



LIFE PORTFOLIO - TEAM 1

Project name: Multiculturalism and multilingual societies

Group number: 1

Supervisor(s): Alina Yevchuk

Participants: Emma Aleksandra Heino, Ilmari Nikanor Siltala, Kirre Irja Riga Ranin, Nurlan Mamedov, Victor Jimenez Rivera

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Northeast India	2
2.1 Linguistic Rights in India	3
2.2 Language of Justice Departments in India	5
2.3 Nagaland	5
2.4 Northeast - Federal Government Relations	7
2.4.1. <i>During the British Colonial Period</i>	7
2.4.2. <i>Constitutional Developments and Autonomy since 1947</i>	7
2.4.3. <i>The Northeast in Indian Politics Today</i>	8
3. Religion in India	9
3.1 Buddhism	10
3.2 Comparison of Religions	10
4. Representation Issues in Dharma Productions and its Movies	11
4.1. Representation Issues Beyond Movies	11
4.1.1. <i>Representation in the Workforce</i>	12
4.1.2. <i>Representation in Social Media</i>	13
4.2. Representation in Movies	14
4.2.1. <i>Dil Se.. (1998) & Chak De! India (2007)</i>	14
4.2.2. <i>Mary Kom (2014) & Axone (2019)</i>	16
4.2.3. <i>Badhaai Do (2022) & Gangubai Kahtiwadi (2022)</i>	17
4.2.4. <i>A Note on Assamese Cinema in the Indian Cinema Landscape</i>	19
4.3. Issues of Class, Caste, and Religion at Dharma Productions	20
4.3.1 <i>Class Issues</i>	21
4.3.2 <i>Issues with the Caste System</i>	22
4.3.3. <i>Religion Issues</i>	23
4.3.4. <i>Representation Issues in Dharma Productions' Casting</i>	25
5. Conclusions	26
6. Action Plan	28
7. Self-Reflective Report	30
8. References	33

1. Introduction

The aim of this project is to take a deeper look at the Northeastern area of India and its eight states, focusing on issues of diversity and representation corresponding to this project's theme of multiculturalism and multilingualism. The geographical and political details and practices of India are not well known in the Western world. India is still very romanticized in its presentation both in the West and by Indian artists themselves; representations focus on issues of poverty, exotic women, and historical living. Our hope with this research project is to make those aspects more visible.

The themes of this project can be divided into three pieces, which are religion, the depiction of minorities, especially those from the Northeast, in Hindi films, and the political situation in the area, as it has one of the most complex politics in the Republic of India. On top of that, an overview of the linguistic and geographical situation of Northeast India will be covered to provide much needed context in understanding the topics this paper is focused on.

India is a federal republic divided into multiple states, each of them with their own cultures, histories, and, importantly for our research, languages and ethnic groups. Northeast India is often considered one of the major regions of India, owing to its particular ethnic composition being distinct from the stereotypical Indo-Aryan peoples that form the majority of the country and the Dravidians of South India. This region has been chosen to be the object of our study as it has historically been a peripheral marginalized region of India. The issues chosen have been selected due to their historical importance and modern salience. According to the Indian Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (2022), the states that can be considered as Northeastern are the following: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.

Representation issues can be felt across all aspects of life. This project has chosen to focus on an example of an industry where representation issues are very visible, that being the film industry. The Indian movie industry is not only one of the country's most notable exports

and famous industries, but it also can be understood as playing a very large role in representing the country's society, both to outsiders and to local Indians, which may learn about other people groups in India from the movies.

2. Northeast India

Northeast India, famously known as the "Seven Sister States" is a mountainous region comprising the eight (the Seven Sisters with the addition of Sikkim, which used to be independent) following states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The total population in the region is 56 million people, with Assam (31 million) being the largest of the states and Sikkim (0.6 million) the smallest. Overall there are over 220 languages spoken in the region (*About North East*, 2022). The region has multiple languages, dialects, ethnic groups and subgroups; and it has been a subject of many questions when it comes to territory, language, and culture. As the natives were already a very diverse group in pre-Modern times, the mass immigration into the region prior to Indian independence added even more diversity to the region (Jain, 2016).

The very first question is, how do we define ethnicity. According to different definitions, it can be seen through language, culture, customs or the psychological bond. These state lines have been drawn according to ethnic groups, without taking into account the mobilization and migration of the multiple groups existing in the area. In many areas, many ethnic groups coexist stimulusly. This leads to yet a new question. The rise and fall of different languages (and ethnic groups) as one ethnicity takes over another and becomes the dominant one, leaving the native one becoming a minority (Piang, 2013).

Ethnicization, or "policies of erasure" and "restriction oriented policies" happen when the state tries to unify, homogenize and make the groups become one main group through political influence. This in practice has led to hostility between different groups and has even led to violence and deaths (Jain, 2016). Language policies have also influenced migration of ethnic groups. This happened with multiple smaller language groups when Assamese was

steadily becoming the dominant language. The language policies have also led some groups to demand new states as they are facing extinction in their current habitat (Jain, 2016). Northeast India is also seen as remote and is not the priority of interest to the current government (Piang, 2013). The culture, languages, history and political movement is not familiar to the government nor are they taken into consideration when making new policies (Jain, 2016).

2.1 Linguistic Rights in India

While Hindi and English have been denominated as the official languages of India as a whole, each state has the possibility to specify its own official language according to the Indian constitution (Byjus, 2022). Each of the Northeast Indian states has taken advantage of this and recognized native languages as their official languages, reflecting their linguistic diversity: Assam has recognized Assamese, Bengali, and Bodo; Manipur has recognized Meitei and Manipuri; Tripura has also recognized Bengali, as well as Kokborok; and Mizoram has placed Mizo alongside English as its official language (Barbora, 2019). We can understand this right and recognition to be a tolerance-oriented policy adhering to the principle of negative collective territorial linguistic human rights.

Over 1600 languages and dialects are spoken overall in India, corresponding to many language families. Although Northeast India is a geographically small area, making only 7.9 % of the country's total land, it is home to over 75% of four language families; Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian. To have four language families in such a small territory is linguistically rare and unique. Each language has its own unique phonological system and features. The most popular languages are Assam with 14 million speakers, Bengali with 215 million and Meitelon with 2 million. (Majumder, 2020). Many smaller unrecognized languages are on the brink of extinction due to language shift, whereby speakers adopt a more dominant language such as Hindi hoping for better economic prospects (Barbora, 2019).

Language policy in India is often dictated by administrative imperatives, contributing to the endangerment of smaller languages. This is best reflected in the education system, which uses the three language formula dictating the teaching of three languages: Hindi and English,

as the official languages of the Republic, and the particular state's official language. (Barbora, 2019) This leaves little room for local languages. While it may be a bit of a stretch to deem this a policy of linguistic repression, it may nonetheless be described as a restriction-oriented one, as it places restrictions on the community's capability to use its ancestral language and encourages individuals to switch to other languages that may be perceived as opening up the doors for better economic prospects, given how many higher-paying jobs may require the knowledge of Hindi, English, or at least the state language. Therefore, it may be conceived that the policy has a negative impact on the citizens' collective linguistic human rights, as, even if their languages are not directly targeted by the policy, their endangerment can be linked to it.

The Indian government has followed the practice of promoting Hindi not only by encouraging its use in the education system even in non-Hindi speaking areas, but also promoting the writing of original books in Hindi and textbooks for college and postgraduate students in the country's universities. Procedural government literature has also all been developed in Hindi, and the mass media have also been used as tools to propagate the language, such as the movie industry, television, and radio; which following Indian independence shifted from Hindustani to Hindi in their broadcasts. These policies of language promotion have been supported by language planning, codifying standard Hindi and *Sanskritizing* it to increase its lexical stock and grammatical structure borrowing from Sanskrit. (Delican, 2011)

This mix of policies can be said to represent status planning (as they have the aim to make Hindi the main language in all of India), corpus planning (as they intend to modify Hindi to conform with an idealized version of the language as an evolution of the ancestral Sanskrit language), language acquisition planning (as it aims to promote Hindi learning in areas like Northeast India, where it is not widely spoken), and also prestige planning (given how the Sanskritization of the language appears to intend to make it resemble Sanskrit, a prestigious language akin to how Latin is viewed in Europe).

