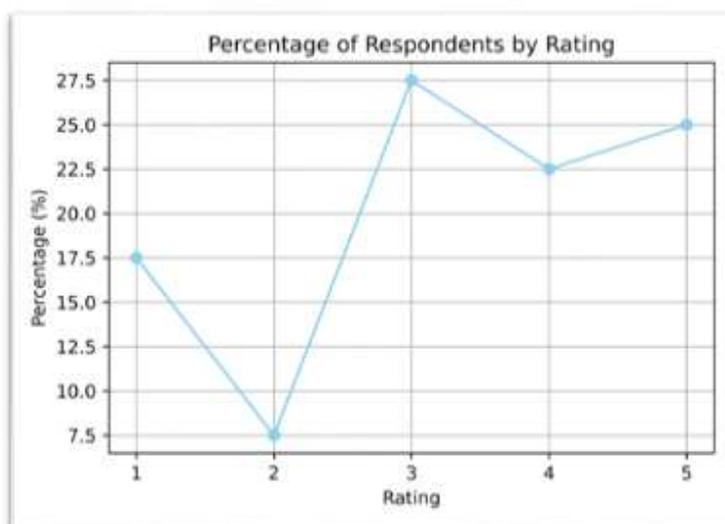
Figure 4.5 shows a majority of the obvious 40 have watched the "My Name is Khan". The respondents had, however, a great number, 25 (which makes it 62.5% of the sample), that claimed to have watched the film. In the converse side, 15 respondents, for example, accounting around 37.5% of the sample, have not seen the movie. It has been seen that most respondents to have watched the movie below the list, and about half of them say that they have an idea about what the movie is about. Yet it points out that there is not so small a group of the people surveyed who have not watched yet this selected Bollywood film which soon may arguably indicate the range of familiarities with this particular Bollywood movie.

### 4.3.2 AUDIENCE RATING:

The following table 4.6 shows the ratings given by respondents to the film

**Table 4.6**

Ratings	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	7	17.5
2	3	7.5
3	11	27.5
4	9	22.5
5	10	25



**Figure 4.6**

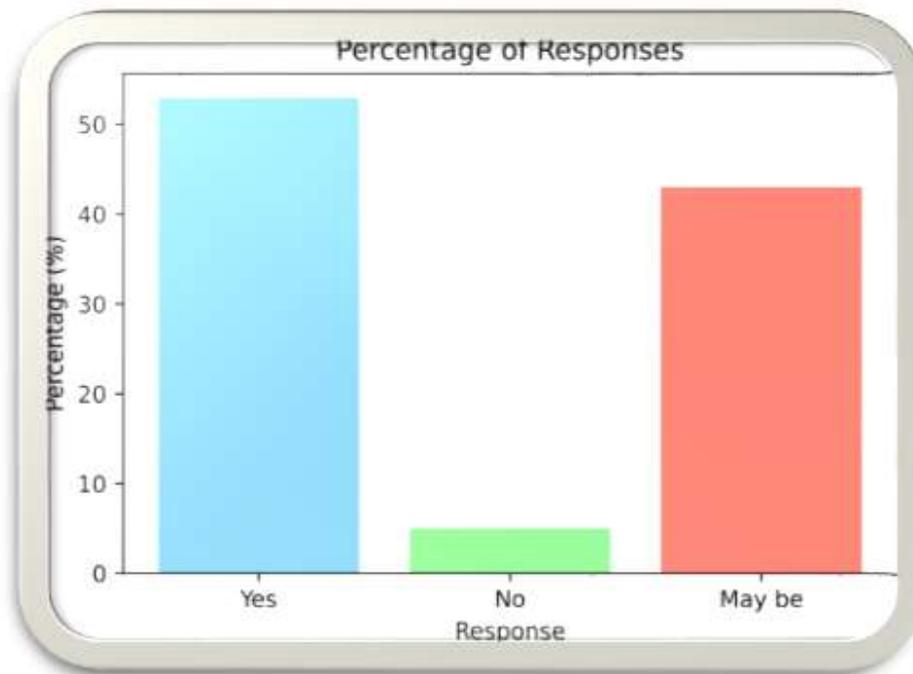
Despite the numerous ratings for the movie about "My Name is Khan" (2010), the respondents' feedback has a tendency to be positive. Out of the 40 respondents 17.5% gave the film a rating of 1 and compared to it 7.5% rated it as 2. The dominant choice among respondents was a 3 with 118.9% of people going for this option. Respondents were very closely tied between the scores 4 and 5: 22.5% gave a score 4 as compared to 25% who gave a score 5. According to this data, a lot of respondents who viewed the movie mostly rated it thumbs up with 3, 4, or 5 having made up 3/4 of the replies. A minority number of audience members sliding the rating bar to the lower section is a clear indication that the film fulfilled the general audience's wish to watch a good movie.

#### **4.3.3 PORTRAYAL OF SECULARISM:**

The following table 4.7 shows whether the film has portrayed the idea of secularism or not.

**Table 4.7**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	21	53
No	02	05
May be	17	43



**Figure 4.7**

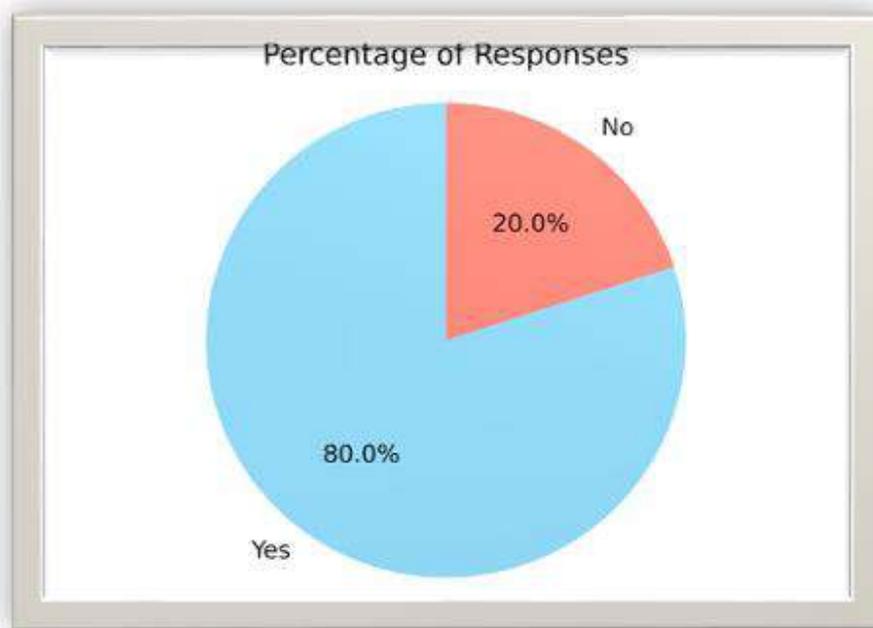
Among the respondents, there were people with different views, which concern whether the film "My Name is Khan" (2010) was developed under a secularist concept. It is pretty obvious that a vast majority of 53%, that is a total of 21 people, feel that the movie indeed carries a strong secularist message, which brings a positive perception for the movie's thematic parts. On the contrary, just a little minor portion, between 3 and 5 respondents, said the film is ignoring secularism. A remarkable 43% or 17 percent voters for a "Maybe" response and very little could be comprehended as to what they exactly think about the film. This information brings about a mixed attitude towards the role of the film towards secularism, to an extent that the viewers who are either for or against it tilt towards a favorable opinion, depending on their perception.

#### 4.3.4 WHETHER THE FILM IS INFLUENCING?

The following table 4.8 shows whether the film has influenced the mindset of the audience.

**Table 4.8**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	32	80
No	08	20



**Figure 4.8**

Figure 4.8 explicates the points narrating how "My Name is Khan" changed the audience's views towards real life. A striking 80% of the responders, that is 32 individuals, had definitely confirmed that the movie was able to change the mindset. However, a minority of 20%, again

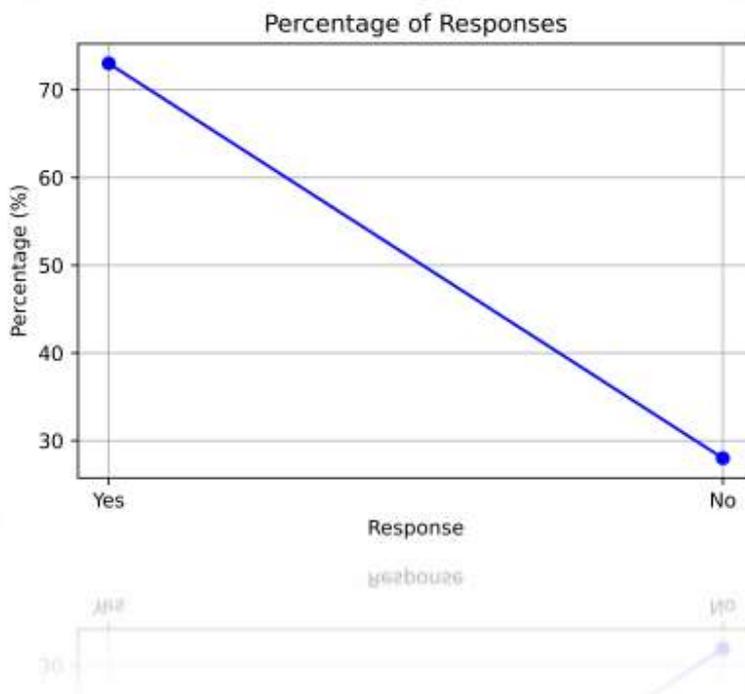
exactly 8 respondents, was of the opposite belief regarding the message conveyed by the movie. These figures also reveal the film's powerful role in most of the viewer's mind, which could be manifested in the fact that "My name is Khan" has contributed to the perception of a significant number of its audience.

#### **4.3.5 FILM RECOMMENDATION:**

The following table 4.9 shows whether the audience will recommend this film to others.

