



**An Analysis of Four Representations of South African Indian Women's Identities in
Jayan Moodley's *Kandasamy* Films (2017 – 2023)**

Submitted by Zoë Govender

Student Number: 219033266

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

ENGLISH STUDIES

**School of Arts, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg,
South Africa.**

November 2025

Supervised by

Dr Samiksha Laltha

(Supervisor)

DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate Programme in English Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Zoë Ursula Govender, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
 - b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Zoë Ursula Govender

Student Name

Signature

November 2025

Date

Dr Samiksha Laltha

Name of Supervisor

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement and support I received from family, friends, and my supervisor – my most heartfelt thanks to you all.

To Dr Samiksha Laltha, thank you for supervising and supporting me through this process. Your encouragement, patience, and advice have been invaluable.

To my dad, Ivan, thank you for being unwavering in your encouragement and support, especially when the road was rough. To my mom, Ursula, thank you for your prayers and listening to my incoherent ideas until they started to make sense. To my siblings, Zachary, Daniel, and Zara-Ann, thank you all for your encouragement and expressions of sympathy for my struggles. Thank you all for your love, expressions of interest, and belief in me – it made the process infinitely less daunting.

I thank God for giving me the wisdom, strength, and ability to complete this dissertation, and for sustaining me throughout the process.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the National Research Foundation for their financial assistance towards this research. The opinions expressed and conclusions reached in this research are those of the author and are not necessarily reflect those of the NRF.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
Research Gap.....	1
Relevance of the Topic.....	1
Synopsis of Films.....	3
Cultural Impact of the <i>Kandasamys</i>	4
Literature Review.....	6
Superwoman, Sita, or Senile? The Stereotypes that Jennifer, Shanti, and Aya (Re)Present...	10
Characterisation, Vectors of Identity, and Stereotypes.....	15
Changing Perceptions of South African Indian Women.....	19
Additional Social Factors Contributing to Perceptions, Representations, and Expectations of South African Indian Women.....	23
Matriarchal Societies	23
The ‘Monster’-in-Law.....	24

Previous Representations of Women Characters in South African Indian Literature and Film.....	25
Acknowledgement of Previous Research on South African Indian Literature and Film.....	27
Research Methods.....	31
Theoretical Framework.....	33
Understanding Identity.....	36
Intersectionality.....	37
Cultural Studies.....	38
Postcolonialism.....	38
Feminism.....	39
Feminist Film Theory.....	39
Summary of Chapters.....	41
Conclusion	45
Chapter One: Aya’s (Re)Presentation of Old Women On-Screen.....	47
Introduction	47
Representing and Challenging Stereotypical Representations of Old Women in Film.....	47
Aya as Sita Reimagined	54
Conclusion	57
Chapter Two: Superwoman vs. Sita, Jennifer and Shanti’s Representation of Two Ideal Identities	59
Introduction	59

Jennifer	60
Superwoman at Work and to the World.....	61
Superwoman at Home.....	62
<i>Jennifer, the Not-so-Super Mom</i>	62
<i>Food Fuelled Identity</i>	65
<i>Identity Validation at Work vs. Invalidation at Home and the Importance of Support for ‘Supermom’</i>	66
Shanti	70
The Domestic Sita	71
Shanti, the No- so-Perfect Mother	72
The Recognition of Sita.....	73
Shanti’s Resistance of Restriction	75
Superwoman and Sita, Sisters	78
Scene Analysis of the Opening Scene in <i>Keeping Up With the Kandasamys</i>	79
Conclusion.....	92
Chapter Three: Jodi’s Negotiation of Identity	93
Introduction	93
Jodi the Everywoman	93
Jodi and Jennifer: Mother-Daughter Relationships	97
Women as Sites of Negotiation: Food as a Metaphor for Cultural Change	102
Attitudes Towards Mental Health: Jodi, Jennifer, and Post-Partum Depression	105

Conclusion.....	110
Conclusion.....	112
Further Considerations.....	119
Bibliography	121

ABSTRACT

South African Indian literature features a variety of texts that both focus on South African Indian women and are created by South African Indian women. These texts, however, are not representative of present day South African Indian women's identities and experiences. South African Indian film fares little better and the existent literature reflects this. The aim of this dissertation is to provide a starting point for filling the research gap on contemporary South African Indian women's identities as represented in literature and film and the research gap regarding South African Indian film. It also seeks to contribute to the research that reads film as text as filmic representations are often accessible to larger audiences and play an important role in (re)presenting identities both locally and internationally. This aim is achieved through an analysis of four South African Indian women characters, Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi, in Jayan Moodley's *Kandasamy* films – *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (2017), *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (2019), *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (2021), and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (2023).

An intersectional feminist cultural studies framework is employed in analysing Aya, Jennifer Kandasamy, Shanti Naidoo, and Jodi Kandasamy's representations and re-presentations of South African Indian women's identities in order to account for the influence of ethnicity, age (generation), and faith on the creation, expression, and expectations of "woman". Aya is shown to re-present older woman as complex individuals who are active agents in their lives and as challenging the narrative of passive acceptance and longsuffering that is associated with South African Indian women, especially of her generation. Jennifer and Shanti are shown representing two often conflicting identities – the modernised Superwoman and the traditional Sita. They reveal that no matter the individual identity of the woman, she is still expected to be a good mother and quietly accept double burdens and marginalisation. Shanti is also shown to challenge women's invisibility, amongst other expectations, as her husband learns to value and actively appreciate her for who she is as a person. Jodi is shown to represent women, daughters especially, as sites of negotiation for identity and culture, facilitating Jennifer's realisation of her own identity and bridging the gap between tradition and western cultural demands to create a hybrid identity for herself. Through Jodi, South African Indian women are represented as agents within their culture rather than passive

participants and South African Indian culture is presented as fluid and alive as opposed to static and stagnant

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation analyses the representations of three generations of women characters, Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi, in Jayan Moodley's four *Kandasamy* films (2017 – 2023). I employ a feminist cultural studies framework to analyse selected representations and re-presentations of stereotypes that affect South African Indian women in my selected texts and the position of women as sites for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture within the South African Indian community, represented in and through the four selected films.