2.2 Language of Justice Departments in India

As the Republic of India contains 29 states, 25 high courts and 22 official languages it means that there is no easy way out when it comes to the language that has been used in legal affairs. From the first glance it seems simple as English has been stated as the official language in all the high courts in India according to Article 348(1). However, the Governor of each state has the possibility to authorize the language used in the proceedings of each state. This measure needs the approval of the President to be accepted, according to Clause (2) of the Article 348 (Jaiswal, A. 2020).

Article 214 of the constitution of India that there shall be a High court for each state in India. The region of Northeast has been an exception in this matter as each of the seven states shared the same institution, the Gauhati High court, till 23.03.2013. It was decided after this date that the states of Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura would each receive a separate High court (The Gauhati High Court, 2022).

The language used in the High courts of Northeast is English. However, depending on the will of the Governors the language used in each of the institutions can be changed regarding the case. As of today, the Gauhati High court consists of 24 judges. This number includes the Honorable Chief of Justice and the six additional judges as well (The Gauhati High Court, 2022).

2.3 Nagaland

In Modern times, the Northeastern states have historically been in conflict with the governments of India, whether the country was ruled by the British or by Indians. Each of the states and the many peoples inhabiting them have had their own historical trajectories, which have been in all cases fraught with these issues. This section will provide an example of such a historical trajectory, that of the state of Nagaland, which is situated in the far-East of the area, on the border between the Republic of India and Myanmar (previously known as Burma). Nagaland exemplifies the common themes undertaken by most societies in the Northeast,

going from a traditionalist decentralized society to a relatively unified state.

Nagaland was carved up by the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 and made part of India on agreement between the major powers (the British Raj, the Mughal Empire, and the Burmese Empire). The creation of the state was already fraught with issues that would plague it in the future, as it was done without the knowledge, let alone consent, of its inhabitants, but instead resulted from the agreement between foreign powers, the United Kingdom (represented by the British East India Company) and Burma. This was followed by fifty years of Naga tribesmen violently resisting British occupation but to no avail. The occupation not only affected territorial holding but also upended Naga society, creating a common identity for all Naga peoples, hitherto isolated and disunited, in opposition to the invaders.

While the British, despite their administrative reforms, did at least attempt to preserve traditional leadership, after the independence of India the new country destroyed all traditional institutions in the name of centralized administration and fighting insurgency. Nonetheless, Nagas still mostly identify with their traditional marker of identity, the village, whereas the parliamentary system has failed to replace it, generating instead conflict and division in Naga society. Another example of a major disruption in traditional Naga life was the introduction of the concept of money. This upended the distribution of wealth as the region, which used to have an egalitarian society in which “the poor did not hate the rich and the rich shared their wealth with the poor,” (p. 256) became a monetized society in which corruption and lack of resource management know-how plague administration. Perhaps the main change to traditional Naga society, though, was the introduction of Christianity by British missionaries. The Nagas were introduced to a religion that made them part of a universal humanity, and which shunned their traditional practices and made church membership supersede clan and village loyalty. The focus on individualism brought by Christianity, focused on the salvation of the person’s soul, also upended the community spirit. (Chasie, 2005, pp. 253-8) All of these changes make Nagaland an excellent case study of the changes experienced by Northeast

Indian society in its post-traditional era, following the British conquest and incorporation into the Indian Republic.

2.4 Northeast - Federal Government Relations

2.4.1. During the British Colonial Period

The Northeast received harsher treatment from the rulers during the Colonial Period than other regions of India. At first the region was governed as an adjacent subordinate area of Bengal province. The same type of management continued even after the Bengal province became the separate province of Assam in 1874. Another restrictive act happened a year before in 1873 when British rulers implemented a Line System into the hills of Assam (Inoue, 2005). It was presented as a liberating factor at the time when in fact the Line System caused difficulties for the inhabitants in areas of business, land transactions etc. one reason being that the arrival to the northeastern area was made difficult to the outsiders. In 1875 the hill areas of Northeast were demarcated and then divided into excluded areas and partially excluded areas. It was decided that the Northeast and Assam should belong to independent India. The decision was made just moments before the Independence Act in June 1947 (Inoue, 2005).

2.4.2. Constitutional Developments and Autonomy since 1947

After the clarification of the Indian Independence Act on the 15th of August 1947 the Government in power had difficulties managing the region of Northeast. This led the government to follow on the same path that the British Colonies had chosen earlier, continuing the isolation and alienation of the area (Inoue, 2005). A large part of the states in Northeast have had or are having an autonomous position. Nagaland (1963-) and Mizoram (1987-) belong to the section of homeland autonomy. Over 10 states have achieved a decentralized autonomy. Examples of those are Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills and Khasi-Jaintia since 1952; Garo Hills since 1962; Tripura Tribal 1972; Jaintia Hills 1985; Chakma ADC, Lai ADC and Mara ADC since 2003 (Hausing, 2021).

2.4.3. The Northeast in Indian Politics Today

Northeastern states had habitually been considered a stronghold for the Congress party that dominated Indian politics but since 2015 they have turned to other parties. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led nationally by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has formed an alliance with various regional parties and used rhetoric contrary to Bangladeshi immigrants to gain power in Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. Additionally, it shares power in Nagaland as well as having gained the backing of the ruling regional party, the Sikkim Democratic Front, in Sikkim. The party has, however, faced many issues in the region. For instance, it has attempted to introduce a ban on beef-eating, driven by its Hindu nationalist branch. Beef is the main meat consumed in the Christian states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. Immigration of Bangladeshis is also another major issue, as the BJP has to balance keeping illegal immigrants out with protecting non-Muslim Bangladeshis. The party has also worked on building a barbed-wire fence along the border with Bangladesh.

Despite promising to engage more proactively with Southeast Asia through its “Act East” Policy (AEP), the BJP does not appear to have done much on the ground. The bid to connect Northeast India to the region remains in progress. This is partly due to a lack of investor confidence in the region, driven by large military and paramilitary presence in states like Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Nonetheless, the main international issue in the Northeast remains the relationship with Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government has set up a diplomatic presence in Assam and Tripura, but it is unwilling to accept deported illegal immigrants expelled by India. India’s federal government has also enacted a law making it easier for Bangladeshi Hindus to gain Indian citizenship, contravening the Assam Accord which promised the Northeastern States that Bangladeshi immigrants would be deported.

Besides the issues of ethnic violence, separatism, and secessionist insurgencies, Northeast India has been hit hard by the pandemic. This has impacted patterns of political instability and unrest. Immediately before the onset of the pandemic, Northeast India was

already facing unrest due to the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the BJP government. The Act grants citizenship rights to non-Muslim undocumented immigrants, for example from Bangladesh. The Northeastern tribal groups have contended that this encourages the migration of Bangladeshi Hindus in the region. While demonstrations against the CAA appeared to die down when the government instituted a lockdown in 2020, nativist groups in the Northeast, especially in Assam, continued to protest what they viewed as a threat to their cultural identity. Many armed groups are still active throughout the Northeast, despite a decline in violence over the last five years. However, due to the economic decline following the pandemic, many young Northeasterners have joined militant groups due to increased unemployment. (Sharma, 2020)

3. Religion in India

Indian history is heavily influenced by religion, so it's important for people talking about India to acknowledge the assorted threads that realize the material of their history. The teaching of history in India involves understanding the role of history in teaching and balancing the various social and religious forces in society. Religious and academic principles in Indian society have much in common with American ones. In large democracies with multiple religions represented on their spectrum, both countries have deliberately separated religion from education publically schools. In both cases, these policies contributed to the expansion of personal schools with explicit or implicit religious characteristics. In these two countries, both of which are supremely happy with their diversity, freedom and opportunity, education is seen as a way to vary people's perceptions of various backgrounds and heritages. The largest democracy within the world, India, claims to be able to maintain relations within the country. Here differences are as often confused as similarities; recently, India's then secretary of state Natwar Singh stated at university, "India is uniquely poised to become a world political and economic power in the 21st century because of its history of democratic secularism and investment in education." (Kramer 2021)

