

Original Article

Spices and Screens Across the Straits: Food, Cinema, and Post-1990s India–Malaysia Cultural Exchange

Ved Chuckarbutty

International School of Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Corresponding Author : vedchuckarbutty@gmail.com

Received: 20 April 2026

Revised: 23 May 2026

Accepted: 15 June 2026

Published: 28 June 2026

Abstract - This research paper investigates the unfolding of cultural exchange between India and Malaysia from the 1990s to the present day. It focuses specifically on the cultural artefacts concerning cinema and diasporic food practices, and seeks to explore the relationship between cinema and dietary practices among diasporic Indians in Malaysia as part of the broader idea of identity perception and formation. This paper has explored shifts in genre preferences and audience composition for Tamil cinema, while also examining the effects of film fandom and star power on the process of identity formation. Furthermore, the paper explores how diaspora food spaces act as places where cinema and the sense of “Indianness” are forged and experienced by linking food identity with film fandom and community belonging. The research deploys a qualitative approach, interviewing members of the diaspora and conducting ethnographic observations, with descriptive analysis of secondary data. Findings highlight that cinema plays a crucial role in shaping quotidian culinary practices and ritualised consumption. Furthermore, it is evident that diasporic food spaces are cultural hubs for identity negotiation. Audiences’ inclination towards ‘larger than life’ cinema and a stronger cultural affiliation with India due to their preference for Indian Tamil cinema over Malaysian Tamil cinema is also noted in the study.

Keywords - Tamil Cinema, Cultural Exchange, Diaspora, Food Culture, Identity.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, it can be said that cultural practices greatly contribute to creating a connection between members of diasporas and their homelands (Cohen 2022). Cinema functions as a means by which diaspora members can view stories on the big screen that they truly relate to (Ravindran 2006). In addition, food serves as a cultural practice for diverse societies to allow members to maintain connections with their countries of origin (Perry 2017). This can be seen in Scotland, where chicken tikka masala is considered to be the national dish (Buettner 2008). Thus, it can be said that a mixing of cultures can be created through cultural exchange.

This research paper will study the cultural exchange between the nations of India and Malaysia from the 1990s onwards to the present day. This paper will hone in on the cultural artefacts of food and cinema. Moreover, the participants who are involved in this research are people of the Indian diaspora. They are aged between their teenage years and their sixties. It must be said that insider bias could have been a factor at play when industry specialists were interviewed. This topic is personal to the author, as the author is a member of the Indian diaspora in Malaysia. The author harbours a particular interest in how Indian

entertainment and food may contribute to cultural exchange in a variety of ways. Indians constitute approximately 7.3% of Malaysia’s population today. Therefore, they are one of the largest and most culturally rooted minorities in current-day Malaysia (Velmurugan and Rajalakshmi 2025). The authors’ research will contribute to the small corpus of research on Indian-Malaysian cultural exchange.

Firstly, this study will look at how cinematic exchange between India and Malaysia has evolved from the 1990s to the present, across cinema halls, VCD/DVD culture, satellite TV, and streaming-era circulation. It will then analyse the shift in genre preferences for Indian films over several years. The author will also investigate how diaspora food spaces, such as restaurants like Banana Leaf, are cultural hubs in which cinema is promoted and discussed. This provides evidence for the claim that food and cinema play an integral role in contributing to the creation of diasporic identity. As will be later expanded on in the review of literature, this paper will address the significant gaps present in available research. Existing scholarship has tended to look at and view the topics of food culture and cinema through separate lenses when examining diasporic identity; however, there has not been an analysis of how the pair converges to construct modern Malaysian Indian identity. Furthermore, whilst a



transnational lens has been vaguely applied to the South Asian diasporas present in the world today, this paper will shed light on the ritualistic practices and everyday acts which Malaysian Indians participate in that create their sense of 'Indianness'. This paper, unlike existing literature, will unpack the role of post-film meals and cinema-influenced food desires amongst the Indian Malaysian diaspora, and its ramifications on the community.

This research paper comprises four primary sections. The first is a review of the literature. The second section looks at the methodology, which looks at the author's usage of data. The third is a discussion chapter that displays the findings of the data. Lastly, a conclusion that maps out the future directions in which this research can be developed.