Research Gap

As this dissertation analyses South African Indian women's identities and experiences of the present as told by South African Indian women, it fills the research gap regarding the present identities and representations of South African Indian women. Furthermore, in reading the selected films as literary texts, this dissertation fills the literary research gap regarding representations of South African Indian women's identities in mainstream media. Additionally, this dissertation contributes to field of film studies, focusing on South African Film, specifically South African Indian film of which there is little work at present.

Relevance of the Topic

The films analysed in this dissertation are: *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (2017), *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (2019), *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (2021), and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (2023). All four films were directed by Jayan Moodley, a South African Indian woman, who was also involved in creating the screenplay with Rory Booth for the first three films and Jailoshini Naidoo and Yugan Naidoo for the fourth. The characters analysed in this dissertation are Aya (Mariam Bassa), Jennifer Kandasamy (Jailoshini Naidoo), Shanti Naidoo (Maeshini Naiker), and Jodi Kandasamy (Mishqah Parthiephal). All four characters are played by South African Indian women.

Aya is analysed for her representation and re-presentation of the old woman on screen and her re-presentation of Sita, ultimately challenging negative stereotypes associated with old women and oppressive expectations of South African Indian women. Aya subverts the expectation of South African Indian women as passive and at the mercy of their husbands. Jennifer and Shanti are analysed for their representations of the Superwoman and Sita stereotypes, respectively. Both the Superwoman and Sita identities describe a type of ideal woman and Jennifer and Shanti present some of the realities of trying to embody their respective identities. They reveal that no matter the individual identity of the woman, she is still expected to be a good mother and quietly accept double burdens and marginalisation. Their failure to live up the ideal identities of Superwoman and Sita, as mothers especially, contributes to their subversions of expected, stereotypical behaviour as they are shown to be people with complex lives rather than background characters who contribute to a man's or their children's success as South African Indian women often are portrayed. Finally, Jodi is analysed as a site for the negotiation of identity and culture, thus presenting South African Indian women as agents within their culture rather than passive participants and presenting South African Indian culture as fluid and alive as opposed to a static and stagnant.

The “cultural, societal, and spiritual factors that characterise” the representations found in film are worthy of examination, especially those created by women, as such representations offer an insight into female identity from a subjective point of view (Kappert in Mistry and Schuhmann, 2015: 13). This is not to say that male filmmakers and directors are incapable of presenting women's stories but rather that “in the same way that filmmakers from other parts of the world struggle to portray Africa and Africans, male filmmakers tend to look at the world through male glasses and not pay attention to female perspectives” (Hedren in Mistry and Schuhmann, 2015: 186). As a western viewpoint cannot fully present African experiences, a masculine viewpoint cannot fully give expression to women's experiences. Film, described by Jyoti Mistry and Antje Schuhmann (2015: x) “is a vehicle for releasing the repressed and the silenced, for remembering, altering and transforming narratives that might otherwise be forgotten”.

While the *Kandasamy* films do not foreground politics or history, the stories they tell of ordinary women are important to building a collective memory that is robust and therefore resistant to patriarchal and hegemonic pressures. To build a balanced and more accurately representative discourse around South African national cinema¹, which represents South African national identity, it is necessary to give attention to film created by women which reflects women's identities and experiences and reflect the diversity of South African women, which this dissertation does in analysing selected women characters from the *Kandasamys* films which were written and directed by a South African Indian woman. Furthermore, in addition to being more accessible to South African and international audiences when compared to other South African Indian films such as *Broken Promises* (Naidu, 2003)² and to written literature, the *Kandasamy* films are contemporary instead of historical. Thus, their impact in shaping notions of South African Indian identity is greater, making it necessary to examine and even criticise the representations of South Africa and South Africans that are found within the selected films.

Brief Synopsis of the Films

The films follow a linear story line, focusing on the drama of Jennifer Kandasamy and Shanti Naidoo's lives. The first two films are set in Chatsworth, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The third film primarily takes place in San Lameer, Southbroom, just under 150 kilometres southwest of Durban. The fourth film is set in Mauritius.

Keeping Up With the Kandasamys (Moodley, 2017) revolves around the relationship between Jodi Kandasamy, Jennifer's daughter and only child, and Prishen Naidoo, Shanti's elder son, and their mothers' attempts to break them up due to past grudges that resulted in a domestic cold war between the two women. Jennifer and Shanti are successful in separating their

¹ *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (2017) and *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (2019) were produced by African Lotus Productions. *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (2021) and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (2023) were produced by Ster Kinekor and African Lotus Productions respectively, and distributed by Netflix (Rotten Tomatoes, 2017. Online).

² The *Broken Promises* franchise (2003 – 2024), directed by Kumaran Naidu, had the first two films go straight to DVD. The third had a "limited cinema run" (Birjalal, 2018. Online). The fourth and fifth films were released in cinemas, yet are inaccessible otherwise. The first, second, and third films can be viewed via the director's YouTube channel though the films are broken into shorter clips which does not make for an ideal viewing experience. The third film is also available via Amazon Prime, and the fourth film is there, but inaccessible in South Africa.

children but soon realise that they have caused more hurt than they could have anticipated and work to reunite the two.

Kandasamys: The Wedding (Moodley, 2019), starts with an off-screen proposal and, as the title says, ends with a wedding. In-between those scenes, Jennifer and Shanti fight, Jodi struggles with Prishen's attachment to his mother, Jennifer meddles in Jodi's professional life and, the night before the wedding, it is almost called off.

In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), the three couples, along with Aya and Desan, are set to spend a weekend at the beach to celebrate Shanti's fiftieth birthday. Jennifer and Shanti plan to use this retreat as an opportunity to rekindle their romantic relationships with their respective husbands. Baby, Peggie's younger sister, makes a surprise appearance and completely derails Jennifer and Shanti's plans of a romantic weekend with their respective husbands. Jodi and Prishen, as happy as they are, are struggling to fall pregnant.