3.1 Buddhism

The Buddha was originally a prince, eventually attaining enlightenment as a wandering ascetic, teaching the importance of the 'Four Noble Truths' and therefore the 'Eightfold Path'. Buddhism spread everywhere in India and beyond, with the number of followers fluctuating supporting the support or critique of the government. Its impact on Indian society included social ideas like equality among people, non-violence, and also the importance of learning and art, as exemplified within the beautiful stupas and cave temples that were built to market Buddhist ideas. Vardhamana Mahavira founded and spread Jainism. His teachings include the concept of the three 'gems' and five important principles; the Jains made significant contributions to the Tamil language and literature. The textbooks also reference the ideas of Confucius in China and Zoroaster in Persia. (Levknecht and Ramanathan, 2006)

3.2 Comparison of Religions

The main differences between the treatments of two religions are best demonstrated by the various emphasis each text placed on what is deemed important and what is not. Christian books provide the foremost complete and interesting picture of the increase of the two new religions with stories about the two influential religious figures (Buddha and Mahavira), which make the text interesting. Two factors are identified to clarify the differences between the recognition of Buddhism and Hinduism. One was the role of royal patronage. Secondly, the religious leaders effectively used the languages spoken by the people instead of Sanskrit, which was the language of the elite. (Levknecht & Ramanathan, 2006)

Even as Hindu books details two religions, it subtly devalues them, implying that significance lies only in relation to Hinduism. It describes their beginnings from Hinduism, downplaying the importance of the religious figures and does not mention the impact the two religions had on the practice of Hinduism. One of the bullets in the section 'Points to Remember' states "Buddhism declined because of a revival in Hinduism". However, while Hindu

books do not discuss the teachings of the Buddha extensively. (Levknecht & Ramanathan, 2006)

To sum up, Christian books have expressed their view on Hinduism and Buddhism, in which they are stating Hindus being the majority in India. I believe that, even though the differences are quite big, people in India are living friendly lives and not considering each others' religions.

4. Representation Issues in Dharma Productions and its Movies

This section will look at issues of multicultural representation in Dharma Productions. We will be looking at a selection of motion pictures that our team has deemed illustrative of the issues facing representation of Northeast Indians and other minority groups in Indian cinema, focusing on the aforementioned production company, Dharma Productions, as this is the main object of our research as one of the largest film production companies in India (and thus the world as a whole). We will be concentrating on specific movies released by Dharma Productions from the 1990s onwards since there is more available information about them and they may be deemed more representative of the current status quo in either case as they are closer to our present moment. The movies that will be reviewed are: *Dil Se..* (1998), *Chak De! India* (2007), *Mary Kom* (2014), *Axone* (2019), *Badhaai Do* (2022). Additionally, a brief commentary will be provided on the official trailer of *Gangubai Kahtiwadi* (2022), a recently released production.

4.1. Representation Issues Beyond Movies

Representation issues are not only limited to what can be seen in the movies. Firstly, we will explore how Dharma Productions as a corporation operates, as a company's corporate culture usually has a big impact on how the company's products are created, which we suspect may be especially true in the case of a company that produces mainstream cultural products such as motion pictures. An equal and diverse work environment consists not only of the number of employees but also the positions they take up. Inclusive work environments are valuable as they are found to be positively correlated with job performance. Truly diverse work

environments are formed when there is a commitment to building an organizational culture in which leadership is not concentrated in the upper echelons of the company. (Adjo et al., 2021) Additionally, we will observe the company's presence in social media, which is wide and active with accounts on all major platforms such as Instagram (Dharma Production, 2022), Twitter (Dharma Productions (@DharmaMovies) | Twitter, 2022), YouTube (Dharma Productions, 2022b), and Facebook (Dharma Productions, 2022).

4.1.1. Representation in the Workforce

In the case of Dharma Productions, we have observed that the majority of the production company's foremost personnel is quite diverse, including its founder's son Karan Johar being of mixed Punjabi and Sindhi ancestry (Johar, 2017), but Northeasterners do not appear to be particularly represented in the company, in fact it appears that foreigners from the United States and the Netherlands were more represented in the company's hierarchy (as observed from the hierarchy reported at RocketReach, 2022). Nonetheless, ethnicity does not seem to be highlighted by the company so data can be hard to come by.

It appears, however, that, according to our research on former employees of the company, the majority of employees appear to have had a satisfactory experience, emphasizing good salary and teamwork as the main positives (from reviews at AmbitionBox 2022, Glassdoor 2022, and Indeed 2022). Some of the negatives that former employees emphasized were working hours (from reviews at the same sites). This may appear innocuous, but policies such as work-life balance (which includes work scheduling) are designed to correspond to the norm in society, that is, the expectations of those in the majority, privileged group. This means that discrimination is not necessarily just performed at the macro level through hiring tendencies and racist behavior, but it can also exist at a micro level, with different expectations of performance and behavior being placed on different groups, usually making it harder for the discriminated group to perform (Aysola et al., 2018). Thus, this disadvantage may play a role in mistreating or misunderstanding Northeastern Indians in the company, but it must be noted that our evidence on this front is not conclusive.

4.1.2. Representation in Social Media

As we discussed above, Dharma Productions has a large and active social media presence on most major platforms, as can be expected from a media production company. It has a large audience on these platforms, owing largely to its popularity. As of April 2022, on YouTube, it has 9.53 million followers, on Instagram 1.6 million, on Facebook 4.8 million, and on Twitter 4.7 million followers. On LinkedIn it has 99.7 thousand followers and the introduction says the company to be “a leading production house in the mainstream Indian entertainment industry” (Johar, 2022).

The personal account of the current CEO, Karan Johar is linked to the company’s official Instagram account and has 11.9 million followers (Karan Johar (@karanjohar), 2022). He is also mentioned by name on all the other platforms (Dharma Productions, 2022) and has famous followers such as actresses Kareena Kapoor Khan and Katrina Kaif, both well known in Bollywood. He is not only known for his career in the film industry but also for his “maverick fashion sensibility” according to his cover interview with Lifestyle in Asia magazine. He knows the actors on a personal level and the focus seems to be more on his reputation and image as a style icon and not only on his talent with movies (Gangwani, 2022). He has also been heavily criticised for nepotism as his father was an incredibly well known film producer and the community has requested Johar to acknowledge his privileged position. He has responded to the accusations by saying he is not running a charity but a business and the business is not fair for many others either (Staff, 2020). In 2021 Johar introduced 14 new Board Members for Dharma Production. 12 were men and 2 women, all Indian of ethnicity (Kanyal, 2021).

The social media accounts of Dharma Production focus on promoting upcoming movies and offer discussion opportunities for fans. Instagram also has many funny and entertaining clips for the audience to use and people are encouraged to share these videos on their personal accounts. On YouTube the focus is on clips from the movies, usually dancing and music parts but also behind the scene material for fans to have a deep connection to the filmmaking process.

According to Social Blade (Social Blade, 2022), a website to search social media account data, has listed Dharma Production as per its different accounts. On Instagram, the company's engagement rate (measured as a composite of metrics related to comments, views, and likes) is 0.63%. Although posts receive on average over 10,000 likes, the audience comments are fairly low at just 66 per post. The overall grade for the Instagram account is B+, average. On YouTube, the account has had over 32.3 million video views in the period between March 22-April 22, 2022. The yearly earnings are estimated to be between 97.1 thousand up to 1.6 million USD. It is placed 55th on the global film rankings and 131st on the Indian YouTube ranking. On Twitter, the Social Blade analytics show that Dharma Production is losing followers and also that the company's tweets are declining. The overall grade is also B+. To be considered successful, the grade should not be less than A-. Overall, Dharma Productions has a strong and solid presence on social media. The main focus is on the movies, not on individual actors or actresses, although famous faces are used heavily on Instagram posts (Dharma Productions, 2022). Therefore, not that much can be said in terms of ethnic representation looking at just social media posts, but instead the movies themselves, as the ultimate source material for these posts, ought to be considered. We will be looking at Dharma Productions' movies in the following section.

4.2. Representation in Movies

4.2.1. *Dil Se.. (1998) & Chak De! India (2007)*

Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se..* is a film that can be interpreted in many ways. Belonging to Ratnam's so-called *Terror Trilogy*, which are films that explore India's internal politics through love stories. The *Terror Trilogy* contains the Tamil-language films *Roja* (1992) and *Bombay* (1995) with the Hindi-language film *Dil se..* (1998) being the last instalment.