**Table 4.9**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	29	73
No	11	28



**Figure 4.9**

Figure 4.9 explores the respondents' answers to the question whether they would recommend the film "My Name is Khan" to someone. A huge majority of nearly 73% that is about 29 people are thinking to recommend the movie even to their friends. However, 28% or 11 panelists even expressed that they would not recommend the movie to their friends. This information indicates that the size of the number of people who were affected or influenced by the movie was great, but that there are people as well who may fail to bring the message across to their 'buddies' or friends. The main gist of the survey findings is that the majority of 20 respondents prefer the film and would like to recommend it to others.

#### **4.4 AUDIENCE OVERVIEW: BAJRANGI BHAIIJAAN**

A great number of comments addressed to 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' among the respondents are quite opposite to sources of admiration and critique. Many found the film's emotional extent very satisfying, especially the protagonist's toucher-liked bond with the little girl, highlighting the interaction of humanity and love's being beyond blood lines. The emotions aroused by the film and the captivating storyline were found to be one of the things which match well those mentioned in the review of the film by numerous respondents. On the other hand, it was noticed that the adjudicators were found to be unfair. Some people allege that the film raised but, unfortunately, it did not squarely delve into secularism issues between the two towns. Somewhere, it was implied that the film must give a more positive image of the Pak-India relation. Furthermore, there were numerous remarks emphasizing the restrictive side of not clearly representing of other religions, concentrating mostly on Hinduism and not touching satisfactorily the Islamic subculture. In these opinions, the critics did not offer many important points. However, the majority of the audience had positive feelings towards the film, by closely watching the story, acting and theme of humanity. The movie's viewing of nationalism and religion also contributed to the film as a whole in many ways. Therefore, one of the main highlights of 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' may probably be the audience of emotional nature, the statuses given to compassion, love, and humanity could be the most appreciated aspects, and still further felt that the film could have been more inclusive and closer to reality in terms of the secularism.

The assessment of secularism in 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' by the participant's reactions brings out a variety of viewpoints as far as the respondents are concerned. Generally, amongst the participants the movie's picturization of secularism was appreciated; these participants liked

scenarios where spiritual people from different religions lived together in unity. However, an important part was when the main Hindu and the Muslim characters, though from different religious backgrounds, helped save each other's lives. According to the respondents, the concept of humanity and dignity depicted in the film were epitomal secular ideals. With that, it was indicated that this narrative does not need to be framed within religious or national labels. While multiple remarks found the particular movie very helpful because it shows the open-mindedness to each other's religious identities to those of different religions, numerous comments also noted the humanities among people of different religions featured in the film representing that it encourages public to see beyond religious identities and view their fellow human beings with similarity. The growing notion of the conflict being more of an antithesis between the individual and a system instead of religion, class or national affiliation stems mostly from the audience's response towards characters and stories presented as such in the film.

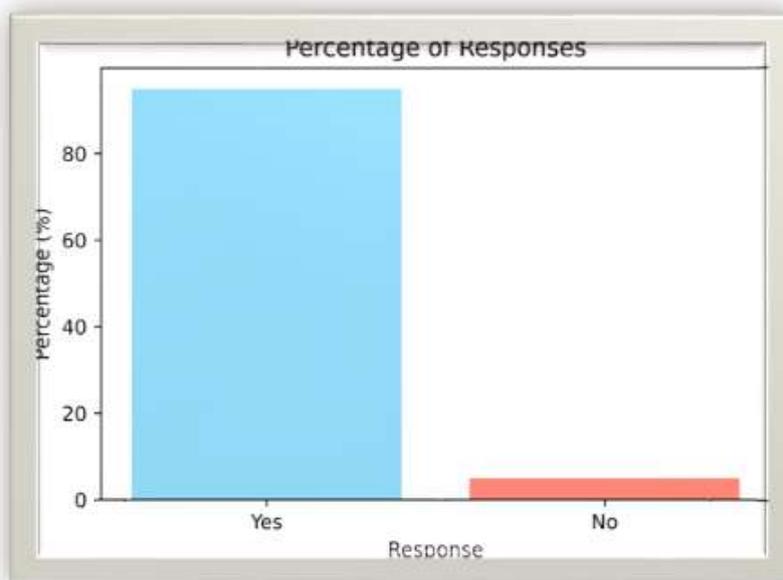
However, as people were expressing the criticism and nuances in their comments, there were some criticisms, too. Some respondents believed the movie would be more informative or cover secularism more deeply. Others believe the movie has a narrow secularism view. A few among them underlined closely some of the scenes where religious stereotypes and prejudice were a bit evident in the story. Even though the critics may negatively judge this film as not having any religious elements, the respondents largely expressed that this film is a good illustration of harmony and kindness, showing unity and kindness. What seems to be inferred from the answer is that the movie is positively viewed by most respondents in relation to secularism. The film's key features that were most appreciated by the respondents revolve around humanity, compassion and the notion of all people belonging to one religion.

#### 4.4.1 TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WATCHED THE FILM

The following table 4.10 shows the number respondents who watched or not watched the film.

**Table 4.10**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	38	95
No	02	05



**Figure 4.10**

The given Figure 4.10 revealed that the people who participated in the survey liked the film 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan'. In an overwhelming majority, i.e. 95% of the respondents or as it were, 38 individuals declared that they have watched the movie. On the other hand, a tiny part, 5% or 2 people, perceived that they didn't get a chance to watch the film. Such statistics suggest that for a

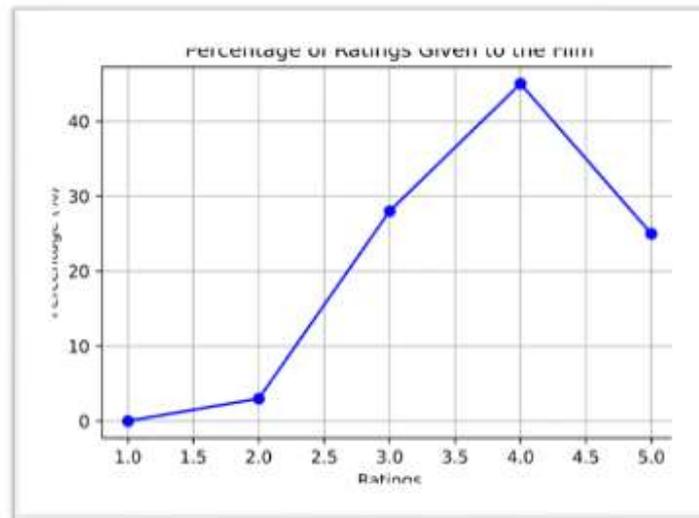
large number of respondents to the survey, this movie was well-liked and popular. The presentation might have touched a wide range of people, as over 90 percent of people have watched it according to the poll taken. The fact that more than half of the people that took the survey attended the movie confirms its broadness as an appeal and also shows that it had a considerable effect on a large proportion of the respondents.

#### 4.4.2 AUDIENCE RATING:

The following table 4.11 shows the ratings given by respondents to the film

**Table 4.11**

<b>Ratings</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1	00	00
2	01	03
3	11	28
4	18	45
5	10	25



**Figure 4.11**

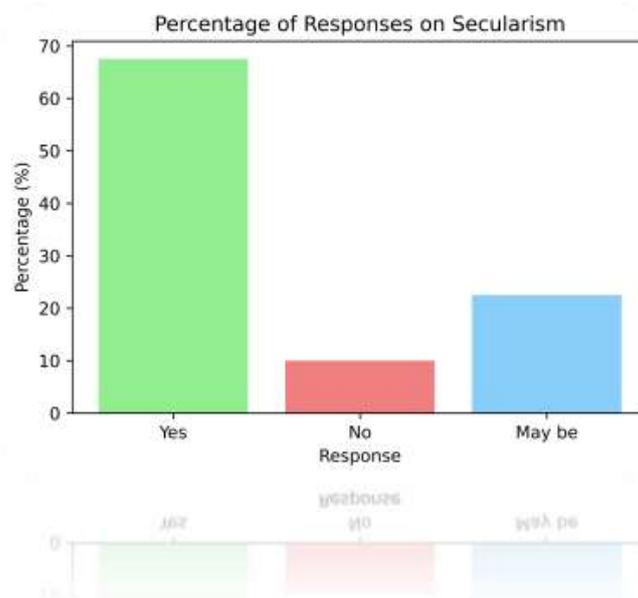
Figure 4.11 in the graph is a rating list given by the audience to the film 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan'. The rates are represented as any number from 1 to 5 with one being the least. Amongst the items, none of the respondents gave a rating of 1 to the film. It indicates that that none of the surveyed people rated the film as disappointing or poor at all. The lowest score recorded, of 2, as a single response given by only one respondent and thus 3% of the total, might possibly mean that the film was only mildly dissatisfying for that person. Whereas, as high as 45% or 18 people gave the film a 4, which is close to maximum, so movie seems to have been enjoyed and highly regarded by the most audience. One step from the top, 11 respondents belonging to the 3rd (neutral) category account for 28% or 11 voters showing a generally positive yet less intense view of the movie. In closing, the report indicates that 10 respondents representing 25% of the sample scored the film 5, denoting that it was excellent, and that they were highly satisfied with the film. Overall, the movie 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' received mainly positive ratings, with about one-third viewing it as a 4, few as 3 and others as 5. The movie not only won the praise of most people, but a small part also voiced their moderate to poor opinion.

#### 4.4.3 PORTRAYAL OF SECULARISM:

The following table 4.12 shows whether the film has portrayed the idea of secularism or not.