Kandasamys: The Baby (Moodley, 2023) takes on a more dramatic than comedic tone as the now grandparents travel to Mauritius to see their newborn granddaughter. Overbearing and interfering as per usual, Jennifer and Shanti try to find ways to wiggle out of the tight itinerary Jodi and Prishen prepared for them while Elvis and Peggie try to enjoy their vacation and keep their wives out of the new parents' way. Meanwhile, Jodi is struggling with post-partum depression and, back home in South Africa, Desan has become a school bully. This film has Jennifer and Shanti realising their shortcomings as people and parents and make efforts to rectify their oversights.

Cultural Impact of the *Kandasamys*

The films amassed a substantial fanbase with the first film grossing “more than R4 million at the box office in its first week and then [...] over R16 million, becoming the highest grossing film in South Africa for” 2017 as well as the “highest-grossing South African worldwide” (Newman, 2023. Online). *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019) was a box office

success and “was rated as one of the best African films of the year” in 2019. *Trippin’ With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), released by Netflix, “dominated the number one slot of the Top 10 films for weeks” in 2021. *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) “trended at number one [on Netflix], continuing that success throughout the weekend” during its release at the end of 2023.

Director Jayan Moodley and the cast were quite conscious of the stories they were trying to create in the films. Moodley describes the *Kandasamy* films as “a love letter to Chatsworth” (Naidoo, 2023. Online). Additionally, the films are “multi-generational” which allowed a wide range of people to relate to it. The positive representation of Chatsworth and its people made the *Kandasamys* a favourite with the South African Indian community and is likely to be the reason they were able to, as Moodley said, “[touch] the heart of the community” (Newman, 2018. Online). The third film, which was distributed by Netflix, allowed the celebration of South African Indian culture to be shared with the world.

In an interview for the third film, Yugan Naidoo, who plays Peggie, commented on the importance of humour in the films saying that Moodley makes conflicts in real life accessible by underpinning these conflicts in the films with humour. The humour allows people to “free themselves and [...] create an open space for the debate [about the issues and conflicts] to happen” (Parker, 2021. Online). Mishqah Parthiephal, who plays Jodi Kandasamy, describes the stories as “so honest and a true representation of our community [which] is what [they] carried from the first film to this [the third] film” (Parker, 2021. Online).

Talking about *Trippin’ With the Kandasamys*, Moodley, Maeshni Naiker, and Jailoshini Naidoo commented on the theme of “women empowerment and standing together” and how it is really highlighted in the film. They feel that the theme really “comes through [...] in the multigenerational aspect of the film [as] we get to hear” the voices of “four phenomenal women” (Parker, 2021. Online). They describe the fourth film, with its theme of parenting, as maintaining focus on the women with “the mother-and-child relationship between Shanti and her kids, Jennifer and her daughter, and Aya and her daughter-in-law” (Thangevelo, 2023. Online).

Literature Review

This section provides a summary of some of the key articles employed in this dissertation. Chapter One's key article is Femke De Sutter and Sofie Van Bauwel's "Uncovering the Hidden Bias: A Study on Ageism in Hollywood's Portrayal of Ageing Femininities in Romantic Comedies (2000 – 2021)" (2023), which identifies common stereotypical representations of older and old women. The selected article for Chapter Two is Nida B. Syed, Shashivadan P. Hirani, and Raheelah Ahmad's article "Superwoman Syndrome & Women's Health and Well-Being: A Systematic Review" (2025), which provides a starting point for the analysis of Jennifer's Superwoman identity. Shanti's Sita identity is explained and supported in the next section, and does not appear here. Finally, supporting my analysis of Jodi as a site for the negotiation of identity and culture, I have used Marianne Hirsch's article, "Mothers and Daughters" (1981), and Priyanka Padayachee and Sumaya Laher's article "South African Hindu Psychologists' Perceptions of Mental Illness" (2014).

In Femke De Sutter and Sofie Van Bauwel's "Uncovering the Hidden Bias: A Study on Ageism in Hollywood's Portrayal of Ageing Femininities in Romantic Comedies (2000 – 2021)" (2023), in which they analysed forty-four films Hollywood rom-coms, two for each year from 2000 to 2021 for their representations of older and ageing people, they note that "popular media often represent age negatively as a process of decline [...] the loss of youth" and that negative "representations of age contribute to the development of prejudicial attitudes and stereotypical beliefs, a phenomenon that is defined [...] as ageism" (20). Women, furthermore, suffer more than men as the "most recurring representations of ageing women [...] include depictions of them as witched, passive, and bossy" (21) and they lose visibility as they age, unlike men. De Sutter and Van Bauwel go on to identify four negative and three positive stereotypes that are common in depictions of older and ageing adults. The four negative stereotypes are "severely impaired, despondent, shrew/villain, and recluse" and the positive are "perfect grandparent, golden ager, and John Wayne conservative" (22).

In the films De Sutter and Van Bauwel analysed, the Golden Ager, Perfect Grandparent, Despondent, and Shrew stereotypes are represented. The Golden Ager "represents older adults

as optimistic, healthy, and active, people who enjoy leisure activities, volunteering, and contributing to society”; the Perfect Grandparent “idealizes older adults as wise, caring, and unconditionally loving grandparents”; the despondent stereotype “represents older adults as sad, lonely, and hopeless, and as characterized by declining health, loss of independence, and sense of isolation”; the Shrew stereotype “portrays older adults as difficult, argumentative, or bossy, often caricatured by their rigid adherence to rules and tendency to criticize others” (22). Representations of women showed them to be represented as the Golden Ager on par with men and were less often represented as the Perfect Grandparent but “were rather represented according to negative stereotypes” (27) of Despondent and Shrew. Within this very reductive representation, they found “little diversity in the older women represented [consisting] of mainly white, heterosexual (if mentioned at all), middle-class, and able-bodied women” (30) further demonstrating the invisibility that women face as they age. In concluding they note that even the positive representations of older and ageing people can contribute to their invisibility as these stereotypical presentations are often “difficult for many older adults to realise [...] [and] women who deviate from these stereotypes are often invisible” (31).

This study highlights the need for diverse, nuanced, and positive depictions of older people, women especially, in film. Chapter One examines Aya, the matriarch of the Kandasamy family. As the oldest character in the film franchise, it is necessary to consider the general depictions of older and ageing women in film. Using the stereotypes identified by De Sutter and Van Bauwel, Chapter One demonstrates how Aya both reinforces and challenges certain representations of old women, leading to a nuanced and overall positive depiction of old women. As a woman of colour, Aya can also be considered as contributing to a diversified representation of old women in film.