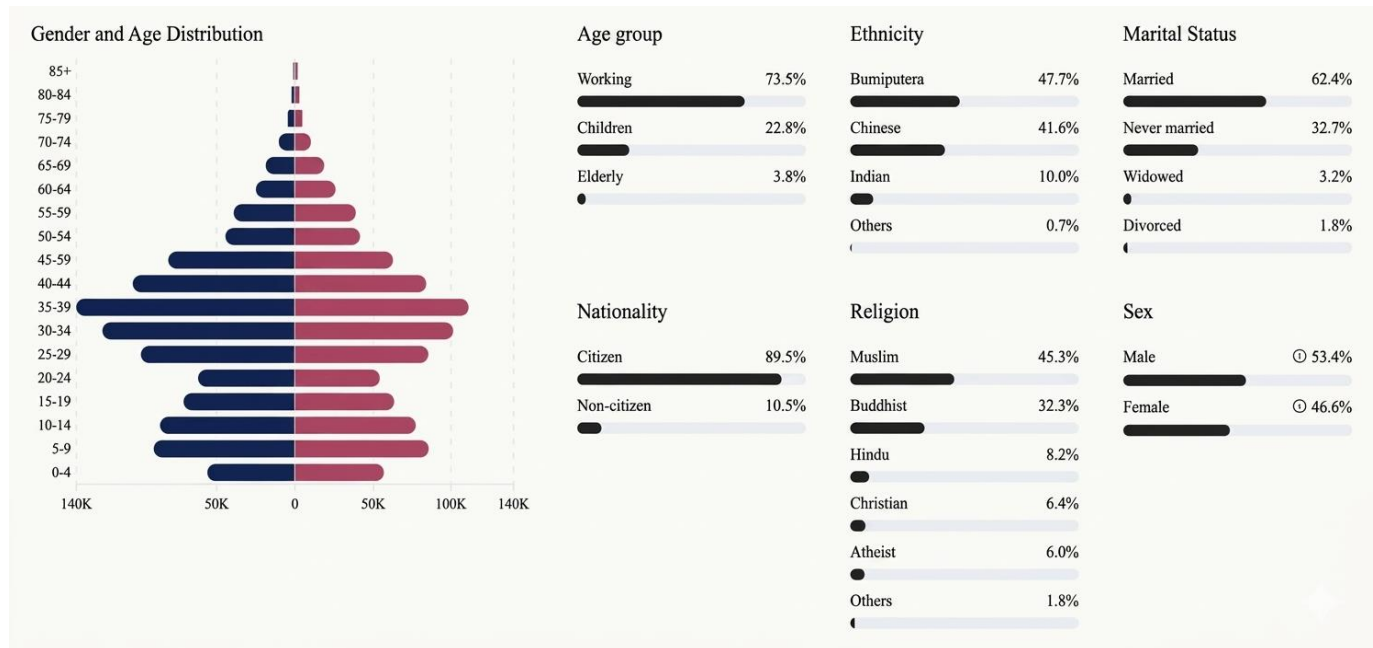


Fig. 1 The ethnicity percentages of Kuala Lumpur's population

As visible in the data above from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), when looking specifically at Kuala Lumpur, Indians constitute 10% of the population, demonstrating that there is a substantial percentage of Indians in the population of Kuala Lumpur.

2. Review of Literature

Current research on the topic of Indo-Malaysian migration states that it is heavily rooted within culture itself and has managed to construct diasporic communities that have become a part of Malaysian society (Velmurugan and Rajalakshmi 2025). Although this is the case, the outcome of the migration that occurs differs depending on the region of Malaysia in which it has occurred. For example, on the one hand, Peninsular Malaysia encouraged the display of Tamil culture and welcomed Tamil institutions (Velmurugan and Rajalakshmi 2025). Conversely, migration that occurred towards Sabah created separate diasporic groups, who integrated themselves with the indigenous population of the region; This integration was a result of interethnic marriage (Yusoff 2024). These differences demonstrate how Indian diasporic identity in Malaysia is influenced by the demographics of certain regions in the country.