**Table 4.12**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	27	67.5
No	04	10
May be	09	22.5



**Figure 4.12**

Figure 4.12 represents people's viewpoints as to whether the film 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' presented the thoughts of secularism accordingly or not. More than half of them, about 70% of them, thought that the movie represented the idea of secularism accurately, for about 27 people. They liked the film in the sense that how interfaith has been shown and the strength of a person is

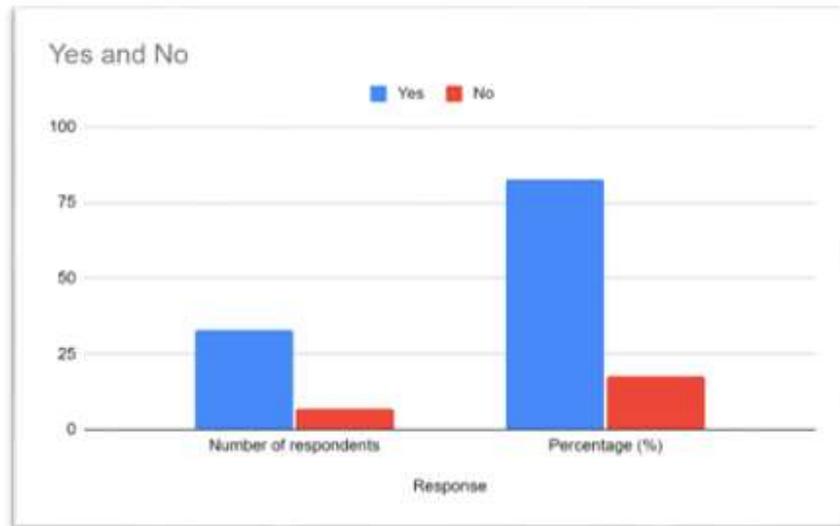
more than religion or nationalism matters. But, on the other side of the picture, a minor number of times, 10% according to my statistics, or 4 persons, considered that the film was not a good representation of secularism. It could be that the film was believed to have lacked (deeper) representation of secular values or that it omitted several (intricate) issues related to religious harmony. There were also 22.5% of the 9 who were undecided and chose 'Maybe', revealing that there were either uncertainties or mixed opinions regarding the film's secularism portrayal. Thus, it can be pretty safely illustrated that over half of the readers have decided that the 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' motion picture depicts secularism well. Nevertheless, a minor portion were uneasy or had reservations about its portrayal what makes it evident that the film was very much appreciated by many for this topic. However, there is still diversity in interpretations and perspectives of this topic which needs exploration.

#### 4.4.4 WHETHER THE FILM IS INFLUENCING?

The following table 4.13 shows whether the film has influenced the mindset of the audience.

**Table 4.13**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	33	82.5
No	7	17.5



**Figure 4.13**

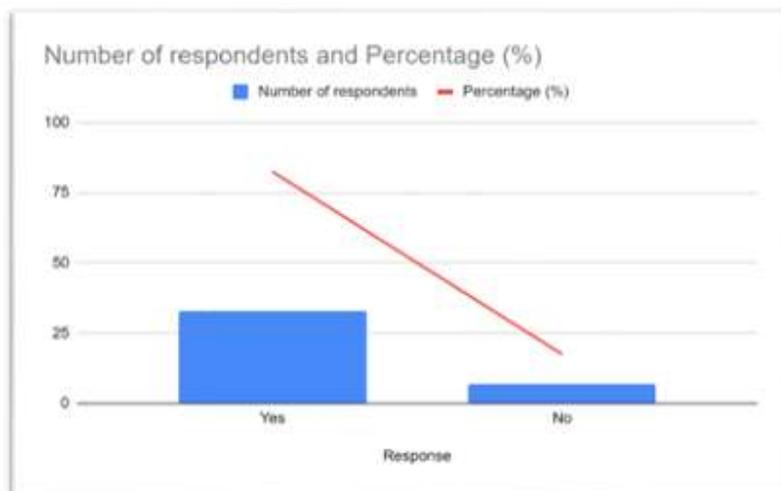
Fig. 4.13 the film Bajrangi Bhaijaan was depicted showing the reaction of people. According to the estimation, around 82.5 or 33 of the interviewees said that the film not only has changed but indeed influenced their general mindset. The audience members mentioned that these movie themes of compassion, humanity and inter-faith harmony influenced their lives positively through different ways such as through either mindset change or a deeper recognition of certain values. Similarly, in the dissonance side the 17.5% or 7 people in the respondents gave a reply that the film did not influence their point of view. Such audiences possibly were thinking that the film is in no way innovative, and its information is just not an exact translation of their person. In summary, according to the majority of the audience 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' was influential in a major way as they were able to get several different things on their mind as a result of the movie and its storylines. Nevertheless, it is not the case for all of them because some of them did not share the same feeling: this confirms that a film may get different responses and interpretations from different people.

#### 4.4.5 FILM RECOMMENDATION:

The following table 4.14 shows whether the audience will recommend this film to others.

**Table 4.14**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	33	82.5
No	07	17.5



**Figure 4.14**

Figure 4.14 represents the vast majority of the people who took part in the survey, which is composed of 82.5% or 33 individuals, answered positively to the question on whether they were willing to recommend the film to others. The fact that the top figure is so high indicates that the pandemic overwhelmed a large number of people, and they do believe others to be also in a state of distress. Such people may have liked the film's theme, approaching style, and/or overall message and feel that it will resonate with their inner circle, and, therefore, it calls for sharing.

Conversely, a small part of the respondents (17.5% or 7 people) confessed that they disapprove of the film and would decline to recommend it. It is possible that these people will like the movie with certain reservations, or it is not valid as a means of interaction for everyone. Overall, the audience members are primarily pleased with the film and hold the opinion that it is a film they will suggest the others to watch, and they do so because of the impact, themes, and quality involved. On the other hand, whilst some of the respondents flatly recommend the movie, few are inexpressively negative about it, indicating a diversity of opinion within the viewers.

#### **4.5 AUDIENCE OVERVIEW: THE KASHMIR FILES**

The comments on 'The Kashmir Files' were as varied in nature as are the emotions that the film evoked among the viewers. The audience who liked the film appreciated the movie for its truthful portrayal of the real hardships of the people of Kashmir, considering it an eye-opening kind of documentary. They have seen this film as an effort to tell the story of difficult times Kashmiri pandits have suffered. The participants of this film think that it is very close to the real history of their suffering. This group expressed the appreciated fact that the movie showcased the history and respected the fact that it manifested the Kashmiri Hindu genocides truthfully. Nevertheless, the film was not without its critics though as well. The other viewers assert that it showed hatred of Muslims and how they have contributed towards communal hatred. They thought that the film was partisan and was just one-sided point towards the Kashmir issue. A few students were of the opinion that the movie was against secularism, that it was seeking to propagate an agenda regarding the topic rather than the purpose of mere description. There were also some who were saying they hadn't watched it and couldn't judge it yet. Some viewers said that the film is a good one, but it has inconsistency with history. The film would be better though

if it was presented as a documentary. Generally, 'The Kashmir Files' has been responsible for the viewers obtaining strong emotions. Albeit some applaud the movie for trying to showcase the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, some others express resentment towards the version of events presented and the movie is labeled as very communalistic. The film debatably caused enormous, heated debate as well as contrasting opinions ranging from praising to scorching and so on.

The reactions by the viewers of the film on portraying secularism in 'The Kashmir Files' are varied, which indicates the serious impact of the movie on the audience's thought process. Some of the participants in the poll thought that the movie did not manage to reveal the messages of secularism perfectly. They think, the film insults in a way that paints Muslims as thieves or terrorists. Audience members had no interest in the movie and felt that it was biased rather than presenting the balanced view of communal harmony and no faithful discrimination. On one hand, some viewers valued the film for casting light on the matter that of Kashmiri Pandits, whereas on the other hand, they asserted that it must have highlighted the way of life of the Hindu community at that time in Kashmir. They considered that the movie's portrayal of religious friction and conflict between nations was reflective of a real situation and hence it was timely to expose past grievances. A couple of people agreed that the film throws light on secularism in a complex way, where sects are brought up more often to enter into a healthy relationship among people holding different religions. They commended the picture's motives of exhibiting the straits and barriers of the minority communities, as well as the importance of open dialogue and reconciliation for building a truly secular state. On the other side, some spectators claimed that Hollywood's picture had no fact and suggestion secular. They felt that the film should have more focused-on victims of genocide but as a non-secular date it was not that much explored. Therefore, the way of secularism representation in 'The Kashmir files' contributed a lot to

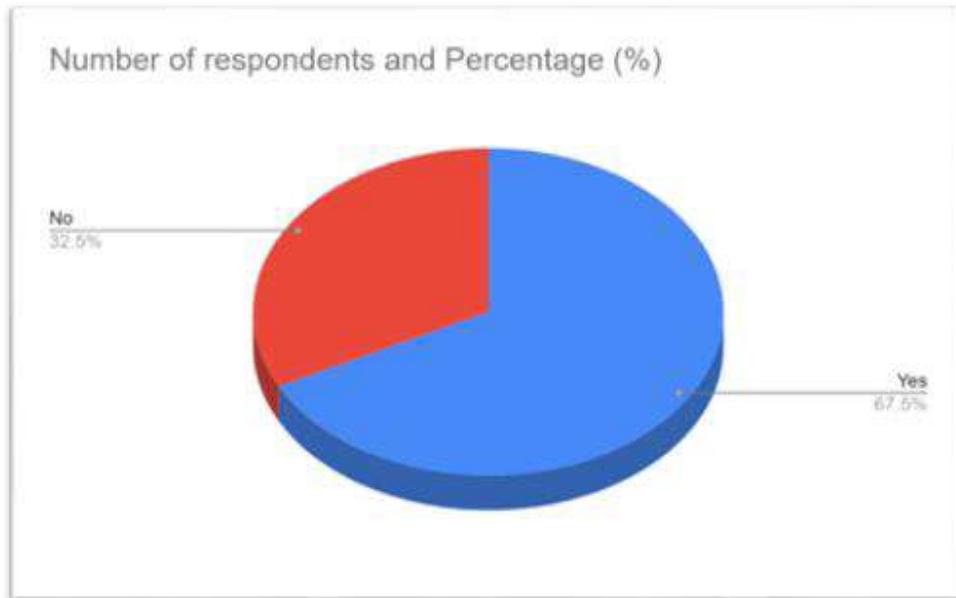
viewers with a diverse reaction towards portrayal. Whilst for few the film may appear as an attempt to fuel communalism or biases, there are others who consider it being a means of drawing the attention towards the struggles of Kashmiri Pandits with equivalent beliefs. The movie has caused a lot of argument and dialogue about the meaning of secularism and its depiction in cinema and there is wide variation in people's opinions, reaching all the way from dislike to praise and anything in between.