In Nida B. Syed, Shashivadan P. Hirani, and Raheelah Ahmad’s article “Superwoman Syndrome & Women’s Health and Well-Being: A Systematic Review” (2025), they define the superwoman syndrome as “a phenomenon where women feel compelled to excel in multiple roles – such as career, family, and personal life – often striving to ‘do it all’ and ‘have it all,’ while neglecting their own health and well-being” (86). They note that the existing literature on the superwoman syndrome is “surprisingly inconsistent” (86) as

[s]ome researchers have considered it as a “myth” that has developed due to the false belief that women entering employment should not compromise their domestic responsibilities, and thus, women should be performing multiple roles simultaneously, forcing them to choose part-time employment, face gender inequality, strained interpersonal relationships, social isolation; some [have] pointed out that men’s strict adherence to traditional gender roles have driven women towards superwoman syndrome and reported to be causing various health issues such as cardiovascular disorders, stress, depression etc.; some have tried to explain superwoman syndrome as a “counteract” against the negative societal characterisations of womanhood, and as a “survival” mechanism against sociohistorical and personal contextual factors and reported it to be beneficial for womanhood as it leads to enhanced self-worth and productivity.

In the review, Syed, Hirani, and Ahmad note, amongst other less relevant characteristics, that the “Superwoman syndrome [is] associated with the tendency to avoid sharing feelings or emotions with others” due to the idea that “displaying emotions in public [is] a ‘sign of weakness’” or being “concerned that [their] emotions would be burdensome for others and unprofessional or unproductive at work” (92). The suppression of emotions negatively impacts “overall subjective sleep quality, [...] smoking and alcohol use [...], mental health issues such as stress, [...] depression, and anxiety, [...] and] social isolation” (93). An associated characteristic is a “resistance to being vulnerable” and “a desire to be independent [...] because they do not know how to accept help” as “vulnerability or dependence would cause them to get hurt” or “people may take it as their weakness or inefficiency” (93). The authors conclude by noting “key characteristics” of the superwoman identity “which are[,] undertaking multiple role responsibilities; feeling an obligation to present an image of strength; obligations to suppress emotions; obligations to help others; determination to succeed despite limited resources; resistance to being vulnerable; active participation in her community; and adherence to spirituality” (94). Chapter Two includes an analysis of Jennifer’s Superwoman identity. Jennifer shown to undertake multiple roles and be resistant to showing vulnerability as well as being expected by other characters to be able to “do it all”.

In Chapter Three, Marianne Hirsch’s article, “Mothers and Daughters” (1981) has been particularly useful for analysing Jodi and Jennifer’s relationship. Hirsch “delineate[s] the range and direction of the work done in [the] area” of mother-daughter relationships in the five years following the publication of Adrienne Rich’s book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). Hirsch (1981: 202) states that the “study of mother-daughter

relationships situates itself at the point where various disciplines become feminist studies, as well as at the point where the feminist areas of a number of disciplines intersect”, emphasising that the nature of mother-daughter relationships are impacted and influenced by various vectors and that “the points of intersection are so numerous that they demand detailed analysis” (203). She goes on to identify “three trends [that] emerged in [then] recent feminist psychoanalytic works about mothers and daughters” (204). The first draws on “the Freudian oedipal paradigm and on neo-Freudian theory, especially object-relations psychology”; the second, on “Jungian studies [...] Erich Neumann’s *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, and on Carl Kerényi’s *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*”; the third, from “French feminist theory” draws on Jacques Lacan” (204 – 205). Hirsch (1981: 205) points out the problem “inherent in these analyses [...] a male theorist [...] and] a developed androcentric system, which, even if deconstructed and redefined, still remains a determining and limited point of departure”. She finds “the work of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, [and] Flax [...] useful in the most generous sense” (221), and I have used Chodorow and Flax’s idea of mothers identifying “more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves” and using “her relationship with her daughter [to] work out her unresolved relationship to her own mother (206) in analysing Jennifer and Jodi’s relationship.

In relation to Jodi’s representation of mental health issues, which is also presented in Chapter Three, Priyanka Padayachee and Sumaya Laher’s article “South African Hindu Psychologists’ Perceptions of Mental Illness” (2014) has been useful. In their study they conducted “semi-structured interviews [...] with six Hindu psychologists around the Johannesburg area” and analysed their responses “using thematic content analysis” (1). They found that “religion plays a crucial role in defining and understanding the causes of, as well as pathways to treatment for, mental illnesses” (19). They also noted that a belief in *Karma*³ contributes to the stigma associated with mental illness and mental health issues as mental illness can be seen as “resulting from the Karma of a past life” in which the individual conducted themselves in a manner “not deemed righteous” (3). The psychologists interviewed provided further helpful insights into the views of their South African Indian patients regarding therapy and mental health. The “stigma” (11) regarding seeing a therapist and “the issue of confidentiality and the work that therapy entails [...] not being well understood amongst the [community]” (11) are

³ Refers to a belief in the actions of an individual’s past life directly affecting their current life.

the most relevant points from the article. The stigma around therapy comes from the sense “that if [you are] seeing a therapist then there must be something wrong with you [that] you might be crazy” (11). Avoidance is increased though the lack of understanding around confidentiality as there is the fear that the therapist will talk about your problems and “then the rest of the world will know that [you] have a [...] big problem [and ...] all your relatives will get to know and [you will] be the talk of the town” (11). A secondary issue raised was the “necessity for therapists to demonstrate cultural competence” particularly in the realm of “problematic family dynamics” (11). One participant “reported [that] the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law thing is a big problem among Hindu women” and if they went to a “normal [w]estern [White] psychologist [...] they [would not] get it” (11). Thus, reluctance to go for therapy can also be reasonably attributed to the belief that it is ultimately unhelpful. These two issues are helpful in understanding older generations’ reluctance and outright avoidance of mental health issues when compared to younger generations, as seen in Jodi seeking professional help in managing post-partum depression while Jennifer was left to struggle on her own in similar circumstances.