The story is about Amar (Shah Rukh Khan) who becomes infatuated with Meghna (Manisha Koirala), a mysterious woman from the Northeast. Their paths cross throughout the film, with him falling deeper in love with her, while she is more hesitant. Unbeknownst to Amar, she is part of a faction of rebels who intend to kill the Prime Minister at the celebration of

India's independence. Finding himself heartbroken, Amar gets engaged to Preeti (Preity Zinta), a bubbly and strong-willed woman from the state of Kerala in South India. Meghna and Amar meet once more and the film climaxes with their mutual destruction and death.

Meghna is the film's heroine, played by the Nepali actress Manisha Koirala. She had previously played the Muslim heroine Shaila Bano in Ratnam's *Bombay* (1995) four years before. In his book *Conversation with Mani Ratnam*, film critic Bhardwaj Rangan brings up Manisha Koirala's features (that are also alluded to in the film) and that it was partly why Ratnam cast her.

Rangan: I felt you cast her because she is from Nepal, and you wanted someone who looked like she was from the North-East. And Amar even refers to her small eyes: "*Chhoti chhoti aankhen...*"

Ratnam: That was also there. Casting is also about getting somebody who'll deliver in the role and also physically fit the role, somebody who's available and right for it, who's best among the lot for that particular role, and someone who is as keen about the film as you are.' (184-185)

Meghna is a character as much as a symbol in her role as the terrorist and love interest, both in conflict within her. The film works with these layers and tells both her story and thus the Northeastern people's story in the way director Mani Ratnam perceives it.

The film shows the discontent of a section of the Northeastern people with the Indian government and how it has repressed them through the years after independence (Kabir, 2003). Ratnam does not fully commit to labeling Meghna as a 'terrorist', and neither does he fully show her as a heroic freedom fighter. We do get the backstory on Meghna's situation and how the government's actions radicalised her (Ahmed, 2015). Her backstory is shown to us as she explains it to Amar. How members of the Indian army terrorised her village, killed her father, raped her older sister and it is implied that they raped Meghna as well (Kabir, 2003).

The film is a retelling of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at the hands of a female suicide bomber from the separatist faction of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri

Lanka in 1991. Instead of having a Sri Lankan Tamil separatist as the suicide bomber, Ratnam changed it to a Northeastern one (Mezey, 2018). With this blurring of reality and fiction, there is not a clear line to be drawn on whom she is supposed to represent. If she is to be one or to be all of these, not to mention her own character in the film. Thus leaving her an enigma for many.

In *Chak De! India* (2007) the story is about a multicultural and multilingual group of hockey players who overcome their difference to win with the help of their coach Kabir Khan (Shah Rukh Khan). The groups' Northeastern members Mary Ralte (Kimi Laldawla) and Molly Zimik (Masochon Zimik) face harassment from local boys and are perceived as 'alien' in their own country, which is pointed out in one dialogue.

Northeastern women are subject to harassment because they are perceived as more 'loose' compared to traditionally dressed Indian women. The culture of the Northeast is more egalitarian, with women being on a much more equal footing than in other parts of India. Victim blaming happens in harassment cases when a Northeastern woman is involved, which is heightened by the patriarchal culture (McDuie-Ra, 2015).

The harassment face is a plot point that comes into fruition when the group of girls attack back at the harassers. Otherwise, there is not as much development of these characters within the large cast and in the plot. The film ultimately shows the reality many Northeastern women face, while not committing to a full storyline for them.

4.2.2. *Mary Kom* (2014) & *Axone* (2019)

Mary Kom (2014) tells the story of the Manipuri boxer Mary Kom and her journey to winning the 2008 World Boxing Championships. Played by Priyanka Chopra Jonas, *Mary Kom* is the first high profile mainstream movie that depicts a Northeastern Indian. Though it should be noted that Chopra had to put on makeup to look like Mary Kom, thus making her depiction one using Yellowface.

Mary Kom, the person, has been used as a signal for meritocracy in India. Since her fame, she has been used as a symbol of patriotism within India and as a symbol of how non-racist India is with its own citizens, even if the latter part has been deemed untrue. In

India, racism is seen as something that happens to other people outside of India, not something that is well-working inside its own borders. Mary Kom, the person, is thus used as a symbol to evade any critical thought or introspection into the racism faced by Northeasterners or any other races within India (McDuie-Ra, 2015). With these facts in mind, the Yellowface becomes even more troublesome since it is showing a Northeastern woman in power and facing racism as she climbs to success, while still using racist makeup to make a more 'conventionally' Indian looking actress to look like Mary Kom.

Axone (2019) is the first Hindi film with a full Northeastern cast. The story is about a group of friends in Delhi preparing the dish axone, while they prepare for the wedding of one of their friends. The group of friends try to finish preparing the food as their neighbors berate them for making such a smelly dish. The film is directed by Nicholas Kharkongon, who is from the Northeast himself, thus bringing authenticity to the narrative and presentation.

Northeastern migrants are usually from lower-middle-class families who leave their home state in the hopes of continuing their education and getting work. The younger people are the ones moving, because of these factors. They do so for school, but also to work in the social sector (Gergam Smith, 2022).

This film does show the reality of the situation, but one held by the middle class, rather than the lower middle class or lower that are most likely to be the migrants in a city like Delhi. Thus this film, which is a great achievement, shows the experience of being a migrant, but only from a privileged perspective, rather than one held by the majority of migrants who leave their state to work and live.

4.2.3. *Badhaai Do* (2022) & *Gangubai Kahtiwadi* (2022)

The latest movie showing a Northeastern character actually played by a Northeastern actress in *Badhaai Do* (2022). The movie is about two gay people, Suman "Sumi" (Bhumi Pednekar) Singh and Shardul Thakur (Rajkummar Rao) who enter a so-called Lavender Marriage to hide their sexuality from their respective families. Rimjhim Jongkey (Chum Darang) becomes

Sumi's girlfriend and along with Shardul's boyfriend Guru (Gulshan Devaiah), the group forms a found family of their own.

The film takes both an empathetic look at LGBTQA+ people in India, showing the hardship they experience, but still granting a form of happiness that might not be approved by everyone. The ending is a bittersweet one. Rimjim is treated fairly within the narrative and her and Sumi's relationship is not sexualised in any way. She does experience microaggressions from Shradul who mispronounces her name at first many times. As the movie goes on she gets to express herself and her wants within the relationship she is in with Sumi and is very much her own character.

In the official trailer for *Gangubai Kahtiwadi* (2022) we see a Northeastern dentist trying to pull one of Gangubai's teeth. The following exchange takes place. The translation is taken from the official subtitles in the trailer.

Dentist: Open your mouth...Wider. Open wider.

Gangubai: Are you going to shove all of China in my mouth or what?

From this exchange, connecting Northeastern people to China, we see Sinophobia and racism wrapped into one sentence. This film's timing and the racism shown in this exchange is very much ill timed, since it came in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the hate crimes against Northeast Indians in India, because of Sinophobia and racism (Geran, Smith, 2022). So this film showing racism against Northeastern people is not only ill timed, but also framing such language as normal for those watching.

We can see that racism still affects the types of characters Northeastern people have in the Hindi entertainment industry. There has been a lot of progress made on how Northeastern people, mostly women, are perceived in Hindi films, but the racism and associations with China rather than India have not completely disappeared either.

4.2.4. A Note on Assamese Cinema in the Indian Cinema Landscape

India's film industry has never been a monolith. The different industries all over the country have their own state languages that are used within the movie industries there. Hindi film or 'Bollywood' is the most famous outside of the country, has been for many years, but with time the industries in the South have slowly come to either overtake and give serious competition to the power that Hindi-language films have. The audiences have slowly shifted southwards in their search for films that appeal to them, mostly thanks to the success of the Baahubali-movies, made by the Telugu director S. S. Rajmouli. The Baahubali movies were a grand story, which took a lot from the old Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana, but still being an original story. They had the money and the vision, which was then welcomed by the rest of India, making it a Pan-India hit, not just a regional one. This shift of preference in films though has not made Assamese films as great of a draw, even if they do have their audiences.

Assam is the only notable region in the Northeast with a significant film industry and where films come to the reach of other audiences. Such films are usually low-budget, minimal, art house films that make it to the so-called "mainland" from Assam. Movies such as *Othello* (2017) did have an opportunity to shine in Indian film festivals, but mostly the industry does not get much notice in the mainstream Indian cinema discourse.