#### **4.5.1 TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WATCHED THE FILM**

The following table 4.15 shows the number respondents who watched or did not watch the film.

**Table 4.15**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	27	67.5
No	13	32.5



**Figure 4.15**

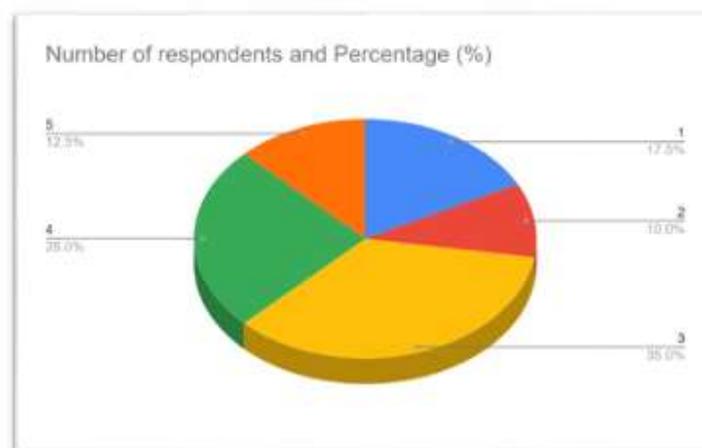
Figure 4.15 conveys the audience composition of 'The Kashmir Files' viewers as the audience for this survey. The majority of the interviewees, 67.5%, said that they had seen the film or 27 people. The importance and the significance of a good movie can be determined if these viewers, over two-thirds of them, have seen the movie. These viewers probably actively chose to watch the movie because it was a discussion starter and had a controversy and real impact, or you may have come across it because of its frequent mention and publicity. Conversely, another 13 respondents, representing 32.5%, did not express they had seen the film. They could have ignored the event, for example because they had no interest in it, or because they did not like the way it was portrayed or could disagree with the theme, or for any other reason. They might not have had an opportunity to see it yet.

#### 4.5.2 AUDIENCE RATING:

The following table 4.16 shows the ratings given by respondents to the film

**Table 4.16**

Ratings	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	07	17.5
2	04	10
3	14	35
4	10	25
5	05	12.5



**Figure 4.16**

Table 4.16 further demonstrates the scoring made by the respondents giving full views and critical appreciation, of 'The Kashmir Files'. On the contrary, a substantial proportion of the respondents of approximately 35% or 14 persons graded the film with a '3', As such the majority of viewers seem to have found this movie just the middle ground in between good and bad.

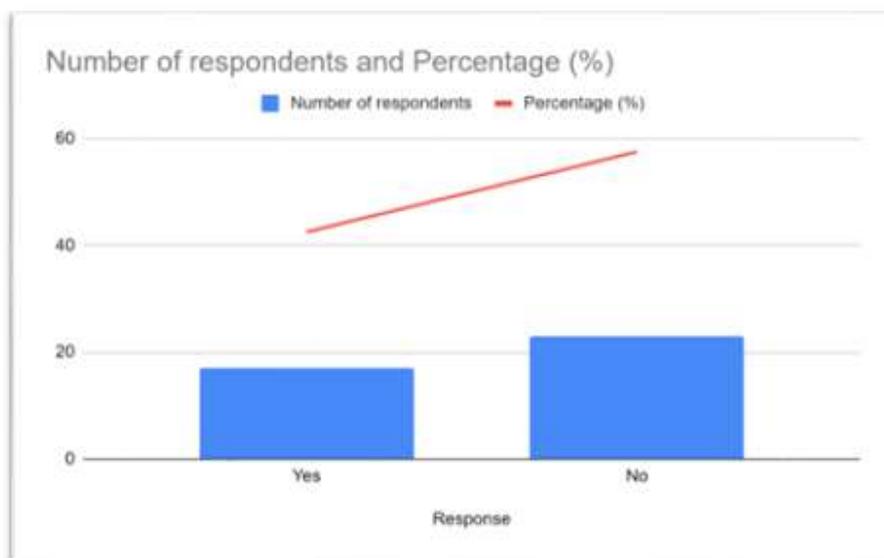
Therefore, the movie was average or moderately satisfying, on the contrary it wasn't exceptionally good or bad. Not much far behind, 10% (4) or 10 respondents gave the film 'mostly-4'. This means that they gave it slightly above average and very good ratings. Towards the bottom of the spectrum, the film got the corresponding '1' votes from 17.5% of viewers that meant a negative or dissatisfied opinion. As a consequence, the weighting of '2' by 10% among the respondents, or 4, basically indicates that they do not appreciate the film as much. We will see at the top end of the distribution, where 5 people out of 40 rated the film with the highest possible 5 score, suggesting that they thought it was outstanding and of very good quality. Therefore, to round up, 'The Kashmir Files' movie was somehow having more divided ratings with some of the viewers saying that they found it 'good' at least. On the other hand, there are cases where many users responded to the film with different opinions and reactions based on the quality of the movie and etiquette presented in the movie.

#### 4.5.3 PORTRAYAL OF SECULARISM:

The following table 4.17 shows whether the film has portrayed the idea of secularism or not.

**Table 4.17**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	17	42.5
No	23	57.5



**Figure 4.17**

Table 4.17 focuses on how people see if 'The Kashmir Files' shows secularism well. The table shows that 42.5% or 17 people said the film showed secularism. These people may have seen parts of the film as promoting togetherness, respect, and understanding between people of different beliefs. On the other hand, a bigger group, 57.5% or 23 people, thought the film didn't show secularism effectively. They might have seen biases or missing parts in the film's representation of different religions and peace. They felt the film didn't fully capture the complexities of secularism in the Kashmir conflict. In short, the responses in Table 4.17 show that viewers have different views on how the film shows secularism. Some people think the film missed the mark, but a smaller group thinks it did show secularism well.

#### **4.5.4 WHETHER THE FILM IS INFLUENCING?**

The following table 4.18 shows whether the film has influenced the mindset of the audience.

Table 4.18

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	35	87.5
No	05	12.5

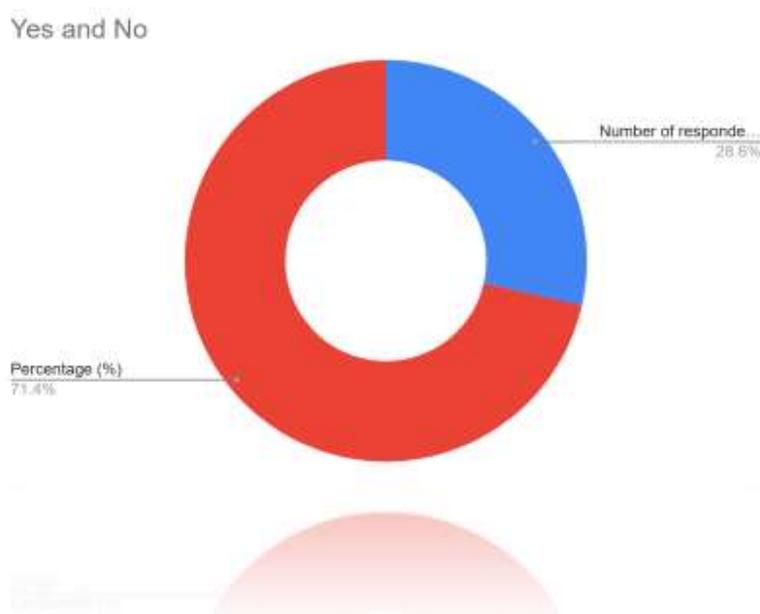


Figure 4.18

Table 4.18 looks at how 'The Kashmir Files' affected the thoughts of people who were asked about it. A big majority, 87.5% or 35 people, said the movie did change how they think. This shows the movie had a big impact on making or strengthening their ideas, beliefs, or attitudes about the topic it talks about. On the other hand, a small group, 12.5% or 5 people, said the movie did not change their thoughts. These viewers might have come to the movie with thoughts or views that stayed the same after they watched it. In the end, the data from Table 4.18 shows how much the movie affected most of its audience. It shows the movie's power to get people

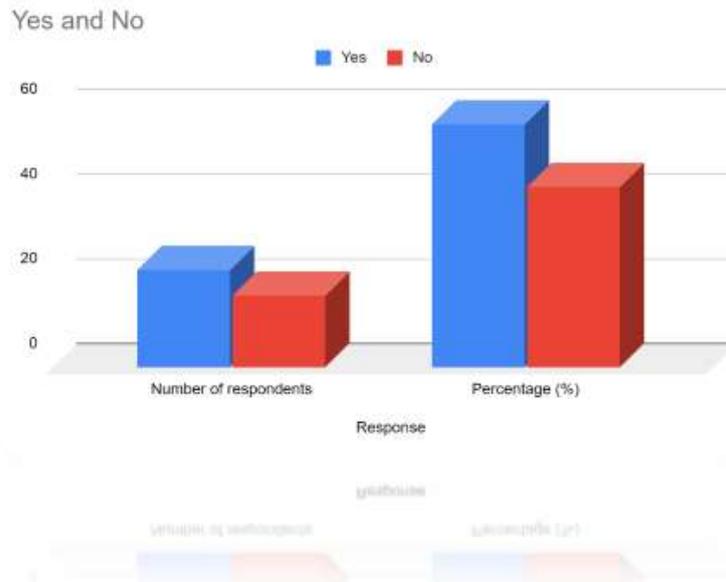
really involved and make them think or change how they understand or feel about the things it shows.

#### 4.5.5 FILM RECOMMENDATION:

The following table 4.19 shows whether the audience will recommend this film to others.

**Table 4.19**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	23	57.5
No	17	42.5



**Figure 4.19**

In Table 4.19, we see that most of the audience, about 57.5% or 23 people, would suggest 'The Kashmir Files' to others. This indicates that despite any controversies, many viewers found something valuable in the film that they think others should see. However, 42.5% or 17 viewers expressed they would not recommend the movie. It's possible they had concerns about the content, how it was presented, or the way certain themes were portrayed, leading them to believe it's not suitable for others. In summary, the results from Table 4.19 indicate a mixed response among viewers regarding their willingness to recommend 'The Kashmir Files'. While a majority would suggest others watch it, a significant minority would advise against it, reflecting the film's polarizing impact on its audience.