Superwoman, Sita, or Senile? The Stereotypes that Jennifer, Shanti, and Aya (Re)Present

The representation of ‘older’ women in the *Kandasamy* films is important due to Hollywood, Bollywood, and European cinema’s tendency to focus on and idealise the idea of youth, pushing older people, women especially, into supporting or background roles. Femke De Sutter and Sofie Van Bauwel (2023) state that from the 44 films⁴ they analysed “older female characters were represented in almost a third of the films [...] mainly to be found in a minor role” (30), and that the older women represented in these films were generally “white, heterosexual (if mentioned at all), middle-class, and able bodied women” (30). More interestingly, Suarav Kumar (2022), assessing “the representation of older women in more recent Bollywood movies” (335) notes that “the European cinema, Bollywood, and Hollywood have always had cohorts of women actors undergoing midlife transitions and being largely ‘invisible’ due to the predominance of the old-young binary in both academic and popular discourses” (336). Furthermore, when older women are present in mainstream films, they are

⁴ Their research “examined the representations of older women in Hollywood romantic comedies released from 2000 to 2021” (19). To do this they selected “the two most popular romantic comedy films in the United States [...] for each year in the time frame” ultimately analysing forty-four films (23).

usually representing types rather than featuring as whole characters. Examples of such stereotypes are mothers who are “self-sacrificing [...] renouncing” (Kumar, 2022: 344) and asexual, the “aging courtesan with a golden heart” (346), or the mother-in-law who may or may not be at odds with her modernised daughter-in-law. Dey and Tripathi (2021) claim that the “few women who are shown experiencing the ‘disease’ [...] of old age in films, are mainly characters who effortlessly fit into the stereotype of feminine incompetence and powerlessness associated with senility” (264). Aya represents the image of an old woman who suffers from the disease of old age when she is hospitalised in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). She also challenges such representations as she re-presents old women as people who can play laser tag and enjoy dirt-biking in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023). Aya’s representation and re-representation of the stereotypes surrounding old women on-screen are analysed in Chapter One.

Motsaathebe (2018) examining the portrayals of black women in post-apartheid South African films concludes that there “has not been much advancement in terms of a shift in the representation of Black women in commercial films, as the images of the “mummy”, the “Jezebel”, and the “Black matriarch” [...] are still being circulated” (393). The “mummy” and the “matriarch” correspond with roles that older women are depicted in – tied to caretaking and the family, without an independent sense of identity. Similarly, De Sutter and Van Bauwel (2023: 22) identify four negative stereotypes, “severely impaired, despondent, shrew/villain, and recluse”, and three positive stereotypes, “perfect grandparent, golden ager, and John Wayne conservative”, which inform the roles that older adults play. While they found that “positive age stereotypes were primarily used”, these stereotypes are of then “difficult for many older adults to realise” and can “create pitfalls, as women who deviate from these stereotypes are often invisible” (31).

Ethnicity or race is a significant factor that causes women to “deviate” from such stereotypes. While on some level these representations may seem empowering, even going against the idea of women being weak and incapable, from an intersectional perspective, certain representations only serve to reinforce harmful stereotypes about women of colour. For women of colour, being “superwoman” is generally an expectation rather than an option. Motsaathebe’s commentary on the “positive images of single motherhood” in the films he examined exemplifies how

seemingly positive and empowering representations can work to reinforce oppressive paradigms. The image of the single mother plays into the stereotype of “the Black superwoman who is able to survive all the difficulties she confronts” (387).

The superwoman stereotype is a “multifaced construct that refers to the identity of a woman who simultaneously fulfils several significant roles in home and work front” (Syed, 2025: 94). Some of the key characteristics of this identity include “undertaking multiple role responsibilities; feeling an obligation to present an image of strength; obligations to suppress emotions; obligations to help others; determination to succeed despite limited resources; resistance to being vulnerable; active participation in her community; and adherence to spirituality” (94). As Shah, Gandhi, Shinde, and Chaudhry (2025: 2) say of the existing literature on the supermom⁵ identity, looking at the superwoman identity solely “as the ability to ‘do it all,’ [...] presents a one-dimensional perspective”. The characterisation of Jennifer and Jodi in the *Kandasamy* films both challenges and reinforces the superwoman identity. While the pressure to be a superwoman and the negative effects of such pressure are presented, the strength of the characters is also celebrated, contributing to “the internalisation of the [superwoman schema]”, perpetuating “unrealistic expectations, and ultimately reinforcing “pressures associated with the [superwoman schema]” (Issa and Chen, 2025: 10). Jennifer presents the expectation of the Superwoman to be able to do it all as she is judged, harshly by some, when she falls short of their expectations. Her internalisation of the superwoman schema then leads her to place heavy expectations on herself and isolate herself from others, as presented in Chapter Two.

Like Jennifer’s Superwoman, the Sita identity, that of the devoted wife and mother, is both reinforced and reimagined in the films. Sita, wife of Rama⁶, is the ultimate embodiment of devotion and chastity⁷. When Rama is exiled for fourteen years, she follows him into the forest (along with his brother, Lakshmana), demonstrating her loyalty to her husband. Despite the challenges of exile, Sita was a source of strength for Rama. One day, Sita is kidnapped by

⁵ Supermom is a term that can be used to describe “the multifaceted responsibilities that modern Indian mothers undertake, often juggling professional commitments with familial duties” (2).

⁶ Rama or Ram is the seventh incarnation of Vishnu (one of the three supreme deities in Hinduism, responsible for protection and sustenance of the universe) and he is the eldest son of Dasharatha and Kaushlya, king and queen of Ayodhya.

⁷ She is also known for her intelligence, grace, and compassion

Ravana⁸ and taken to his palace where he makes advances towards her. Sita remains chaste and loyal to her husband throughout her captivity in Ravana's palace. Eventually Rama rescues her⁹ but has doubts¹⁰ about her chastity during the time she was held captive by Ravana. To prove her chastity and loyalty to Rama, Sita undergoes *Agni Pariksha*, trial by fire. Emerging from the fire unscathed, Sita's purity and devotion is proved, but Rama still banishes her when doubts regarding her fidelity persist. At this point, Sita is pregnant with Lava and Kusha, Rama's sons, and takes refuge in Valmiki's¹¹ hermitage. Following Rama's acknowledgement of Lava and Kusha, Sita appeals to her mother, the Earth, to release her from the sorrows of life, and she is thus swallowed by the earth¹².