Assam, though, has a long history of making films. Jyotiprasad Agarwala's *Jyomoti* (1935) is considered the first Assamese film. The film is based on the iconic Assamese play *Jyomoti Kuwori* by Lakshminath Bexbaruah. The film is culturally, aesthetically and narratively an Assamese film to show patriotism that was forming under the rule of the British Raj (Baishya, 2017). The cinema of Assam would have its so-called golden age in the 1960s, after independence, much at the same time when Hindi cinema was flourishing in Bombay. At the beginning only few films would be produced in Assam, because money was not easy to come by for filmmakers. However, in the 1960s films were produced more regularly, leading to twenty-five films from that time, and nine won the prestigious Nation Award. Since then Assamese cinema has had its successes and disappointments, but with the invention of

streaming services (OTT platforms) it has rejuvenated the industry and introduced it to a new audience. Assam even held the popular Filmfare Awards in 2020 (Deka, 2021).

Assamese cinema has grown to be an industry built on crowd-funding campaigns by directors and shows a variety of genres with no large preference. The industry is not saturated with one type of audience or film, since there is usually something for everyone to be found in modern Assamese cinema (Deori & Bora, 2020).

4.3. Issues of Class, Caste, and Religion at Dharma Productions

In this section, we will be analyzing different aspects of movies from Dharma Productions from 2010 onwards. The movies shall be analyzed when it comes to their take on class, caste, and religion, as well as how the movies from Dharma have evolved in their representation of it. This will also take into account casting for certain parts within those movies, though taking into account the realistic expectations within the Hindi movie industry. To show this we shall use academic texts. Some movies shall be emphasized more than others at certain points, depending on the topic at hand.

Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema with its far-ranging appeal, has historically been at the forefront for many issues. From the 1950s to the 1960s, after Indian independence, it espoused Nehruvian and Gandhian values. In the 1970s with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and The Emergency, a suspension of civil rights in the 1970s, the actor Amitabh Bachchan rose to become the image of the everyday working man going against the system that had wronged him. Indian cinema might be seen as homogenous of all of India outside of the nation's borders, but this is not the case. There are many regional industries that have their own type of cinema, with their own values, with no special leaning toward the state as a whole; unlike Hindi cinema, which is very much linked to the Delhi government in various ways (Sicar, 1995). Analyzing Dharma Productions with this frame in mind, one has to see the influence a single movie has, and what it can do. Thus making aspects that are more troublesome within those movies all the more glaring, because of the wide range of influence Hindi cinema has. Not just internally in India, but also abroad.

4.3.1 Class Issues

When watching a mainstream Dharma Productions movie, the first thing one sees is how upper-class, upper-middle-class or middle class the characters are, and how glossy the world is. Movies such as *We Are Family* (2010), *Student of the Year* (2012), *Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu* (2012), *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* (2013), *Gori Tere Pyaar Mein* (2013), *Hasee Toh Phasee* (2014), *2 States* (2014), *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania* (2014), *Shandaar* (2015), *Kapoor & Sons* (2016), *Baar Baar Dekho* (2016), *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (2016), *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* (2017), *OK Jaanu* (2017), *Ittefaq* (2017), *Raazi* (2018), *Dhadak* (2018), *Kalank* (2019), *Student of the Year 2* (2019), *Good Newwz* (2019), *Bhoot: Part 1 -- The Haunted Ship* (2020), *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* (2020), *Sheersah* (2021) and *Gehraiyaan* (2022) are all films with main characters that are part of this “comfortably living” class. The poor and disenfranchised are not part of the film’s narratives. In *Student of the Year* (2012) a character who is shown to be lower-middle-class is used as a punching bag for some of the film’s jokes (Luther, 2021). The poor exist, but they are not the main characters, nor are they a big part of the plot.

In *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (2016) there is an acknowledgment of the class difference. Alizeh says that her father is wealthy, but she is not rich, meaning she has money to live comfortably, but not amounts of it. She can ask her father for money, and get it, but is not obligated to work at all. There is a private jet, but also simple first-class air travel around the world. In a rare case of self-awareness, money is made into a material thing that implies status, but there is a clear difference between people with money.

The *Student of the Year* films also acknowledges this on a thematic level, with the lower-middle-class protagonists, Sidharth Malhotra and Tiger Shroff, trying to beat the rich students with their cunning. *Gehraiyaan* (2022) also acknowledges money, and class, it is even a plot point. But the characters have money in a way that they want to earn more, one even being an heiress, but losing a little will not hurt them as much as it would a person at the lower end of the class spectrum.

Hasee Toh Phasee (2014) is interesting, since money is acknowledged, and Sidharth Malhotra's character is noticeably less rich than his fiancée in the movie. He is the son of a policeman, and his fiancée gives him a task to earn a certain amount of money before the wedding. Her family is rich, with expectations that come with it, and it is shown as a burden to Malhotra's character. Also, in the romantic song scene *Ishq Bulaava*, the film shows the ordinary life of a regular morning in Mumbai. The filming is realistic and shows people of every kind going to work or doing their chores in the morning. During this romantic song, representatives of the lower classes (milk deliveries, cleaners, chai wallahs and others) do get an acknowledgment of their contributions to society.

4.3.2 Issues with the Caste System

The caste system, known as *jati*, continues to impact social relations in India to this day. This is because, as India remains a mostly collectivist society, the group that he belongs to is central to a person's status. While the caste system has experienced many changes throughout its millennia-long history and varies across Indian regions, most of these systems share some commonalities. They divide society into social classes, namely priests (brahmins), warriors (kshatriya), merchants (viashya), commoners (sudra), and out-of-caste "untouchable" individuals, the lowest class (dalits). (Johnson & Johnson, 2022) As we will see, the caste system does play a role in representation issues in Dharma Production's movies.

In Dharma Production movies, there is rarely a mention of caste. Similarly to class, there is a difference, but it is an unacknowledged one within the narrative. *Dhadak* (2018), a remake of the Marathi movie *Sairat* (2016), is one of the rare movies which tackles caste within its story, even though it does so less than the original film. *Sheersah* (2021) is also one of the rare films to acknowledge that caste is the reason the main couple cannot be together. *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* (2017) also mentioned caste in how it relates to the marriage market when in search of a bride for Badrinath or 'Badri'. However, the film is more concerned with its main message, which is that of dowry and honor killings. These films, among the many made by Dharma Productions, are the exception to the rule of not mentioning caste openly.

Caste nevertheless can be seen in the surnames of characters, and to which part of this cultural and religious hierarchy they belong to. Hindi cinema has no star that is of the Dalit caste. The lowest of the caste system that are ostracized from society. One can call this blindness to the caste issue or willful ignorance, in order to imagine an India in cinema where caste is no longer an issue, even though in real life it is very much so for those of lower caste, as well as tribals (indigenous people) (Dwyer, 2014). If caste is shown, then it is shown with the equivalent of brown- or blackface, with higher caste stars being colored brown for a role as a Dalit or a tribal. Caste, thus, overlaps with class with the skin color of the character, with higher marking lighter skin, and that the darker the skin, the lower in the class hierarchy the character is. This has to do with the internal prejudice within the Hindi industry. One can be a dark-skinned actor and succeed, like Nawazuddin Siddiqui, but this does not mean that they can get the hero roles appreciated by the masses that make an actor successful on a large scale (Peters, 2021). However one can see the rise of Dalit heroes, though not played by Dalit actors, in Tamil cinema in recent years (Edachira, 2020). Therefore, while Dalits as a concept can be said to be more represented, their actual societal rights do not appear to be improved by this as it is still non-Dalits playing those roles and excluding Dalit-caste actors.

4.3.3. Religion Issues

As we mentioned above in an earlier section, religion in India is intertwined with everything in Indian society, from politics to societal relations to the film industry itself. Religion has been made into a political tool many times in India's long history, with it being used against minority communities within the country. Islamophobia has been most prominent since the 1990s with communal riots against the Muslim population becoming more, and more severe (Dwyer, 2014: 15). Muslims are portrayed as the "other" from Hindus who are categorized as the norm. This goes back to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism when it came to Middle-Eastern countries as seen by Western eyes (Khan, 2020).