#### **4.6 AUDIENCE OVERVIEW: THE KERALA STORY**

The feedback on 'The Kerala Story' is quite diverse and reflects a range of opinions. The human point of view on 'The Kerala Story' is different and collective with a wide mist of ideas. A not-insignificant portion of the surveyed respondent's harbor concern about some groups, especially Muslims, with the movie imputing with innuendo that the movie continues to propagate negative stereotypes. While some are arguing that narrative pushed forward its own agenda, portraying the subjects in defamatory way. From the other side of the scale, a couple of respondents applaud the movie for bringing to light the problems that girls experience in Kerala and for the education of society about certain intractable challenges that it faces. The observers identify the movie as try and address real-life problems and however they admit certain flaws in it and sometimes it spreads wrong info too.

The repeated feedback from viewers indicates to me that the film is controversial in its presentation of the topic of faith conversion. Some viewers believe that it presents an inaccurate picture of how people join a religious movement from another; others do not agree. It made some of the viewers realize that a film is not an impartial and balanced narrative due to its nature of telling a story. Further, a couple of audience members tend to be bored by the film for its visualization of the bigoted perspective towards certain events that have happened in Kerala. They hold that the negative depictions have a profound influence on the truth of the scenarios displayed on screen. It is true that some viewers thought the film meaningfully raised awareness on several social issues. But still a larger number of individuals found that the movie was either biased, misleading or rather failed to provide a well-balanced view on these matters. The comment on portraying secularism in 'The Kerala Story' mostly is remarkably negative. A considerable number of respondents are of the opinion that the film is not able to depict secular values full scale. A lot of viewers think that the film reflects a partisan view, especially about some one particular community, and this very community is depicted as a true culprit of instances of conversion by force. Some viewers give negative feedback, because they believe that the film is far from the one which was the base of the book, and at the same time it contains the narratives that stimulate the conflict. They point out that polarization succeeds because of this one-sided approach. The movie in question focuses on controversial and sensitive topics that only divide communities without presenting another point of view. On the opposite side of the spectrum, few people argue that religious thought is the movie trying to advance the ideology of a less religious mindset and competence over relational faithfulness. Some viewers also sharpen that the film deals with Kerala's past peaceful and communal relations, but these views are somewhat rare.

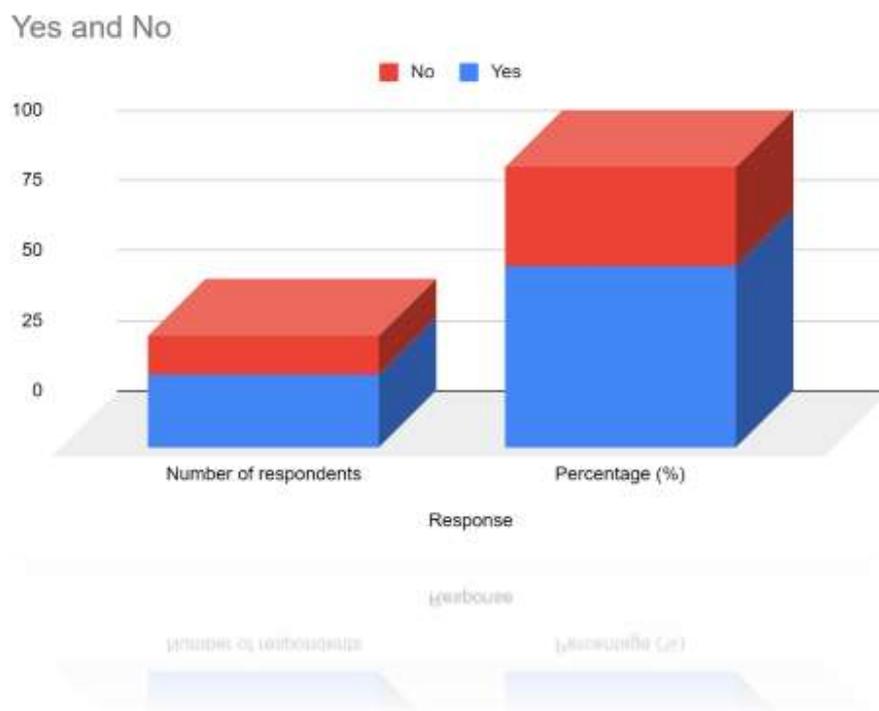
In the constant commentary of ‘love jihad’ or forced conversions, several viewers have raised the issue that this argument uses acts of violence with the absence of appropriate context. This is just what a number of the respondents think now. And they believe that this film is doing something to stigmatize those groups. Basically, most surveyed people think that the film 'The Kerala Story' did not present secularism as it factually and successfully is. Alternatively, they consider the story to not fully illustrate the dilemma, or to match their personal opinions regarding the matter, which leads to fragmented and biased versions.

#### **4.6.1 TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WATCHED THE FILM**

The following table 4.20 shows the number respondents who watched or did not watch the film.

**Table 4.20**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	26	65
No	14	35



**Figure 4.20**

In the Table (4.21), the view-ship of 'The Kerala story' was taken into consideration. Over half of respondents, namely 26 out of 40 (65%), implemented that 'The Kerala story' was watched by them. Contrary to the prior version, 35% (14 out of 40) of the respondents have not seen the movie. By this we learn that according to the survey's responders a certain size of the audience got to see the movie while some of them haven't had a chance to watch it yet.

#### **4.6.2 AUDIENCE RATING:**

The following table 4.21 shows the ratings given by respondents to the film

Table 4.21

Ratings	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	11	27.5
2	03	7.5
3	11	27.5
4	10	25
5	5	12.5

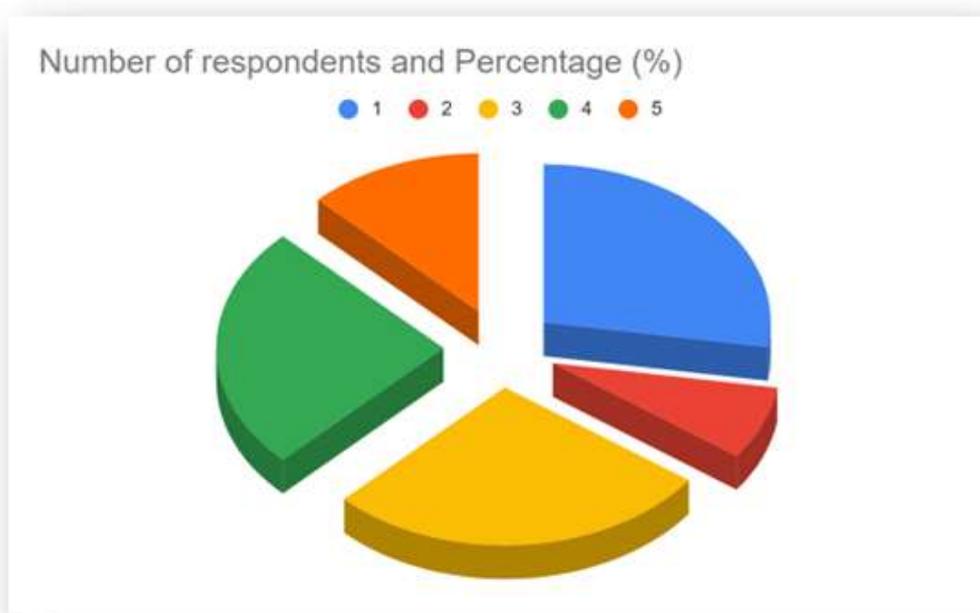


Figure 4.21

As seen in Table 4.21, it indicates the different viewpoints of respondents toward 'Kerala Story', by looking into the ratings provided. The biggest number of respondents, at 27.5% each, rated

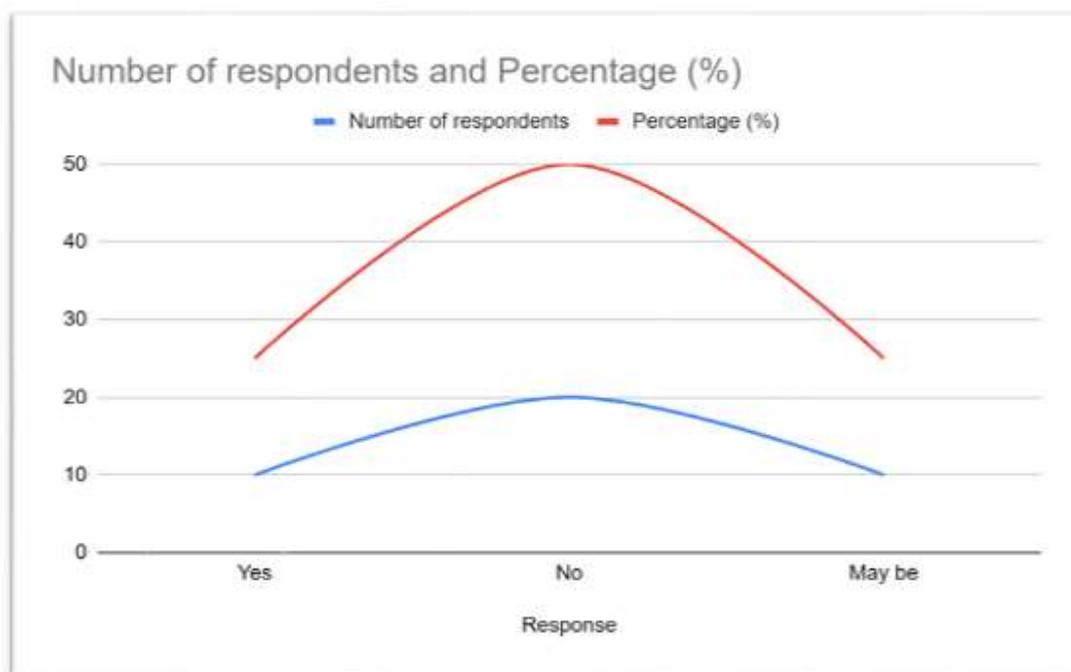
the cinema film as "1" and "3" contributor the highest percentage. This implies that a higher percentage of respondents for whom casting and acting issues were critical were dissatisfied or average. Immediately after, 25% of participants considered the film a 4-star film, which is regarded as a positive rating of the movie. A minority of consumers, 12.5%, scored it at 5, getting the highest rating, and obviously a low number, 7.5%, recognized it at 2, which means the majority of them did not enjoy it that much. The poll results on average show that the film got mixed feedback from the representatives of its audience.