Scholars such as Ravindran have highlighted that the process of cultural exchange has greatly contributed to the reshaping of South Indian cinema; this is done through migration to South East Asia. Events like the Indian partition of 1947 and the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 created a situation where migration is forced. These changes encouraged filmmakers to centre films around ideas like identity. As the Indian population in foreign nations gradually increased, producers and directors started to incorporate themes of connection to homelands and migrations more frequently in their films. (Bandyopadhyay 2008). Therefore, cinema becomes a medium through which members of the diaspora can determine and create their own identities. (Ravindran 2006). This can be seen in an audience survey: "Indian Tamil television serials provide a source of cultural knowledge to Malaysian Indian youths, and they are able to identify with the cultural practices like dressing, language, worship, traditions, and gender shown in these serials" (Balraj 2006, p. 30). Piecing together the puzzle is essential here. Second-and-third generation Malaysian Indians fear that they may lose their connection to their home country, so mediums such as movies prove useful in bridging this gap (Ravindran 2006). The culture and language that diaspora members can relate to on the big screen allows these

same second- and third-generation Malaysian Indians to stay in touch with their culture and heritage. However, migrant viewers shape and form their own ideas of the movies they view. Therefore, cinema plays a role in influencing and reshaping the Indian diaspora in Malaysia and is not merely a reflection of it (Ravindran 2006).

Anthropologist Steven Vertovec argues that transnationalism is the process by which migrants have lasting effects on both their homelands and place of settlement, culturally and socially. He claims this to be achieved through their sustained cross-border ties. This can be linked back to the circulation of Tamil cinema and culinary practices between India and Malaysia, which can be looked at over the course of this paper (Vertovec 2009). In addition, scholar and filmmaker Hamid Naficy, who has several cultural studies focusing on diasporas, introduced the concept of 'accented cinema'. A concept that illustrates how diasporic films are heavily influenced by the displacement and political beliefs of their audiences. In the context of Malaysian Indian cinema, it can be said that its Indian diasporic viewers incorporate their own transitional experiences into Tamil cinema - reaffirming their cultural belonging (Naficy 2001).

Culinary culture both connects and divides communities around the world. This is due to the fact that it has the capability to be a point of connection for certain groups of people, but it can also mark those who do not belong. Amongst diasporic communities globally, culinary practices foster a sense of home in individuals, as "food expresses love and affection, creates bonds and triggers positive nostalgia of home, family and friendships" (Melissa Shamini Perry 2017). In spite of that, food is also something that creates or exposes divides between varying ethnic communities, as "traditional food" is determined by a person's heritage (Md Ramli et al. 2016). Dishes that are "traditional" per se are associated with ancestry and background. This is due to them representing the identities of their nations of origin and ethnic affiliations (Md Ramli et al. 2016). The differences that food creates for people apply even for migrants who eventually become citizens, as an individual's race and background are what are fundamentally looked at.

Whilst the author has examined the works of different scholars on the topic of Indian and Malaysian migration (Rajalakshmi 2025; Yusoff 2024), alongside views of scholars on cinema in Malaysia (Ravindran 2006; Balraj 2006), and food cultures (Perry 2017; Muniandy et al. 2023), traditionally these concepts are looked at separately as cultural indicators, often overlooking the larger narrative around identity. The author intends to examine how cinematic exchange between India and Malaysia has changed from the 1990s to the post-globalisation era, across cinema halls, VCD/DVD culture, satellite TV, and streaming-era circulation. Moreover, the author will expand on box-office

data links to audience composition. Finally, I will explore how diaspora food spaces serve as cultural hubs where Indian cinema is promoted in Malaysia. A link between film fandom and community belonging will be established. Linking food and cinema, and exploring them as crucial aspects of diasporic identity, has helped the author highlight the role of these artefacts in the reimagination and recreation of a syncretic identity among the members of the Indian diaspora in Malaysia. This paper intends to present the process of identity formation in a postcolonial state by the diasporic group, which has also been colonised previously.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach. It is phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology can be defined as "the study of lived experience and the ways in which individuals make sense of that experience" (Moustakas 1994). Furthermore, this research paper has attempted to understand the true value of the Indian diaspora in Malaysia in things such as cinema and culinary experiences. The primary research site for this paper is Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; this can be attributed to the city's appeal to the Indian diaspora. Additionally, all participants are aged between 15 and 60. This large range of ages provides a broad spectrum of differing interests in food and cinema amongst resident adolescents, first-generation immigrants, and members of the established diaspora from predominantly affluent backgrounds (including students, technology engineers, business professionals, and small food business entrepreneurs). Interviews were conducted with 7 participants, along with 4 different observation sessions. However, according to estimates, there are 198,000 Indians living in Kuala Lumpur (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2022); the sample size of 7 interviews was due to the scope of the research and was in accordance with ethical considerations. The interview transcripts were coded, as a variety of themes emerged over the course of the interview process due to the wide demographic of participants. In terms of the sampling method, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling can be defined as the "method of recruitment in which participants refer the researcher to other potential participants" (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). The method of snowball sampling allows for the location of local participants by making use of the networks of those contacted for research.