My Name is Khan (2010) is a significant film, as it deals with Islamophobia Muslims faced in America after 9/11, while also being a parallel to how they are treated within India. The

film's protagonist Rizwan Khan is portrayed by the most famous Muslim in Indian cinema, and one could even say worldwide, Shah Rukh Khan. With the rise of the Hindu right-wing governance across India, and with the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in 2014, and re-election in 2019, there has been a seismic shift within the movie industries across India.

Raazi (2018) is a film that is nationalistic. Its characters' behavior is shaped by nationalism, even if thematically nationalism shown to come with a deep personal cost. Pakistan is seen as the enemy, with its population wanting to hurt India. In fact, the homeland is a theme of the movie, with India seen as the motherland for our Kashmiri Muslim character *Sehmat* played by Alia Bhatt. Since *Sehmat* is married to a Pakistani in order to spy on her husband's military colleagues so that she can give intel to India. Yet the film shows that there are emotional sacrifices that are made in pursuit of protecting one's nation and that it is not a glamorous pursuit even if it is driven by good ideals (Khan, 2020).

Kesari (2019), *Sheersah* (2021), and *Sooryavanshi* (2021) are the most explicit films when it comes to the treatment of Muslims within India by proxy with a Muslim enemy from outside of India. Thus giving the implication of Muslims as the enemy, the "other." *Kesari* (2019) shows Muslims as both victims and villains, even going as far as to espouse tolerance between the Sikhs and Muslims. Yet it comes off more as tactful, not too earnest, as the last third of the film is all about the carnage the Muslims inflict on the Sikh soldiers.

Compared to the agenda of *My Name is Khan* (2010), these later movies seem clear to invoke the Hindu nationalism that is popular in today's India. *Kesari* (2019) does so on the Sikh side, but the abundance of the symbolic saffron still invokes the right-wing takeover of the color. *Sooryavanshi* (2021) makes the Muslims terrorists, evoking the Bombay bombings with its plot. It even ends with the heroes, both policemen, gunning down terrorists. No matter how many good Muslims these films shows on the sidelines, one cannot escape the overall message of these movies: Muslims are the villains no matter what.

Kalank (2019) is a rare movie, which has Muslim main characters, though not performed by Muslims themselves. The narrative plays more along the lines of a tragic love story set during the Partition that made India, and Pakistan. It shows a community flourishing in its inclusivity and diversity, but one with deep-rooted problems that keep the lower-class Muslims down, which leads to the eventual hatred that flares with the climax.

4.3.4. Representation Issues in Dharma Productions' Casting

Dharma Productions, more personally Karan Johar, has come under fire for its casting practices seen in the last few years. Especially in light of the death of Sushant Singh Rajput, an actor who was popular, but not a star in 2020. Twitter erupted in accusations against him and his nepotism for not casting outside of the people he liked in front of the camera. Karan Johar is himself a star in his own right, especially with his famous Koffee With Karan show where he interviews many stars, some being his friends as well. He is a public persona and is very much connected through his many ventures in both cinema and entertainment.

This large media presence has made him famous as a director, and a producer. He has launched stars and has a large influence on the movies his production company makes over the many people who see them (Luther, 2021). The most prominent launch films are the Student of the Year franchise, since it gives a safe template to launch new stars into the industry, but does not guarantee success in the future.

With the first Student of the Year in 2012, a film which he directed, he mainly launched Alia Bhatt, Varun Dhawan and Siddharth Malhotra. All are now established stars within the Hindi movie industry. Especially Alia Bhatt who has become a Pan-Indian star with her ventures into Telugu cinema with the worldwide hit movie RRR (2022) directed by S. S. Rajamouli, the current powerhouse director of that industry. In the movie, there was also the son of Boman Irani, Kayoze Irani, as a side character. Kayoze Irani has continued acting since his launch but has lately turned to directing films. The film also re-launched Sana Saeed, who played the child Anjali in Karan's first film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998). She is largely a television actress now.

The second Student of the Year film starred Ananya Panday and Tara Sutaira, this time the film was directed by Punit Malhotra, not Karan Johar. Tiger Shroff was already an established action star. So far, Ananya Panday has had a better career, being in movies in roles that play to her strengths. Tara Sutaira on the other hand has been in movies that have been panned by critics, and audiences alike. So one can see that even if one gets a launch film, it does not guarantee success within the industry afterward.

It needs to be said that in Hindi cinema the side characters are usually of the state they represent when it comes to movies set outside of Mumbai or Delhi. Indian cinema is largely a star-based system, where anyone can play almost anyone from anywhere of any religion, and culture. A great case of miscasting a lead in terms of ethnic grounds was most certainly done when casting Alia Bhatt in *2 States* (2014), where she plays a Tamilian. Alia Bhatt is a British Indian of Kashmiri heritage. Her character's mother in the film was notably played by South Indian actress Revathi, and the late, Bombay-born, Shiv Kumar Subramaniam.

5. Conclusions

Northeast India is a diverse region that is quite different from the rest of the country. Because of this, it has often been othered by the majority Hindi-speaking Hindu Indo-Aryan population of the country. In this research project, we have looked at the ways in which the Northeast and its population are represented in the broader Indian society, taking the example of popular culture and particularly the movie industry as a case study on the representation and fostering of multiculturalism in India, given how visible and influential the industry is.

Dharma Productions has become one of the most influential leading production houses inside the film industry of Bollywood since its foundation in 1976. Besides creating many critically acclaimed films, the Dharma Production has made a handful of blockbuster films also. Over the years, the company has also provided a number of screening opportunities for numerous directors that have then risen into the standard Bollywood chart of acclaimed directors.

When it comes to the overall satisfaction of the workforce in Dharma Production, most of the ex-employees were happy to work there. One of the reasons for that was the good level of salary and the good atmosphere in the workplace. However, some of them mentioned the working hours as non-satisfactory. A lot of the ex-employees felt that they worked too much.

As so often in Bollywood, the Dharma Production also possess a large audience through their social media platforms. The Company has an account in Instagram (1.6m followers, Twitter (4.7 m followers), Facebook (4.8m followers, and YouTube (9.3 m followers). In addition to that, the CEO of Dharma Productions, Karan Johar, has 11.9m followers on Instagram. There Johar shares content together with the biggest stars of Bollywood such as Kareena Kapoor Khan and Katrina Kaif.

We then looked at the films that Dharma Production has produced from 2010 onwards with the focus being on four different criteria; class, caste, religion and casting. With this division we were able to mirror how the social constructions of India and the North Eastern region are shown in their production.

The class system of India can easily be recognized in the Dharma Production films. First noticeable thing was that there was no representation of lower classes. In every Dharma Production produced films that we watched, the spectrum of the characters included only the upper-class, upper-middle-class and middle class people. The only exception being the film *Student of the Year* (2012), where a lower-class character is less surprisingly the punchline of the film's plot. While the lower classes are rarely represented in films of Dharma Production, the aspect of caste is even more limited in terms of representation. However, there are exceptions like the film *Sheersah* (2021). In that the caste is the reason that the main characters of the film cannot end up together.

Religion plays an important role in Indian society so it is convenient that it also has its place in the films of Dharma Production. Unfortunately, Indians have harnessed religion to be a political tool which is then being used against different minorities of the country. Islamophobia is a good example of this and Dharma Production is no exception in its use. As nationalistic

thinking has been rising in the country, the films of Dharma Production often present the muslims as “the others” while the Hindus are usually given the spotlight.

All in all, it appears that while some attempts are occasionally made to increase diversity and representation, the issue does not seem to be anywhere near the forefront of Dharma Production’s priorities, which is likely to represent a broader issue in the Indian culture industry. Having analyzed the issue in depth, we believe that Dharma Production should make a conscientious effort to increase representation in its products, as that may be a powerful tool to foster better representation of marginalized groups (be it ethnic groups like Northeasterners, religious groups like the large minority of Muslims, or social classes like the Dalit or “untouchable” caste). However, this cannot be done simply by increasing the number of people from these backgrounds that appear on screen or even by including more storylines that would be relatable to them, although that would certainly not hurt and we encourage it as well. Nonetheless, from the literature and our analysis, we conclude that change has to be encouraged in a bottom-up fashion. This would mean, in practice, that the company should make a concerted effort to promote a work environment that is inclusive of people of all backgrounds and promote a culture of leadership that permeates the formal hierarchical structure. Adopting a constructivist sociological approach, we believe that these changes are more enduring and would encourage a positive transformation of the way that Dharma Productions conducts its business, leading to the production of cultural products that are not only more representative of “real” Indian society but that, for that reason, perform better in the market thus having a positive impact on Dharma’s bottom line as well.