#### **4.6.3 PORTRAYAL OF SECULARISM:**

The following table 4.22 shows whether the film has portrayed the idea of secularism or not.

**Table 4.22**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	10	25
No	20	50
May be	10	25



**Figure 4.22**

In Table 4.22, which evaluates whether the 'The Kerala Story' movie depicted the principle of secularism accurately, the respondents are divided and shown they have a controversial view. Fifty percent of respondents believe that the film does not show the meaning of unbelief doctrines perfectly. However, 25% of people stated that, from their point of view, the film was rather entitled to be secular. Incidentally, the other 25% of them both agreed and disagreed simultaneously, and that reflects the uncertainty of reactions to secularism. The data show a high probability that the movie confused its target audience about religious matters.

#### **4.6.4 WHETHER THE FILM IS INFLUENCING?**

The following table 4.23 shows whether the film has influenced the mindset of the audience.

Table 4.23

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	32	80
No	08	20

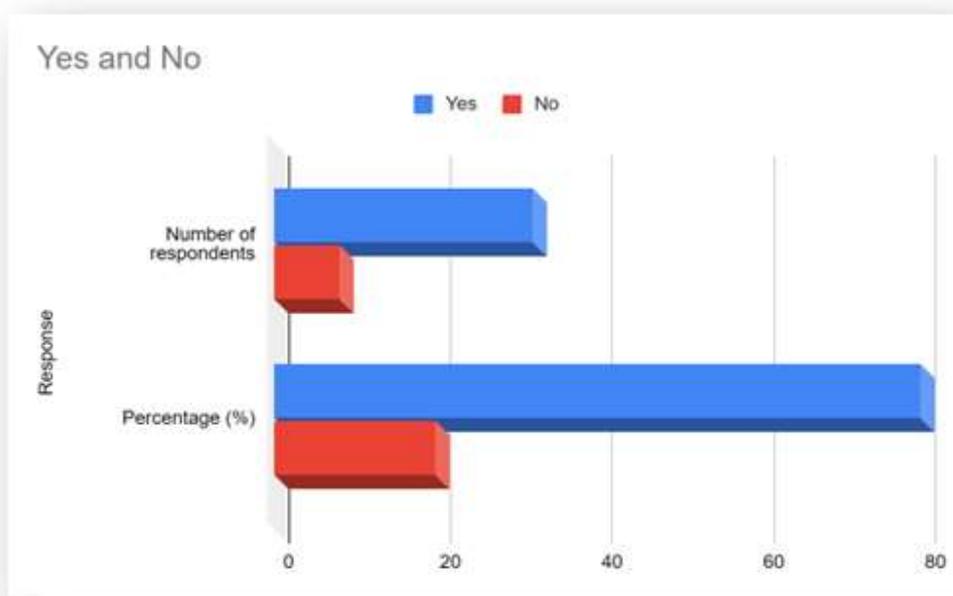


Figure 4.23

Table 4.23 presents the number of people who have been convinced by the data presented in the film on Terrorism "The Kerala Story". An important fact, which is worth noting, about the participants is that about 80 % of them stated unequivocally that this movie had indeed changed their mindset or perspective. On the other hand, the 20% of respondents who said that the movie had not affected their perspective in any way implied that they were not influenced by the screenplay. It remarks further, which makes the viewers understand that the movie has at least

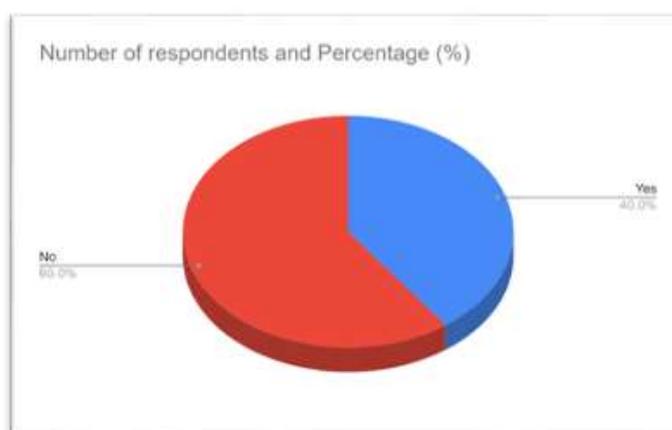
affected the majority of the movie goers and that it is likely that the viewers change their thoughts or feelings following the matters covered in the movie.

#### 4.6.5 FILM RECOMMENDATION:

The following table 4.24 shows whether the audience will recommend this film to others.

**Table 4.24**

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	16	40
No	24	60



**Figure 4.24**

As shown on table 4.24, the possibility of audience given to others the film 'The Kerala Story' is the audience likelihood. An astounding 60% of respondents to this question said that they would not recommend the movie at all, but still, 40% said they would. This indicates that most of the

respondents regarded the idea of recommending the movie to others as rather unpromising, which reminds us that those viewers surely had some serious doubts and problems with the content or the way the movie reflects the world.

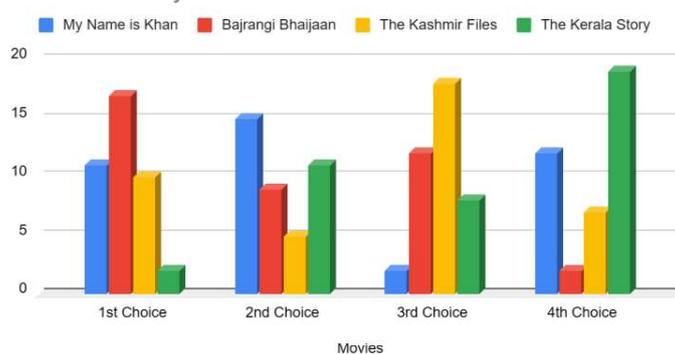
#### 4.7 MOST INFLUENTIAL FILMS:

The following table 4.25 shows the most influential films among these four.

**Table 4.25**

Movies	1 <sup>st</sup> Choice	2 <sup>nd</sup> Choice	3 <sup>rd</sup> Choice	4 <sup>th</sup> Choice	Total
My Name is Khan	11	15	02	12	<b>40</b>
Bajrangi Bhaijaan	17	09	12	02	<b>40</b>
The Kashmir Files	10	05	18	07	<b>40</b>
The Kerala Story	02	11	08	19	<b>40</b>

My Name is Khan, Bajrangi Bhaijaan, The Kashmir Files and The Kerala Story



**Figure 4.25**

Table 4.25 offers insights into the perceived influence of the four films: These are the films most liked by the respondents, the order being "My Name Is Khan," "Bajrangi Bhaijaan," "The Kashmir Files," and "The Kerala Story." "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" and "My Name is Khan" experience as an overwhelming number of audiences voted for them climaxing of one point each. The vote results showed that "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" received 17 first preference votes whereas "My Name is Khan" came close on the heels with 11 votes. This explains that those characters probably appealed to viewers the most as they were humanized. Unlike others, in addition to 'The Kashmir Files' itself having a unique place in the art form, it also was in a very unique condition of its own. If it didn't get as many times being number one choice pick, it was the one that did the greatest number of third places votes. This was an indication that it equally made an impact to viewers even though they might have found the top two films more competitive than it.

Concluding, "The Kerala Story" got the 4th highest choice number that the participants picked out of 5. This means that it is the least globally considered among the respondents. Besides all of the above, the "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" and "My Name is Khan" appealed to this populace the most, and we believe the latter movie acted as a catalyst for the climate of polarized views which contributed to the emergence of the "The Kashmir Files," and to the lesser extent, the "The Kerala Story" was not as influential.

#### **4.8 AUDIENCE AWARENESS OF SECULAR THEMES:**

The data shows the audience has mixed perceptions of secularism, which is evident in three Bollywood films among others. These are titled, "Bajrangi Bhaijaan," "The Kashmir Files," and "The Kerala Story." One major theme that came up from the data is that most Indians think

secularism is all about treating all religions the same and not having too much to do with religion. They welcome such films that embrace intra-faith tolerance and seek to unite mankind as of one human unit. For example, in a Bollywood flick like "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" the hero is a man from Hindu background who helps a young girl belonging to the Muslim religion, which shows that we must obey the law of humanity to unite our divided society.

On the other hand, the group of viewers comprising another section still maintains a swim of disinterest to the objectivity of certain secularism-depicting Bollywood movies. There are those who assert that the picture "The Kashmir Files" and the film "The Kerala Story" weren't just films with inclined toward narrating one narrative, and that they were not 100% effective in this. Critics note that those films could be seen as inflaming communal tensions since they center on the strongly disturbing parts of certain groups or events that happened.

Along with this issue is the revelation of "Love Jihad" and conversion to religious beliefs which is an outcry matter. Some participants are convinced that movies should pursue the passing on the message that is free, just, and fair to all while other participants propose that movies must only portray only what has happened but should not blame the entire communities or ethnic groups for the action of few. On the whole, the data seems to indicate that there is an overall understanding of secularism and why it is necessary, but in terms of how Bollywood deals with these issues of the sensitive nature, the audiences would want these needed to be dealt with an equal and fair hand. The movies that represent secularism by juggling among complexities create a deep impression, allowing viewers to have a more in-depth understanding and acceptance for secular values in India.

#### **4.9 TRENDS AND CONTROVERSIES:**

Data-driven content in this survey provides an engaging look into the contemporary views of secularism in Bollywood movies. A large proportion of respondents expressed alarm, especially regarding the development of purportedly secular narratives that either avoid or bend the rules of secularism. However, most of those films such as "Amar Akbar Anthony" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" was greatly appreciated for their expression of secular values and inter-religious harmony, whereas some of the contemporary films like "The Kerala Story" and "The Kashmir Files" were sources for controversy and criticism.