The research method that was used for this paper was ethnography. It entails observation and short semi-structured interviews. An observation guide can be described as "a structured framework used to record field observations systematically" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Whereas an interview guide, on the other hand, is said to be "a prepared list of topics and questions that directs the course of a qualitative interview" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Together, the pair of methods allowed for the presentation of the findings of each individual participant in a nuanced manner.

Moreover, the entirety of the primary data was collected over a two-week period. The qualitative data was analysed thematically - this was achieved by developing codes from the field notes and eventually categorising them. As a process, coding entailed going through the interview transcripts and categorising the information shared by the participants under different 'codes', which are thematic identifiers. Thematic analysis is said to be the "method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Additionally, descriptive analysis is also said to be "the statistical summarisation of data to describe patterns and distributions" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The entirety of the data is processed manually. Both techniques are relevant to the research topic, as they help explain how patterns of cultural consumption (of movies and cinema) affect social identity. Triangulating the two methods (key themes and understanding around dietary patterns and cinematic viewing culture) and their complementary analysis will address the key objectives of the research. Triangulation can be defined as the combination of differing methodologies in an attempt to study the same phenomenon (Denzin 2017). This will ensure that the conclusions drawn at the end of the paper do not simply rely upon a singular source of data alone.

None of the participants belonged to vulnerable or endangered categories. Only publicly accessible open data is used for this research. No sensitive personal information is collected from the participants. In addition, confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms for the names of participants. This is a student research project with informal safeguards in place.

4. Discussion

The influence of cinema on culinary practices is clearly visible, based on the data collected for this research. This influence takes place through cinematic interaction, as visual exposure for the audience to foods whilst watching cinema gradually shapes their eating habits. One particular respondent (17 years of age) brought this to attention by claiming, "A lot of Kollywood movies show individuals eating Maggi," which led to a shift in his personal consumption habits and a preference for Maggi. This change represents a globalised shift towards cinema as an immersive experience rather than one that portrays an everyday narrative, revealing gradual changes in patterns of media consumption (Appadurai 1996). Another participant reported developing a liking for Pipe Appalams after viewing certain films. These examples highlight how cinema fosters further intimate connection with existing food cultures and culinary practices by integrating newer, culturally diverse flavours and tastes into everyday consumption.

Moreover, a trip to the cinema is not merely about viewing the film; it also entails engaging in broader socio-cultural activities within the Tamilian diasporic community

in Malaysia. This is visible when a respondent (27 years of age) claimed, "Going to the cinemas, watching these movies and eating outside afterwards, has become a ritual during festival time," demonstrating how cinema has orchestrated the curation of certain cultural culinary rituals amongst diasporic cinema goers, such as "eating chicken biryani after a Vijay film". Movies have also popularised certain foods through visual representation, such as laddoo, barfi, and pani puri, even though pani puri is not traditionally part of South Indian cuisine. Observational findings support these conclusions, as a prominent restaurant owner in South-Eastern Kuala Lumpur confirmed a drastic increase in customer numbers in the event of a major film release, with the clientele desiring "an Indian meal to cap off the day." The restaurant itself included culturally themed decor, with classic Tamil music hits from the late 1970s and 80s playing in the background throughout the evening, and contained a diverse menu from all over the country. Items that featured included 'Kadai paneer Punjabi', 'Kashmiri Naan', and 'Banana leaf meals'. This demonstrates how food plays a vital role in shaping a curated Indian identity heavily influenced by cinema.

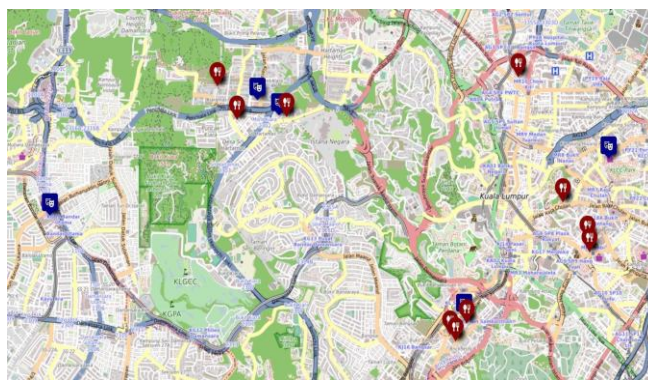


Fig. 2 Spatial distribution of restaurants and cinemas in Kuala Lumpur

Legend:

- Red Dropdown Markers - Indian Restaurants
- Blue Square Markers - Cinemas

The spatial proximity between Indian restaurants and theatres in Kuala Lumpur that showcase Indian movies further reflects how spatial convenience and access can lead to the clubbing of activities into a consolidated "Indian experience". It is clearly visible that there are clusters of restaurants and cinemas across different regions of Kuala Lumpur. The two regions that most prominently display clustering are Brickfields, which is located in the southwestern side of Kuala Lumpur, and Mont Kiara, which is located in the northwestern region of Kuala Lumpur; both are known for the significant presence of the Indian diaspora in the respective regions. Brickfields is even described as a historical Indian ethnic enclave in Kuala Lumpur (Leclerc 2012). The geographical overlap establishes the notion that cinemas and restaurants act as interconnected spaces for

cultural exchange to occur on a daily basis for the Indian diaspora in Kuala Lumpur. Cinemas serve as a medium for cultural consumption through films and the arts, whilst restaurants in nearby areas expand on this experience through culinary offerings. Together, they provide an overall culturally immersive experience for the Indian diasporic audience. This claim is reinforced by a respondent (21 years old) who expressed, “My family almost always eats Indian food outside after watching a movie.” Scholarly arguments also analyse how food sites aid in the construction of cultural identity amongst the diasporic communities (Bell and Valentine 1997). Therefore, the clusters on this map indicate that cinema and food are not separate practices for members of the Tamil diaspora, but are intertwined spatially and socially as sites of cultural exchange.

In addition, this is clear when observing local restaurant spaces that are visibly attempting to manufacture an ‘Indian’ environment through traditional Indian music, regional menus, and visual representations of Indian products. For example, visual imagery of items such as Amul milk, Parle-G biscuits, and other recognisable Indian brands present in the restaurant in Kuala Lumpur’s Little India evokes strong nostalgia and represents Indian identity. Avtar Brah, a prominent sociologist and pioneer for diaspora studies, highlights how identity is formed in “diasporic spaces” (Brah 2005). Therefore, the combination of both cinema and food plays a crucial role in the formation of identity for the Indian Malaysian diaspora. As one respondent mentioned (17 years of age), “Kollywood remains a huge part of Tamil identity, through its influence on my fashion sense and manner in which I talk, as I often find myself imitating signature

phrases of big stars,” illustrating the importance of cinema in strengthening ethnic identity. Moreover, the same respondent highlighted that cinema symbolises “a way to connect with family and friends,” positioning itself as an aspect of everyday social life for the diaspora. Another respondent (46 years old) noted that Tamil films “bring my family together”, confirming the notion that it becomes a part of their routine. Taking into consideration the consumption of Indian food after watching a film or following a festival release, such as Deepavali, these lived experiences form a unique identity that helps the diaspora stay connected to their ethnic identities. This demonstrates that cultural identity is fostered not only by geographical location but also by the constant exchange of dynamic cultural artefacts, such as films from the diaspora’s country of origin, highlighting how identity is ever-changing (Hall 2015). As one respondent stated (24 years old), Tamil films are ‘something which is loved amongst the community’ and ‘often remains a discussion at the dinner table.’ Conversations include ‘political discussion’, showing the role of these cultural artefacts in forming everyday cultural literacy.

A prominent Malaysian Tamil film producer, who has produced hits like ‘Jagat’ and ‘Macai’, reveals a clear preference among the Malaysian Tamil population for Indian Tamil films over Malay Tamil films, asserting the importance of ‘Indianness’ for the Tamil diaspora through cinema. It must be acknowledged that his views may not represent those of the entire industry. As the producer stated, “even second- and third-generation Malaysian Tamilians still primarily prefer Indian Tamil films” despite them having lived in Malaysia for decades.