6. Action Plan

Tasks	Deadline	Student(s) responsible
Group Meeting I	February 22	Victor
Group Meeting II	March 9	Victor

Tasks	Deadline	Student(s) responsible
Region map and list of languages (Northeast, 8 states)	March 10	Emma
Northeastern States in Indian Relations with Bangladesh (issues with Hindu Bangladeshi immigrants vs non-Hindu Northeasterners)	March 10	Victor
Depictions of Northeast Indians in Mainstream Hindi Films	March 10	Kirre
Religion history in India	March 10	Nurlan
Indian federal government relations with the Northeastern states	March 10	Ilmari
Group Meeting III	March 14	Victor
Send mid-term report to Alina	March 16	Victor
Complete Report with all Research	March 17	All
Mid-Term Report	March 18	All
Mid-Term Presentation	March 29	All
Research Workforce	May 13	Nurlan
Research Movies	May 13	Kirre
Research Social Media	May 13	Emma
Draft Conclusions	May 13	Ilmari
Compile and Finalize Group Portfolio	May 14	Victor
Presentation of LIFE project results	May 17	All

7. Self-Reflective Report

Victor: I joined this project because I find the topic of multiculturalism an interesting aspect of public policy and of life in general. I study International Relations and, while multiculturalism is a key aspect to understanding the world of IR as culture is so important to the way that groups of people, such as states, view and understand each other; it is not an aspect that we study in any kind of depth. This meant that I found this project interesting, as it also included multilingualism. While I am not a linguist and my knowledge of linguistic policy was very superficial prior to taking part in this project, languages have always interested me as I myself grew up in a multilingual environment and have always had a passion for learning new languages. For all these reasons, I thought that this project would be interesting and I expected that I would be able to study aspects of linguistic and cultural policy, not necessarily from the angle of politics and administration that I had usually studied these topics from in my academic career as a student of international relations, but from a more human-centric point of view. I would say that these expectations have been fulfilled by the project, as we have done some interesting research regarding a part of the world that I also was not particularly knowledgeable about prior to undertaking this project.

Nurlan: I found this project, among the others from the LIFE projects list, the most attractive, since it seemed interesting to me, as the name of our project is Multiculturalism and Multilingual Societies: multidisciplinary analysis of international cases. The aim of our project is to take a deeper look at the Northeastern area of India and its eight states. There was nobody who was against doing his or her role and if there were any problems or challenging tasks to do, we helped each other with materials and so on. I think that it was not entirely clear from the beginning what exactly we were supposed to do, which has made it a bit more complicated to be up to date with the deadlines. We have gotten closer to each project member by sharing each other's background, thoughts and views on cultures themselves. We have shared with each other culturalism shock moments in our lives and then divided into groups.

We have split into different topics of India and are now preparing a presentation to bring it all together. We have easily agreed on the division of topics and I believe that we did our job well. I would not recommend anything for the developers of the LIFE project, except for keep doing it, since that is the perfect opportunity for students to learn something new.

Emma: I joined this project as I'm interested in multicultural environments and have always grown up surrounded by multiculturalism. I wanted to learn more about multiculturalism through others and how to implement it to my own work. My expectations were to increase my knowledge and challenge any bias or stereotypes I might hold. The topic, India, was dear to my heart and I learned many new things through the academic texts we were reading. This project also increased my multicultural awareness as I hoped for. Things I thought I knew about the region were proven wrong. I need to mention the language variety in India as I really thought almost everyone speaks Hindi at some level. Through the project I learned about subcultures and regional dialects, things I would have not otherwise known or even searched. I'm sure all this newly gained knowledge will be beneficial for me in the future, both professionally and personally. I have also increased my skills to organize and work online, things that are definitely required in any work environment.

Kirre: I was happy to be part of the LIFE project. The topic was very interesting, since it concerned Multiculturalism and Multilingual Societies: multidisciplinary analysis of international cases. I have had a multicultural upbringing, having lived in Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand, so the aspects were familiar to me on a personal level. In the first part of our project, the main topic was that of Northeast India. We looked at Northeast India from different perspectives. I took a look at how Northeast Indians are perceived and depicted in mainstream Hindi cinema. For the second part of the project, I looked at Dharma Productions' movies after 2010 to see how their depictions changed or how they depict people from different ethnicities, class, and religion. Overall, the LIFE project was good, even if at the beginning there was some

delay in starting it. Also, with the school moving from Zoom to in-person classes, there was some mental adjustment to the changes, which took some time to get used to. I would recommend this type of project, and LIFE for others, since it pushes you in the best way possible academically.

Ilmari: The main reason for me to join this project was the fact that it sounded interesting. I also wanted to study and learn something that would differ from the programme that I'm having in TLU, which is focused on politics. Our project focused on Northeast India which was as a region something completely unknown to me before this project started. Now the country of India appears in a completely different light to me thanks to the knowledge we gained about it. In my opinion the best part of our project was after all the multidisciplinary aspect. The project differed from all the other ones I've done so far because of that.

8. References

- About North East. (2022). *North East India*. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, North East India. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://mdoner.gov.in/about-north-east>
- Adjo, J., Maybank, A., & Prakash, V. (2021). Building Inclusive Work Environments. *Pediatrics*, 148(s2). 10.1542/peds.2021-051440E
- Ali, S. (Director). (2017). *OK Jaanu* [Film]. Dharma Productions.
- AmbitionBox. (2022). *Dharma Productions Reviews by 8 Employees*. AmbitionBox. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from <https://www.ambitionbox.com/reviews/dharma-productions-reviews>
- Aysola, J., Barg, F. K., Martinez, A. B., Kearney, M., Agesa, K., Carmona, C., & Higginbotham, E. (2018). Perceptions of Factors Associated with Inclusive Work and Learning Environments in Health Care Organizations. *JAMA Network Open*, 1(4). 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.1003
- Bahl, V. (Director). (2015). *Shaandaar* [Film]. Dharma Productions.
- Baishya, A. K. (2017). Restore, Revisit, Remember: Reinstating the Region in Three Assamese Films. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40(3), 431-446. 10.1080/00856401.2017.1326449
- Barbora, M. (2019, December 6). *The endangered languages of North-east India*. The Association of Commonwealth Universities. Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://www.acu.ac.uk/the-acu-review/the-languages-of-the-seven-sisters/>
- Batra, R. (Director). (2013). *The Lunchbox* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Batra, S. (Director). (2012). *Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Batra, S. (Director). (2016). *Kapoor & Sons (Since 1921)* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Batra, S. (Director). (2022). *Gehraiyaan* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Byjus. (2022). *Describe the language policy of India. - GK Q&A*. Byjus. Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://byjus.com/questions/describe-the-language-policy-of-india/>

Chasie, C. (2005). Nagaland in Transition. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 32(2/3), 253-264. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23006032>

Chopra, A. (Director). (2017). *Ittefaq* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Deka, V. B. (2021). The world of Assamese celluloid: 'yesterday and today'. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 9(1), 393-423.

Delican, M. (2011). The Language Policy of India. *Istanbul Journal of Sociological Studies*, 0(25), 121-130. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/iusoskon/issue/9525/119025>

Deori, M., & Bora, A. (2020). Assamese Cinema Through Nine Decades: Challenging Journey with Encouraging Trends. *Global Media Journal - Indian Edition*, 12(2). 2249-5835

Dharma Productions. (2022). *Dharma Productions*. YouTube. Retrieved April 22, 2022b, from <https://www.youtube.com/c/DharmaMovies>

Dharma Productions. (2022). *Dharma Productions - Home*. Facebook. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from <https://www.facebook.com/DharmaMovies/>

Dharma Productions (@dharmamovies). (2022). *Dharma Productions (@DharmaMovies)*. Twitter. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from

https://twitter.com/DharmaMovies?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

Dharma Productions (@dharmamovies). (2022). *Dharma Productions (@dharmamovies)* •

Instagram photos and videos. Instagram. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from

<https://www.instagram.com/dharmamovies/?hl=en>

D'Silva, R. (Director). (2014). *Ungli* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Dwyer, R. (2014). *Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema As A Guide To Contemporary India*. Reaktion Books.