One of the increasingly critical issues is the possible politicization of cinema, a situation in which movies are seen to curry public favor or attract favorable political ratings at the box office or through political gains. Moviegoers went about this by saying that contemporary films of ours don't give as much attention to the fact that secularism is a roof under which anyone can find shelter. It was argued that movies such as "The Kashmir Files" portrayed one-sidedness which benefits in aggravating the discrepancies instead of nurturing empathy and reconciliation. The prevalent topic in the data is the role of religious unity and how mostly between Hindu and Muslim individuals are the inter-religious relationships. Some audience members applaud films like 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' for portraying the incredibly beautiful human side that is above and beyond the religious prejudices while others strongly oppose the cinema like 'Kerala Story' which is claimed to be promoting negative stereotypes and further fueling communal discord. Moreover, the subjects of 'love jihad' and forced religious conscription surfaced as a heated issue in contemporary movies. The people surveyed asserted that films such as "The Kerala Story" can only perpetrate stereotypes, thus instead of secularism and unity will be the dominant theme.

While Bollywood has historically played a significant role in shaping India's cultural narrative around secularism, recent trends suggest a growing divergence in how the concept is portrayed and understood. The industry finds itself at a crossroads, grappling with the challenges of balancing artistic freedom, commercial interests, and social responsibility. As audiences become more discerning and critical, there is a pressing need for filmmakers to approach sensitive subjects like secularism with nuance, empathy, and a commitment to fostering unity and understanding among India's diverse communities.

#### **4.10 RECOMMENDATION FROM RESPONDENTS:**

Respondents have pointed out several Bollywood films that they believe portray the concept of secularism to varying degrees. One of the most frequently mentioned films is "Amar Akbar Anthony," a classic from the 1970s known for its theme of religious unity. Some respondents mentioned older movies, noting that they didn't notice much negativity towards secularism in them. However, a recurring sentiment among some respondents is that recent films, influenced by political factors, have depicted Hindus and Muslims as villains to cater to a perceived majority Hindu audience in India.

Some newer films were also mentioned positively, like "Earth" (1998), which explores the communal tensions during the partition of India, and "Article 15," which indirectly touches upon societal issues related to caste discrimination and social injustice. Films like "OMG – Oh My God!" and "PK" were also cited for their satirical take on religious dogmas and practices, with "PK" being both praised for its critique and criticized for its portrayal of Hinduism.

However, there's a segment of respondents who expressed disillusionment with Bollywood, describing it as a platform filled with divisive content and propaganda. They believe that many recent films promote Hindu phobia and communal hatred, advocating instead for watching South Indian films as an alternative. Despite this, films like "Veer Zaara," "Bombay," "Dharm," "The Legend of Bhagat Singh," and "Chak De India" were also mentioned as movies that either directly or indirectly touch upon themes of religious harmony and national unity.

#### **4.11 GENERAL OBSERVATION:**

**My Name is Khan (2010)**- Many viewers rated this film highly, praising Shah Rukh Khan's acting and the unique storyline. The film was noted for its portrayal of a Muslim character facing discrimination post-9/11 and the relationship between characters of different religious backgrounds. It was generally seen as a positive representation of secularism, promoting harmony between religions. Most viewers felt the film influenced audience mindsets positively and would recommend it to others.

**Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015)**- This film was also well-received by most viewers, especially praising the emotional connection between characters and the theme of humanity over religion. While some felt it portrayed secularism well by showing the protagonist helping a young Muslim girl despite being Hindu, others thought it had flaws in its representation. Nonetheless, it was generally considered influential and recommended by those who watched it.

**The Kashmir Files (2022)**- Not many had watched "The Kashmir Files", but those who did had mixed opinions. Some appreciated its portrayal of the struggles faced by Kashmiri Pandits, while

others felt it lacked secularism and showed one religion in a negative light. There were concerns about its influence on the audience, but those who watched it were divided on recommending it.

**The Kerala Story (2023)**- Similarly, "The Kerala Story" had limited viewership among the respondents. The film was praised for its storyline but received criticism for spreading misinformation and its portrayal of religious differences. Some felt it lacked a strong representation of secularism, while others appreciated its portrayal of communal issues. The film's influence on the audience was debated, with some willing to recommend it and others not.

When asked which film was most influential among the four, "My Name is Khan" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" received the most mentions. Some respondents also mentioned older Bollywood films like "Amar Akbar Anthony" and "Kranti veer" as films that portrayed the idea of secularism. A recurring theme was that older Bollywood movies didn't focus much on secularism, but recent ones, influenced by politics, tend to portray Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Some respondents expressed concerns about Bollywood's influence on promoting certain political or religious agendas rather than secularism.

While Bollywood films like "My Name is Khan" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" were generally well-received for their attempts to portray secularism and promote harmony between religions, there were concerns about other films like "The Kashmir Files" and "The Kerala Story" possibly promoting divisive narratives.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 OVERVIEW:

Bollywood, being the iconic cultural chain in India, yields a big power in forming public attitudes towards religion and diversity while reflecting these ideas. The way secularism is shown on the screens of Bollywood movies means that the entire cultural situation is reflected, which helps to change other viewpoints and sometimes even challenge old beliefs. Ample of movies like “My name is Khan” and “Bajrangi Bhaijaan” reflect this by increasing tolerance, emotional maturity, mutual acceptance and a feeling of oneness. Such films influence understanding of the issues of younger generation, on the one hand, and prove the suppositions on all stereotypes and prejudiced Ness against the other religious communities. Through a portrayal of a wide range of personal, spiritual and fictional stories that are shown with compassion and respect, filmmakers show audiences that even if something is a known label, religions bring people together, not to divide them.

On the contrary, the movies produced by the Bollywood producers also are reflections of their falling attitudes with religion and diversity in society. Although dramas like "The Kashmir Files" and "The Kerala Story" seem to be protagonist of Hindu interests and raise concerns about religious conversions and national security, it doesn't follow that it is a widely spread opinion in the country. These movies, then, typically tend to follow the segregating stories and take up the effective, polarized viewpoints that exist in society, emphasizing the toughness of secularism in India. Secondly, the Bollywood depiction of secularism is influenced by political ideologies and

agendas seen through a film like 'The Kashmir Files' which is publicized as taking a certain narrative of Hindu nationalism.

Bollywood's impact on the people's attitude towards secularism at the crossroads can be seen from both sides. Conversely, filmmakers do not only draw notions of social attitudes, belief and debates a film, but also culturally condition with the Bollywood films; that may might change opinions, questions, or address beliefs surrounding secularism and religious diversity. Many movies address religious tensions and secularism, stirring debates in society which become a good room for dialogue and help people to challenge their own stereotypes and beliefs, which they come up with.

The Secular Religion of Bollywood delineates the onlook of people and it happens in a reciprocal manner itself. When some movies have negative storylines, others come up with topics that involve reconciliation. There is also the power of film to unite nations by portraying a nation that celebrates its religious and cultural diversity. With India fighting with religious frictions and diversity to its full extent, the contribution of Bollywood to the creation of the atmosphere of empathy, understanding and tolerance is paid more and more attention to.

### **5.1.1 IMPACT ON SOCIETY:**

From the poll data there has emerged a powerful perception of what people have to say today about secularism on screen, contrary indicating a complicated terrain of approval, condemnation, and worry among audiences. It was revealed that a significant number of respondents expressed concern about the emerging films that either get around or deliberately claim that secularism principles no longer represent the norm. For instance, "Amar Akbar Anthony" and "Bajrangi

"Bhaijaan" were very popular movies emulating secular values displayed as a cohesion between religion and secularism. Indeed, these films were among the best Bollywood productions which portrayed secularism as a positive value.

However, contemporary films like "The Kerala story" and "The Kashmir Files" have been prone to criticism and controversy, requiring filmmakers and cinema practitioners to take a closer look at the politicization of cinema. People were sure that a man who love the cinema will not use it for meaningless political aims or television ratings and will talk about secular values. They argued that these films like "The Kashmir Files" offered monolithic narrative that were quite on the contrary to solemnize empathy and reconciliation but instead, divided communities rather than uniting them.

The surveying agency found the common topic of theological oneness in the films especially in the relations of that of the Hindus and Muslims. Anthology of movies like "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" and others were admitted to the real world to show the best essence of humanity that crosses religious lines. However, stories like "The Kerala Story" were criticized for their unfair stereotyping and for fanning the communal fires. It emerged that 'love jihad' and conversion through force were the main problematic issues and that respondents challenged the films saying, " these stories have nothing religious, but some actors always spoil the things" and they didn't talk about religious unity and secularism.

Essentially, Indian movies have ever been focal in defining the country's cultural believes in the same way they portray secularism which changes to reflect the continual social and political developments. In addition to this, the earlier movie titled "Amar Akbar Anthony" showed religious diversity and unity among various characters while mingling together against social injustices was also shown in the movie. Nonetheless, the gods have not smiled on Bollywood as

late, it brings a diametrically opposed trend of the kind of divinity that is being portrayed and viewed in it.

There has been a quest in the industry that found itself at a crossroads and there is a challenge of balancing the artistic freedom, the commercial interests and the social responsibility. The audiences look at sensitive subjects like secularism more critically by the day, and this requires motion picture directors tackle such topics with delicacy, humility, and a mission of getting people from diverse communities to have the same enthusiasm of living together.

it is true that the films made by Bollywood have improved over the years by reflecting different social and political climate, however, the industry should be keen in keeping up with the declaration of secularism and inter-religious harmony being made in the movies. In accordance with the poll results, people are dissatisfied with films which promote division, segregation and the creation of in-groups, while, in contrast, films that encourage diversity, unification and promote social inclusion are acknowledged with more Interest. In India, which walks a thin line between the freedom of the religious and the cultural landscape, Bollywood assumes a wider role, in molding a more joined and respectful society.

### **5.1.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, has to deal with various hindrances while portraying secularity in the films realistically, embodying the complexity of religion and religious sensitivities in the Indian context. One of the main challenges lies in the ‘messing about’ with religious narratives and distorting them just to make a film, commercial or even a political statement. Films that seek to address secularism almost always find themselves at a crucial

juncture between proper indication of religion in harmony and fall back unintentionally into stereotyping or renationalizing. The urge to account for multiple audiences amid the various diversity, culture, religious beliefs, and political sensibilities can in letters be responsible for movies legitimizing secularism while lacking a level of in-depth representation.