Lavanya S. Arvind in *Legitimising Myths and Legends: The Social Construction of Gender Stereotypes* (2022: 65) describes Sita as being “at the mercy of her abductor, her husband, and her kingdom, all of whose motives and terms of engagement with her are positioned around the womanly honour-dishonour binary”. In patriarchal societies, women held the honour of not only themselves but their families and communities in their hands. This is a sentiment that Arvind shares stating that “a woman's honour is not hers alone because it reflects the honour of the marital union and, by extension, their family, the community, and even the nation” (65 - 66). The Mother-Whore paradox is evident in Sita's story. Prior to becoming a mother, Sita has to protect her honour (chastity). As a mother, her sole duty and reason for living is for her sons. Having proved she is not whore via *Agni Pariksha*, Sita only has to fulfil her duty as mother. Once her sons have been recognised by their father and thus passed into his care, her duties are fulfilled, and she is released from her (unjust) suffering to find peace. This reflects the idea that Motherhood¹³ is the ultimate calling in an Indian woman's life. Her time prior to marriage, as a daughter, is spent preparing for motherhood and wifedom. As a wife she is expected to attend to her husband's every need and want. Her “suffering [...] forbearance [...] acceptance and submissive obedience, which can all be lumped together as ‘devotion’” (Blackwell, 1977: 43)

⁸ Ravana is the demon king of Lanka. He heard of Sita's beauty and decided to steal her for himself.

⁹ With the assistance of Hanuman.

¹⁰ Whether it is Rama who has doubts or the people who have doubts about Sita's chastity and thus suitability to be queen, the expectations placed on women and the hardship Sita suffered do not change.

¹¹ An ancient sage recognised as the original author of the Ramayana (Rama's story). He teaches Lava and Kusha the Ramayana.

¹² She opts to return to the Earth even though Rama wants to reunite with her.

¹³ Discussing Swami Vivekananda's ideas in relation to Hindu scriptures and womanhood, Anindita Saha (2024: 3) mentions that along with extolling “the virtues of Sita and [hailing] the Indian women to be like Sita”, Vivekananda, according to Saha (3) “also believes that a woman's womanhood becomes fulfilled when she becomes a mother”.

to her husband is expected. Motherhood, especially when the child is dependent on her, is seen as the highlight of a woman's life. Once the child passes into the father's care, the mother fades into the background, continuing to serve and sacrifice without further recognition, until the next child.

Sutapa Chaudhuri (2013: 93), writing about "revisionings of the Sita myth" quotes Madhu Kishwar (1997) who describes Sita as "the point of reference – an ideal [to be] emulated or rejected" whether women are "asserting their moral strength or rebelling against what they [have] come to see as the unreasonable demands of society or family" (94). In the films, the identity of Sita as a devoted mother and wife are embraced while the marginalisation of Sita is rejected. This re-presentation of Sita is discussed in Chapter One, with Aya's re-presentation of Sita, and in Chapter Two where Shanti as Sita is recognised for who she is as a person. Shanti additionally challenges the traditional image of Sita through her sometimes unruly manners and boldness.

From the self-sacrificing, family focused Sita, to the can-do it all Superwoman, the "ideal woman" has changed throughout history and will continue to change, adapting to new social norms and mores. Certain norms are more pervasive than others as seen in the continued expectation of women to take care of the home and children while maintaining a full-time job as opposed to the lack of pressure for men to start contributing to daily household duties. The expectations placed on South African Indian women to live up to the stereotype of the ideal women are varied but bound together through certain norms and expectations which include aspects such as child-care and preserving the honour of the family. In the *Kandasamy* films the longevity of such norms and expectations are seen as even Jodi, who is representative of the Millennial and Gen Z generations, bases part of her identity on becoming a wife and mother.

Characterisation, Vectors of Identity, and Stereotypes

In *Fictional Characters and Characterisations* (2022) Niall Connolly defines characterisation as “something that can be created [...] something that is put together by an author” (354). For Connolly, characterisation involves properties that are “bound by a relation of having been represented by an individual author” (357) with “its level of complexity [being] determined by the variety of those properties and their interrelations” (358). In “What Are Characters Made Of? Textual, Philosophical, and “World” Approaches to Character Ontology” (2021), Marie-Laure Ryan notes that “[a]uthors do not create characters *ex-nihilo*; they instead make them up by mentally exploring a field of possibilities, and by selecting some of these possibilities to be realised textually” (29). She later mentions three “‘functions’ that characters can fulfil. The mimetic function which refers to the character passing as a person, the synthetic function which reminds the reader that the character and story are fabricated, and the thematic function in which the character represents an idea (34). In analysing the characterisation of the selected women characters in the *Kandasamy* films, the term characterisation can be understood as referring to the presentation of a character informed by various factors, including, but not limited to, age, gender, class, ethnicity, and belief system, chosen by a writer to fulfil a mimetic and thematic function within a work. Characterisation can also be understood as a representation of identity through a character. Thus, the various vectors that are used to construct the identities that Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi represent need to be understood within their South African Indian context.

The common vectors of identity that are used to construct Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi are “woman”, “mother”, “mother-in-law”, “daughter”, “wife”, “daughter-in-law”, and “grandmother”, respectively. In defining the identity of “woman”, the identities of “wife”, “daughter-in-law”, and “mother” all play a part. The normal course of life for a South African Indian woman is marriage, which makes her a wife and daughter-in-law, and then a mother which is culturally considered to be the greatest achievement of a woman’s life. The identity of a mother-in-law does not come across as a defining stage of a woman’s life or identity beyond her friends and woman relatives. In Indian culture, a mother is traditionally taken care of by her son in her old age, as seen in Elvis taking care of and supporting Aya in the

Kandasamy films, the identity of mother-in-law is typically expressed through relations with one's daughter-in-law.