Edachira, M. (2020). Anti-caste Aesthetics and Dalit Interventions in Indian Cinema. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(38), 47-53.

Gangwani, R. (2022, February 21). *February Cover Star: Filmmaker Karan Johar opens up about his love for fashion*. Lifestyle Asia Hong Kong. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from <https://www.lifestyleasia.com/ind/style/fashion/interview-karan-johar-opens-up-about-his-love-for-fashion-bollywood-kareena-kapoor-ranveer-singh/>

The Gauhati High Court. (2022). *About Us – The Gauhati High Court*. The Gauhati High Court. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://ghconline.gov.in/index.php/profile-2/>

Glassdoor. (2022). *Working at Dharma Productions*. Glassdoor. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from https://www.glassdoor.com/Overview/Working-at-Dharma-Productions-EI_IE2361586.11,29.htm

Gulzar, M. (Director). (2018). *Raazi* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Hausing, K. (2021). Autonomy and the territorial management of ethnic conflicts in Northeast India. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 10(1), 120-143.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21622671.2021.1884591>.

HT Entertainment Desk. (2020, August 5). *Karan Johar makes social media comeback after*

trolling over Sushant Singh Rajput's death, comments on Ranveer Singh's post. Hindustan

Times. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/karan-johar-makes-social-media-comeback-after-trolling-over-sushant-singh-rajput-s-death-comments-on-ranveer-singh-s-post/story-yZg6mbT7R3teyDIObU0wXI.html>

Hussain, A. (2021). RELIGIONS IN INDIA. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 8(5).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351770715_RELIGIONS_IN_INDIA

Indeed. (2022). *Working at dharma productions pvt. ltd.: 2 Reviews*. Indeed. Retrieved April 18,

2022, from <https://in.indeed.com/cmp/Dharma-Productions-Pvt.-Ltd./reviews>

Inoue, K. (2005). Integration of the North East: The State Formation Process. In M. Murayama, K.

Inoue, & S. Hazarika (Eds.), *Sub-Regional Relations in the Eastern South Asia: With Special Focus on India's North Eastern Region* (pp. 16-30). Institute of Developing Economics.

<http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Download/Jrp/133.html>

Jain, N. (2016). Northeast India's Multi-Ethnicities: Dominant Issues and Problems. *International*

Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies (IJHSSS), 3(2), 275-285.

Jaiswal, A. (2020, June 29). The language of Justice. *The Indian Express*.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/haryana-governor-hindi-language-judicial-system-6480797/>

Johar, K. (Director). (2012). *Student of the Year* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Johar, K. (Director). (2016). *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Johar, K. (2017). *An Unsuitable Boy*. Penguin Books India PVT, Limited.

Johar, K. (2022). *Dharma Productions*. LinkedIn. Retrieved April 29, 2022, from

<https://in.linkedin.com/company/dharma-productions>

Johara, K. (Director). (2010). *My Name is Khan* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Kabir, A. J. (2003). Allegories of Alienation and Politics of Bargaining: Minority Subjectivities in

Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se*. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 1(2), 141-159.

10.1080/1474668032000132724

Kanyal, J. (2021, March 4). *Karan Johar introduces 14 new directors on 40 years of Dharma*

Productions. India Today. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from

<https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/bollywood/story/karan-johar-introduces-14-new-directors-on-40-years-of-dharma-productions-1775461-2021-03-04#:~:text=The%20directors%20introduced%20by%20Karan,Sagar%20Amre%20and%20Kayoze%20Irani.>

Karan Johar (@karanjohar). (2022). *Karan Johar (@karanjohar) • Instagram photos and videos*.

Karan Johar (@karanjohar) • Instagram photos and videos. Retrieved April 22, 2022,

from <https://www.instagram.com/karanjohar/feed/?hl=en>

Khaitan, S. (Director). (2014). *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Khaitan, S. (Director). (2017). *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Khaitan, S. (Director). (2018). *Dhadak* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Khan, M. (2020). No "Me" Before The Nation: Portrayal Of Nationalism And Religious Identities In

Bollywood Movies Created During Modi-Era. *Theses and Dissertations, 1294*.

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd/1294>

Kharongor, N. (Director). (2019). *Axone* [Film]. Yoodlee Films.

Kramer, S. (2021, September 21). *Religious groups of India by the numbers: Key findings*. Pew

Research Center. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/21/key-findings-about-the-religious-composition-of-india/>

Kulkarni, H. (Director). (2022). *Badhaai Do* [Film]. Jungle Pictures.

Kumar, O. (Director). (2014). *Mary Kom* [Film]. Bhansali Productions.

Levknecht, J., & Ramanathan, H. (2006). Speaking Volumes: Religion and Teaching History in

India. *Economic and Political Weekly, 41*(36), 3853-3858.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418673>

Luther, J. D. (2021). The Karan Johar playbook: The open secret, male same-sex sexuality, and

the 'big-brand'in Bollywood. *South Asian Popular Culture, 19*(2), 193-124.

10.1080/14746689.2021.1940552

Majumder, R. (2020, June 23). *Languages of North East India*. Milestone Localization. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://www.milestoneloc.com/languages-of-north-east-india/>

Malhotra, K. (Director). (2012). *Agneepath* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Malhotra, P. (Director). (2010). *I Hate Luv Storys* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Malhotra, P. (Director). (2013). *Gori Tere Pyaar Mein* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Malhotra, P. (Director). (2019). *Student of the Year 2* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Malhotra, S. P. (Director). (2010). *We Are Family* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Mathew, V. (Director). (2014). *Hasee Toh Phasee* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

McDuie-Ra, D. (2015). 'Is India Racist?': Murder, Migration and Mary Kom. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38(2), 304-319. 10.1080/00856401.2014.992508

Mehra, N. (Director). (2016). *Baar Baar Dekho* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Mehta, R. (Director). (2019). *Good Newwz* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Mezey, J. H. (2018). The pyrotechnics of gender and terrorism in Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se*. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 16(1), 29-49. 10.1080/14746689.2018.1455844

Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. (2022). *North East India*. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, North East India. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from <https://mdoner.gov.in/about-north-east>

Mukerji, A. (Director). (2013). *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Peters, R. (2021, February 24). Colorism, Castism, and Gentrification in Bollywood – The Jugaad Project. *The Jugaad Project*.

<https://www.thejugaadproject.pub/home/colorism-bollywood>

Pew Research Center. (2021, June 29). *Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation*. Pew

Research Center. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from

<https://www.pewforum.org/2021/06/29/religion-in-india-tolerance-and-segregation/>

Piang, L. L. K. (2013). Ethnic mobilisation for decolonisation: colonial legacy (the case of the Zo people in Northeast India). *Asian Ethnicity*, 14(3), 342-363.

Rangan, B. (2012). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin Books Limited. 978-81-84756-90-6

RocketReach. (2022). *Dharma Productions Pvt. Ltd. Management Team | Org Chart*. RocketReach.

Retrieved May 14, 2022, from

https://rocketreach.co/dharma-productions-pvt-ltd-management_b5d0bf95f42e411b

Sharma, I. (2020, October 26). *COVID-19 and Political Unrest in Northeast India*. ACLED. Retrieved

March 9, 2022, from

<https://acleddata.com/2020/10/26/covid-19-and-political-unrest-in-northeast-india/>

Sharma, S. (Director). (2020). *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Shetty, R. (Director). (2018). *Simmba* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Singh, A. (Director). (2019). *Kesari* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Singh, B. P. (Director). (2020). *Bhoot -- Part One: The Haunted Ship* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Sircar, A. (1995). Of 'Metaphorical' Politics: Bombay Films and Indian Society. *Modern Asian Studies*, 29(2), 325-335. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312816>

Social Blade. (2022). *YouTube, Twitch, Twitter, & Instagram Statistics - SocialBlade.com*. Social Blade. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from <https://socialblade.com/>

Staff, M. W. (2020, June 21). 'Never Said I Was Running An NGO': Karan Johar On Nepotism Allegations. *Man's World India*. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from <https://www.mansworldindia.com/entertainment/karan-johar-nepotism-kangana-rana-ut/>

Varman, A. (Director). (2014). *2 States* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Varman, A. (Director). (2019). *Kalank* [Film]. Dharma Productions.

Vishnuvardhan (Director). (2021). *Shershaah* [Film]. Dharma Prodcutions.