However, a politician sees many films and television shows as simple sources of propaganda without quality, but this is usually why they lose their audience. Cinema as a medium of politics can many times watershed the presentation of secularism, with films being utilized as a means to propagate certain ideologies or gain political advantage instead of making sincere effort to auto-catalyze the comprehension and togetherness. This may create a situation in which only one religion is presented positively and the unity among the multi-religious communities is destroyed, leading to animosity and hateful narratives instead of understanding and unification.

Apart from that, the problem of artistic variety starts competing with the duty of the exact and delicate depiction of what democratic secularism is. Filmmakers might find themselves limited by the compromise of societal expectations, censorship or self-censorship, causing the avoidance of religious and secular issues of the controversial nature.

However, Bollywood films have been high chances to create more knowledge and unity among people through their moviemaking in spite of the challenges facing it. There is no doubt that films may inspire and can also create new stereotypes. It is also capable of shaping societal attitude towards secularism and diversity between religions. Through its portrayal of diverse characters and stories highlighted with equal empathy, respect, and truthfulness, Bollywood can function as an important instrument of improving the inter-religious union by bringing a more tolerant society.

Examples of movies like "Amar Akbar Anthony" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" closely show that there is also a way to address religious diversity in a way that relates to the audience and portrays an idea of unity. These flicks help us understand how Bollywood has responded to the challenges of secularism; they also offer ways in which Bollywood explores the potentialities that secular make for greater appreciation of human bonds and interactions.

On the other hand, Bollywood can work as a collaborator of religious and community leaders, cultural organizations and civil society groups to ensure its depiction of secularism generates from genuine and real experience and viewpoints. Working with these stakeholders can become an invaluable resource for filmmakers by helping them to get the relevant insights and advice on how to touch the topics of religion and secularism with the necessary amount of finesse and tact.

despite the fact that the Bollywood industry has to deal with difficulties to portray secularism due to commercial motives, governmental interferences, and social forces, it can also benefit from these great chances for the society cohesion and harmony by means of stories. With due attention, empathizing, and authenticity, Bollywood cinema, can assume its position as a vital factor in not only fostering a more tolerant and inclusive society but also in celebrating its various denominations and cultural diversity

## **5.2 KEY FINDINGS:**

The survey results provide valuable insights into the public's perception of four Bollywood films: "My Name is Khan" (2010), "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" (2015), "The Kashmir Files" (2022) and the recent "The Kerala Story" (2023). "My Name is Khan," at the top of the list with the audience giving it a score of between 4 and 5. The movie succeeded greatly with secularism portrayal in

the eyes of the audiences as better than the usual films since there were more scenes showing the ensemble of faiths. Besides that, a large number of people given their approval of the film in the hope that it would bring the viewers another view through which they could look at their past. Moreover, they highly recommend it.

While "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" got a mixed review, the other was rated very well. While some of the viewers were impressed by the characters and storyline, some of them thought that the film could have been better if it were made using a more professional approach. Besides, the aspect of secularism that is depicted in this film was the person who had the extremist views of this subject according to the viewers who were aiming at having the positive and constructive opinions about this film. In addition, the film raised a controversy among viewers as well which indirectly compelled the critics to give a rating of 3 out of 5 instead of 4 out of 5 as expected by "My Name Is Khan".

"The Kashmir Files", the choice of many as the most controversial of the four films, did not fail to prove that. As long as some audience members considered the film to be touching and thought-provoking, others felt it to be controversial and incompetent concerning the original purpose, secularism. The audience's responses to the film were also polarized as some believed that it was harmful, but others expressed their like for learning more about astronomy. Therefore, the reviewers' opinion were obviously controversial.

At last, the film "The Kerala Story" obtained mixed reactions from the audience in the world that it was given 2 to 4 by the viewers. As for some people it was like storytelling, but other people could find something wrong with this movie. The impression of secularism is also the subject of the film's other criticism, and like its appeal to audiences, the response was varied. Hence, the recommendations instead have been varied when "The Kerala Story" is talked about.

Alongside the aforementioned films some others like "Amar Akbar Anthony" and "PK" were also recognized by the respondents which have also demonstrated the aspects of secularism in their films. After all, this movie proved to be the most popular of the lot due to its excellent reviews and critics' recommendations, which I believe is indeed on account of its depiction of the secularism theme.

### **5.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In exploring the theme of secularism through the lens of "My Name is Khan," "Bajrangi Bhaijaan," "The Kashmir Files," and "The Kerala Story," it becomes evident that cinema serves as a powerful medium to reflect, challenge, and shape societal perspectives on religious diversity and communal harmony in India.

"My Name is Khan" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" both emphasize the universal values of compassion, understanding, and humanity that transcend religious and national boundaries. These films challenge stereotypes and promote the idea that empathy and kindness can bridge cultural and religious divides. They highlight the potential for individual actions to create positive change and foster mutual respect among different communities.

On the other hand, "The Kashmir Files" delves into the complex and painful history of the Kashmir conflict, particularly focusing on the experiences of Kashmiri Pandits. While the film primarily addresses the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits, it also sheds light on the religious and political tensions in the region. It underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the root causes of communal discord to achieve lasting peace and reconciliation.

Contrastingly, "The Kerala Story" stands out for its controversial portrayal of young women from Kerala allegedly being manipulated into converting to Islam and joining ISIS. Marketed as a true story, the film has faced criticism for lacking factual basis and perpetuating the contentious "love jihad" theory. Critics argue that it spreads misinformation by suggesting mass conversions and recruitment of Hindu women into ISIS.

In conclusion, these films collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of secularism and the challenges and opportunities it presents in the Indian context. They demonstrate that while religious diversity can sometimes lead to tensions and conflicts, it also offers opportunities for mutual learning, understanding, and coexistence. Cinema, with its wide reach and influence, plays a crucial role in shaping narratives and promoting dialogue on these critical issues.

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## APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questionnaire

I, **Kiran Parsekar**, a student of M.A. II, Political Science Programme D.D. Kosambi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Study (DDKSSSBS), Goa University. As part of my dissertation work on the topic: '**Secularism and its Contention in Bollywood Films**', I am conducting this survey hence interviews. The identity of the respondents interviewed in this survey will be kept strictly confidential; the responses are used only for academic purposes.

'\*' Denotes compulsory

#### 1. Full Name (Optional) \*

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#### 2. Gender \*

- Female
- Male
- Others

#### 3. Age \*

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#### 4. Religion \*

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#### 5. Education \*

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#### 6. Marital Status \*

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**7. How often do you watch films? \***

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Seasonal
- Yearly
- Never

**8. What kind of films do you watch? \***

- Bollywood
- South Indian
- Hollywood
- South Korean
- Other

**9. What is your favorite genre? \***

- Action
- Drama
- Romance
- Comedy
- Other

**10. How do you understand secularism? \***

- Treating all religion equal
- Separation of religion from state
- Distinction between religion and education

**11. What attracts you to watch particular films? \***

- Actor/Actress
- Director/Production company
- Story
- Music
- Other

**12. According to you, what is the idea of secularism in India? \***

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**13. Do you think the idea of secularism is portrayed in Bollywood Films? \***

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**14. If yes, which film and how? \***

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**15. Have you seen the film, 'My Name is Khan 'of 2010? \***

- Yes
- No

**16. How would you rate this film? \***

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**17. What made you watch this film? \***

- Actor/Actress
- Director/Production company
- Music
- Reviews
- Advertisements
- Other

**18. Comment on 'My Name is Khan'. (About your feeling towards film) \***

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**19. Do you think 'My Name is Khan' portrayed the idea of secularism? \***

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**20. Comment on the portrayal of secularism in the film. \***

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**21. Do you think that this film has influenced the mindset of the audience? \***

- Yes
- No

**22. Will you recommend this film to others? \***

- Yes
- No

**23. Have you seen the film, 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' of 2015? \***

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**24. If yes, how would you rate this film? \***

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**25. What made you watch this film? \***

- Actor/Actress
- Director/Production company
- Music
- Reviews
- Advertisements
- Other

**26. Comment on 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan'. (About your feeling towards film) \***

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**27. Do you think 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' portrayed the idea of secularism very well? \***

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**28. Comment on the portrayal of secularism in the film. \***

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**29. Do you think that this film has influenced the mindset of the audience? \***

- Yes
- No

**30. Will you recommend this film to others? \***

- Yes
- No

**31. Have you seen the film, 'The Kashmir Files' of 2022? \***

- Yes
- No

**32. If yes, how would you rate this film? \***

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**33. What made you watch this film? \***

- Actor/Actress
- Director/Production company
- Music
- Reviews
- Advertisements
- Other

**34. Comment on 'The Kashmir Files'. (About your feeling towards film) \***

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**35. Do you think 'The Kashmir Files' portrayed the idea of secularism very well? \***

- Yes
- No

**36. Comment on the portrayal of secularism in the film? \***

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**37. Do you think that this film has influenced the mindset of the audience? \***

- Yes
- No

**38. Will you recommend this film to others? \***

- Yes
- No

**39. Have you seen the film, 'The Kerala Story' of 2023? \***

- Yes
- No

**40. If yes, how would you rate this film? \***

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**41. What made you watch this film? \***

- Actor/Actress
- Director/Production company
- Music
- Reviews
- Advertisements
- Other

**42. Comment on 'The Kerala Story'. (About your feeling towards film) \***

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**43. Do you think 'The Kerala Story' portrayed the idea of secularism very well? \***

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**44. Comment on the portrayal of secularism in the film. \***

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**45. Do you think that this film has influenced the mindset of the audience? \***

- Yes
- No

**46. Will you recommend this film to others? \***

- Yes
- No

**47. Among these four films which film was the most influential? \***

- My Name is Khan (2010)
- Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015)
- The Kashmir Files (2022)
- The Kerala Story (2023)

**48. Any other Bollywood films that portrayed the idea of secularism? \***

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