No	Year	Number of International Tamil Film Released	Number of Local Malaysian Tamil Films Released	Gross Ticket Collection For International Films	Gross Ticket Collection For Local Films
1	2019	146	8	RM65,481,899.00	RM1,647,743.91
2	2020	36	4	RM11,217,422.00	RM89,396.08
3	2021	12	2	RM3,149,330.00	RM317,787.07
4	2022	67	13	RM48,197,765.00	RM1,322,502.27
5	2023	67	12	RM62,475,134.00	RM1,322,502.27
6	2024	44	11	RM54,116,555.00	RM3,814,139.82
7	2025	57	10	RM48,393,657.00	RM634,839.33

Fig. 3 Difference Between International and Malaysian Tamil Film Production and Box Office Revenue in Malaysia (2019-2025)

Figure 3, based on FINAS data, demonstrates the disparity in production between international and Malaysian Tamil Films. Between the years 2019 and 2025, a total of 60 local Tamil Malaysian films were released in Malaysia. Conversely, in the same 7-year period, 429 international Tamil films were released in Malaysia, more than seven times the number of local Tamil films. In addition, north of 290 million Malaysian Ringgit was generated in box office earnings from international Tamil film releases, whereas only

approximately 72 million Malaysian Ringgit was generated from local Tamil films. These trends reflect a trend of audience preference and the audience’s larger role in contributing towards the portrayal of the diasporic identity. This reflects the diaspora’s aspirations to strengthen ties with their country of origin. Furthermore, the greater performance of Indian Tamil films at the box office as opposed to Malaysian Tamil films reinforces the idea that the diasporic community typically chooses to consume entertainment that

more closely resonates with their inherited culture, rather than aligning more greatly with what Homi K. Bhabha determined to be the 'cultural hybridity' of their Indo-Malaysian identity (Bhabha 1994).

This inclination is not merely a reflection of diaspora preference; it can also be linked to the industrial dynamics of Malaysian cinema. According to the producer, the screening of Indian Tamil films in Malaysia, which has been around for roughly 100 years longer than Malaysian Tamil films, brings to light the reality that diaspora audiences have grown accustomed to the higher budgets, scale, and magnitude of Indian cinema. The value of the star power of actors such as Vijay and Rajinikanth only intensifies the attractiveness of Indian Tamil cinema in the eyes of the Indian Malaysian diaspora. Therefore, cinema positions itself as a means of cultural exchange that fosters a link for the diaspora back to their homeland and plays a crucial role in shaping their cultural identity. It also simultaneously highlights how local stories of the Tamil Malaysian diaspora do not receive the response from the diasporic community, who are further invested in the exotic idea of an Indian identity, rather than the pressing reality of what they face on an everyday basis.

Furthermore, how genre preferences have evolved over the years, especially rapidly in the post-pandemic period, is a fascinating topic. The producer highlights how "audiences now prefer more action, bigger visuals, and larger-than-life stories, symbolising the shift towards action-oriented cinematic experiences, whereas previously, 'romantic and comedic styles of movies' were better appreciated. This is in line with the finding that the Malaysian Tamil diaspora has a visible inclination towards action-dominated cinema rather than viewing stories regarding their everyday realities. Additionally, this is similar to the earlier findings of the research, where the respondent (18 years old) stated they "love to watch action movies the most, because these always have the greatest amount of anticipation and publicity amongst the Tamil community," once more shedding light on the Tamil diaspora in Malaysia's love for 'larger than life' and opulence in an unpredictable world.

5. Conclusion

This research paper examined cultural exchange between India and Malaysia through two forms of media that are inherently connected: food and cinema. The study looks primarily at aspects of life that occur on a daily basis, not political or economic ties between the respective nations. Practices related to food, such as festival-related, special occasion dining, and post-cinema food rituals, have proven themselves to foster feelings of belonging within diasporic communities. As declared earlier, studies already conducted by scholars on the topic of migration, cinema, and food culture (Velmurugan and Rajalakshmi 2025; Yusoff 2024; Ravindran 2006; Balraj 2006; Perry 2017; Muniandy et al. 2023) have always been examined through distinct lenses. It

was proven that cinematic exchange and food culture allowed for the preservation of identity for members of the diaspora. This was achieved through practices such as diasporic social networking when engaging in culinary and cinematic activities.

However, there were several limitations that must be taken into consideration. The first limitation was that the entirety of the research was collected in a four-month period. If there were a longer amount of time available, it would have permitted a greater collection of secondary data and further interviews to be conducted. Another limitation is the lack of gender diversity in the primary data, which would have significantly altered the results, particularly around film fandom and the idea of food as a form of labour. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the majority of the people interviewed came from affluent sections of the diasporic society; the author intends future research to be more class diverse, which will aid in gauging how fandom and food are affiliated, along with how the concept of eating out worlds differently for individuals of varying class groups. In addition, the National Archives of Malaysia were visited, yet a lot of the available archival material was not relevant to Indo-Malaysia cultural exchange post the 1990s. The time frame that applied to the ethnographies also imposed restrictions on the author's ability to collect observations, resulting in a lesser number of restaurants and cinemas being visited. Also, another limitation that was encountered by the author was that Tamil is not his first language. This hindered his ability to access certain local cinematic fan clubs and insider spaces. Thus, the author's ability to gain further insight into the Tamil diasporic audience in Malaysia was significantly hindered. Finally, relying on a single producer's analysis and opinion of the entire Tamil film industry in Malaysia proved limiting.