The identity of daughter generally implies that a full womanhood has not been yet achieved, as the individual is unmarried and has not yet come under the banner of her husband and his family. Naturally, an unmarried woman is not a full woman as she has not yet had a child. The time as a daughter is spent preparing for one's role as a wife and mother which includes learning how to cook and keep a house. Often, a mother's task is to "train the daughter [...] for her future role as an 'ideal' daughter-in-law [...] because the daughter's conduct with her in-laws will reflect the culture of her parents' home" (Wiesinger, 1965: 148). This attitude, though softened, is reflected in Shanti's belief that Jodi would make an unsuitable wife because she does not know how to cook, along with her disparaging remarks about Jennifer in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). Cooking and the keeping of a home, taking care of the older members of the family, and sometimes, the ability to entertain and cater to guests are the hallmarks of wifehood.

The hallmarks of motherhood are becoming a mother and being able to raise children who live up to cultural expectations. For motherhood to be fully realised, the child(ren) should be polite, capable, well-educated both culturally and academically, with respectable jobs, such as a doctor, and married. The method one takes in raising one's child(ren) also plays a part in the realisation of motherhood. It is expected that a mother be warm and caring, devoted to fully supporting their child(ren). Once one becomes a mother-in-law and grandmother, a time of rest, where the daughter-in-law takes over the majority of the household chores, is something that can be expected. Of course, with the arrival of a baby, the grandmother will often return to her motherly and wifely duties while the new mother recuperates, as seen in Jennifer and Shanti's eagerness to take care of Jodi and baby Arya in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023).

As mentioned, becoming a mother-in-law can be considered to correspond to a time of rest as, traditionally, the mother-in-law controls the time allocation of the daughter-in-law and "can share the housework burden of the daughter-in-law and free up the daughter-in-law's time, or she can reinforce gender-specific social norms" (Bhattacharya, 2023: 2) and require her

daughter-in-law to spend more time in “home production activities, which includes domestic chores and caregiving to children and other family members” (Gupta and Negi, 2021: 6). On the other hand, it can also be a time where a woman begins to become invisible as she is no longer the mother that is praised for bringing children into the world and is set aside as the younger generation takes on that role, as seen in Jodi and Prishen’s desire to live independently from their mothers. In this time, visibility can be maintained through claiming affiliation with one’s child and thus, the adult child’s behaviour and reputation become that of the mother. A mother-in-law can also exert influence over her daughter(s)-in-law as a way of retaining control. Recognition and identity at this stage are attained either through control or support of the younger generation. This is seen in the identity of grandmother being eagerly claimed by Jennifer and Shanti in *Kandasamy: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023). Similarly, becoming a grandmother implies that a woman has fulfilled her duty and, having less expectations placed on her now, begins to move to the periphery of family and social life. With this age, however, comes wisdom and respect gained as an elder who can be consulted regarding the appropriate manner in which to conduct one’s life, as implied through Aya’s narration and words of wisdom in all four films.

The manner in which I have described the various vectors that are used to construct the identities of the selected characters is rather stereotypical. There is good reason for this and that reason is that the first impressions we are given of the characters is very stereotypical. Aya is old and wise, Jennifer is straight-laced, Shanti is very traditional and unabashedly enthusiastic, Jodi is a young woman in love. It is only as the films progress that the audience is shown the various characterisations beyond the stereotypes.

Stereotypes can be defined as simplified schema for the identification of people based on culturally salient characteristics. Stereotypes can be descriptive, prescriptive, or proscriptive. Descriptive stereotypes are based on “how one perceives a person of a certain gender”, age, socio-economic status, or ethnicity (Santoniccolo, Tombetta, Paradiso, and Rollè, 2023: 2). Prescriptive stereotypes are expectations of *how* a person is *expected* to behave, based on their perceived salient characteristic(s). Proscriptive stereotypes form expectations of how a particular person should not behave. Stereotypes, being linked to “schematised and

conventionalised perceptions of the Other as well as of the Self’ (Schweinitz, 2010: 276) can be both positive and negative.

When analysing characterisation, due to the conventionalised notions that inform stereotypes being “anchored in everyday cultural awareness”, stereotyped characters are “clearly interrelated with everyday beliefs and values” (276). Thus, character who are “*narrative* embodiments of stereotypical images of the Other” can be described as “conventionalised artefacts reduced to some few conspicuous traits and subject to wholesale intertextual repetition” (278). However, individual characters can develop from conventional artefacts “through interaction with the course of events and [come to] possess an individual and complex intellectual and psychological profile” (278). In the *Kandasamy* films, the progression of the women characters from conventionalised artefacts to individuals with complex intellectual and psychological profiles is seen. It should be noted that there is no such discernible progression for the male characters.

In films, the narrative depictions of stereotyped fictional characters are characterised “to a large extent by audio-visual concreteness, that is, recurring sensuous traits” (Schweinitz, 2010: 283). As distinction between narratively depicted stereotypes and reality is “often complicated by the fact that film spectators and readers hardly ever draw a sharp line between even decidedly imaginary narrative worlds and their imaginary constructions of the real world” (286), stereotypes depicted within fiction do have an effect on perceptions of people in the real world¹⁴. Furthermore, stereotypes “are easily maintained and reinforced” (Eagly, 2021: 344), rationalising “existing role distributions and [making] them seem normal” (348), thus qualifying stereotyped individuals for their perceived “existing roles but [disqualifying] them from roles whose requirements are incongruent with their existing stereotypes (344). This rationalisation and automatic qualifying of individuals for certain roles influences the range of roles in which women (and men but more so women) are afforded in films which is discussed in more detail further on in this section.

¹⁴ The word “muggle” from JK Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is one such example. The *OED* definition of the word is “In the fiction of J. K. Rowling: a person who possesses no magical powers. Hence in allusive and extended uses: a person who lacks a particular skill or skills, or who is regarded as inferior in some way” (2003). In fandom circles, the word is used frequently to refer to people who have not read or watched the series and does carry a note of disdain.

Ultimately, descriptive stereotypes become prescriptive stereotypes which give rise to proscriptive stereotypes. Prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes are often the ones that influence representations in film as stereotypes are a fast and easy method of conveying character information to the audience. This form of representation, even when positive, “inherently limits the ability to individualise the targets of the stereotype” (Czopp, Kay, and Cheryan, 2015: 451), contributing to the systemic invisibility of those who do not conform to the stereotype.