Despite these limitations, the data that was collected succeeded in fulfilling the authors' research objectives. Interviews with relevant individuals in both the cinema and food industries, such as restaurant owners and film producers, provided insights into the interplay between culinary practices, cinema, star culture, identity formation, and the divide between local Tamil Malaysian films and Indian Tamil films in Malaysia. In addition, observations conducted at local Indian restaurants across different regions of Kuala Lumpur illustrated how Indian identity was constructed through menus, traditional music, decor, Indian-imported and hyperlocal ingredients, and consumer perceptions of Indian food. The secondary data, collected through spatial mapping and film industry reporting, aided in framing an understanding of patterns of identity formation amongst the diaspora.

This research opens the door for the author to study this topic at an undergraduate level. The author desires to continue along the path of exploring the differing aspects of

cultural belonging and how identity is forged. However, for the author to go down that path, they would like to do it with a larger sample size of interviews and perhaps engage in researching for a comparative study across a variety of ethnic communities in Malaysia. The author in the future would also like to determine the extent to which food and cinema contribute to the formation of the third culture identity and whether they take on a role of soft power as well. Moreover, the author intends to collect data from a quantitative survey to test whether the qualitative patterns identified in the paper hold at scale across the wider Malaysian Tamil population when completing further studies. Further studies in this field could analyse the digital industry by engaging with online fan culture. The author would love to understand the effect that juggling multiple ethnic backgrounds has on the younger generation of diaspora members across the world.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that could have influenced the research, findings, or conclusions presented in this paper.

Author Contribution Statement

The author, Ved Chuckarbutty, has come up with this novel research idea and research design. He has written the literature review and collected all primary data through semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations across restaurant and cinema spaces in Kuala Lumpur. Ved has performed thematic and descriptive analysis of all qualitative and secondary data. He has written the manuscript in its entirety.

References

- [1] Arjun Appadurai, "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization," *International Migration Review*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 1073-1074, 1998. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [2] N.V. Prasad, and Shanthi Balraj, "The Construction of Cultural Identity: Malaysian Indian Youth Reading the Indian Tamil Television Serial," *Malaysian Screen Journal*, vol. 3, pp. 15-33, 2006. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [3] Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, "Nostalgia, Identity and Tourism: Bollywood in the Indian Diaspora," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Exchange*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 79-100, 2008. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [4] David Bell, and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We are where we Eat*, 1st ed., Routledge, London, 2013. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [5] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London, 1994. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [6] Patrick Biernacki, and Dan Waldorf, "Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling," *Sociological Methods and Research*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 141-163, 1981. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [7] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, 1st ed., Routledge, London, 2005. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [8] Elizabeth Buettner, "Going for an Indian": South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 80, no. 4, pp. 865-901, 2008. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [9] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., Routledge, 2022. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [10] Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed., SAGE Publications, 2011. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [11] Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 1st ed., Routledge, London, 2017. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [12] Department of Statistics Malaysia, "Key Findings: Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 2020," *Department of Statistics Malaysia*, 2022. [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [13] FINAS, National Film Development Corporation Malaysia, FINAS, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://focus.london/newfront/exhibitor/national-film-development-corporation-malaysia-finas>
- [14] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 1st ed., Routledge, pp. 392-403, 1994. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [15] Éric Leclerc, "Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur): A Former Ethnic Enclave for the New Trans-State Strategies of Indian IT Professionals," *E-Migraines*, vol. 8, pp. 87-103, 2012. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [16] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, 1994. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [17] Tamil Arasi Muniandy et al., "The Dining Culture and its Well-being: A Case Study of the Indians in Klang Valley, Malaysia," *Conference e-Proceedings Conference Proceeding the 8th Southeast Asia International Philanthropy Conference 2023 (SEAIPC2023)*, Waterfront Hotel, Kuching, Sarawak, pp. 1-15, 2023. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [18] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, 2001. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [19] Melissa Shamini Perry, "Feasting on Culture and Identity: Food Functions in a Multicultural and Transcultural Malaysia," *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 184-199, 2017. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]

- [20] Adilah Md Ramli et al., “The Knowledge of Food Heritage Identity in Klang Valley, Malaysia,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 222, pp. 518-527, 2016. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [21] Gopalan Ravindran, “Negotiating Identities in the Diasporic Space: Transnational Tamil Cinema and Malaysian Indians,” *Cultural Space and Public Sphere in Asia*, Seoul, Korea, pp. 240-256, 2006. [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [22] uMap, Create Maps with OpenStreetMap Data, OpenStreetMap. [Online]. Available: <https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/>
- [23] S. Velmurugan, and A. Rajalakshmi, “Cultural and Heritage Connections between Malaysia and India: A Shared Legacy,” *Journal of Indian Studies*, vol. 17, pp. 66-74, 2025. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]
- [24] Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, Routledge, 2009. [[Google Scholar](#)]
- [25] Nasir Yusoff, “Acculturation of Indian Minority in Malay Majority Culture: A Narrative Review from the Cultural Neuroscience Perspective,” *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 1276-1290, 2024. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Publisher Link](#)]

Appendix 1

Observation Guide:

- Where is the restaurant/kiosk/cinema hall located? In Little India, some Indian dominated neighbourhood or someplace else?
- What do the interiors of the space look like? What do you see on the posters, walls, banners, and advertisement boards?
- How is the menu arranged in terms of layout, color scheme, pictures, special offers, etc.?
- Do the names of certain dishes refer back to popular culture or cinematic references?
- Is there any explicit claim being made about authenticity or sourcing the ingredients from India?
- In restaurants, is there any cultural reference or advertisement alluding to Indian movies (classic or upcoming)?
- In a cinema hall, is there a kiosk/pop-up selling local Indian snacks?
- What is the demographic and ethnicity of the clientele who visit this space?
- Are there more individuals or groups of friends/families visiting?

Interview guide:

Indian diasporic youth

- How often do you watch Tamil movies, and where do you usually watch them, in a theatre or on tv?
- What genre of Tamil film do you love to watch most? Why so?
- When you watch Tamil films, does it make you feel more connected to your cultural roots? If so, in what ways?
- Is this the case for your family and friends as well?
- Is there a particular Indian dish you have developed a liking for after watching it in some movie?
- Have you ever ordered an Indian movie souvenir or food ingredient directly from India after it was hyped in the movies or popular media?
- Have you ever attended special movie screenings organized by fan clubs? If so, how different has the experience been from the usual movie watching?
- When Tamilian movies are released during festival time, does it influence your chances of watching a movie or dining out?
- Has there been any change in your preference for Tamil movies’ genres over time?

South Asian restaurant owners

- Do major movie releases affect the number of customers present at your restaurant?
- Have you ever incorporated Tamilian film promotion, for example, posters or themed menus, to attract customers?
- What types of customers most typically come to your restaurant? Students, recent immigrants or working professionals?
- During festival season or in the aftermath of a major Tamil cinematic release, do you notice changes in food orders or between the groups of people that come to dine?
- Is there any particular dish in your menu that is an ode to a cinematic cult classic or an actor’s favorite, like Vijay’s favorite mutton biryani?
- Do you feel traditional Indian food helps maintain Indian cultural identity in Malaysia? If this is the case, how and why is this?
- Where do you source your ingredients from?
- Are there any specific ingredients that you source directly from India? If so, do you advertise it as such?

- What is the ethnic composition of your clientele? How have you adapted your menu to suit your clientele?

Local Indian cinema owners

- Over the past 30 years, how has demand for Tamil cinema in Malaysia evolved, and where does it stand today within the broader Malaysian film industry?
- How would you describe the current audience composition for Malaysian Tamil cinema?
- What trends have emerged in audience genre preferences, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic?
- To what extent have generational changes influenced audience preferences for Tamil films?
- How have streaming platforms affected film consumption and distribution within the Malaysian Tamil film industry?
- What impact does star power have on audience attendance and film performance?
- How does fan culture influence audience engagement with Tamil cinema?
- What are the respective roles of cinemas and streaming platforms in the contemporary film landscape?
- How do Tamil films shape cultural identity among Malaysian Indians?
- What key challenges does the Malaysian Tamil film industry currently face?
- What opportunities and challenges do you foresee for the future development of Malaysian Tamil cinema?