Changing Perceptions of South African Indian Women

As descriptive stereotypes inform prescriptive ones, it is necessary to briefly mention the realities that shaped the perceptions of South African Indian women from their arrival as indentured workers to agents in a post-modern world. Not all South African Indian women had the same experiences, class being the major factor that gave rise to the differences in experiences, as being ‘Indian’ and women came with a rather unescapable set of expectations. The first Indian women arrived in Natal in 1860 on the SS Truro. They were not there because the colonial administration wanted women workers but because the fixed quota for women was 29% as per the decision of the Indian government (Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec, 1990). Women earned half the male pay and rations if they worked (Beall, 1990; Meer, 1972). Married women were “not obliged to work and [...] employers were [...] compelled to provide them with accommodation, rations, and medical care” (Beall, 1990: 59). Common law marriages were not recognised by the colonial administration and the majority of the indentured Indians would have been unable to afford the £5 fee to have their marriage legally recognised (69). These conditions left indentured women particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, both by the plantation owners and their ‘own’ men.

Already vulnerable in India, indentured women were often wives of men intending to indenture themselves, women who had no one to rely on and no means of providing for themselves, and

widows escaping *sati*¹⁵ or who had been abandoned by their families. Women who independently indentured could have done so out of their own free will or could have been tricked and kidnapped to fulfil the quota (Misrahi-Barak, Tyagi, and Rao, 2024). The journey across the kala pani was dangerous and traumatising for the survivors. Women were raped and “violence was common” on the ships (Seedat-Khan, 2012: 35). Women who resisted or fought back were risking death and some would “[jump] ship to escape” (39) the suffering and inhumane treatment and conditions. The plantations were not better. During the day women worked in the fields and after working hours “they were expected to engage in food preparation, cleaning, washing, and sexual activity” (Beall, 1990: 66). Due to the unequal ratio of men to women, women often undertook these tasks for several men. This cohabitation with multiple men led to women becoming “focal points of male sexual jealousies” and wife murders were not uncommon due to such jealousies (Meer, 1972: 37). Women were often compelled to play wife to multiple men in exchange for “rations or other favours such as clothing or even protection” (Beall, 1990: 66), their dependence on men increased by the pittance and reduced rations they received for their work. In addition to exploitation by indentured men, indentured women were subjected to sexual harassment from the plantation overseers and sometimes the owners themselves. There are debates over whether indentured Indian women were sexually powerful and used this power to manipulate men as they were ‘free’ to exchange one partner for another. This, although in some instances used to portray women as independent and having control, feeds more into the idea of indentured women having degraded morals and being promiscuous, echoing colonialist and oppressive patriarchal rhetoric.

In contrast to the indentured women, the wives and daughters of the passenger Indians “remained closeted in the home, proud in their purdah, neither allowed to, nor wanting to, venture out into the streets” (Meer, 1972: 37). There were women, often in rural areas, who did help as assistants in their husbands’ shops, however this was not necessarily the norm. Their primary job was to preserve and teach the traditional cultural ways to the next generation and uphold the family *izzat*¹⁶. By the 1920s, the indentured Indians had “settled into traditional conservatism” (37), though some women still engaged the outside world as “hawkers, domestic workers, cooks, and market gardeners” (Seedat-Kahn, 2012: 43) due to economic necessity.

¹⁵ Sati “refers to the practice of a widow immolating herself on the cremation pyre of her husband” (Salangi, 2022: 13).

¹⁶ Arabic, meaning honour.

As preservers of tradition, women had to, as Fatima Meer (1972: 38) says, “remain pure, unadulterated, different from everything around them, protected from everything un-Indian, un-Islamic, un-Hindu” . Home, the domain of women, was “the bastion of Indian life struggling against a foreign environment” (37), as Indians were caught between the white colonial administration, later the Afrikaner government, and the indigenous black African communities who saw them as tools of the white oppressors. The need for a sense of secure identity in the middle of two opposing and, in the Indian mind, equally dangerous forces encouraged the seclusion of women (holders and preservers of tradition) from the rest of the world. Men were expected to interact with the outside world and were expected to become somewhat tainted by it. Women on the other hand were the upholders of their family’s and community’s honour and, with home as a place of refuge from the outside world, a breach of tradition meant a breach in security, rendering transgressions against tradition unforgiveable.

Meer (1972) describes the “responsibility of preserving tradition [as] as terrible one” (38). In the early stages, it caused “the status gap [to be] coupled with a culture gap” (38) as Indian women looked “fine at home with the babies and the cooking pots” but “their peasant garb and peasant manners” were found to be “unseemly in public” (38). Aware of this, women would stay at home as to not embarrass their husbands with their unrefined ways in social settings. Socialised to be passive and submissive as to not bring dishonour upon the family, women would “cling to [their] marriage no matter how unsatisfactory and how severe its provocations” (43) as divorce was considered a disgrace. These self-effacing and self-sacrificing manners, while growing less and less central to the South African Indian woman’s sense of identity, still influence the way that South African Indian women relate to the world around them.

While industrialisation and capitalism come with their own set of societal and environmental ills, the role that they played in the emancipation of women cannot be ignored. As the cost of living rose along with restrictions imposed on people of colour, a single income was no longer sufficient to support a family. A woman who worked became one who was capable of contributing to the family income. Of course, initially it would only be “women from poor households [who] worked” (Carrim, 2021: 6), and there were a few “women from middle-class families [who] pursued careers in female-dominated occupations” (6). Restricted to ‘Indian’

areas during the apartheid era, women were still rather limited in work and career options. Tradition dictated that domestic affairs be the domain of the women, and thus women who worked would have to shoulder a double load. Before, after, and in-between her paid work, there was still food to be cooked, the house to be cleaned, and the children to be taken care of. To pursue a career, especially to a high level, would require the support and cooperation of the woman's husband.

Such support was not and is still not guaranteed, though it is no longer expected for women to solely depend upon their husband for financial support. The necessity of having an income changed attitudes regarding girls' education. An educated woman with a career is considered "an added attribute brought to marriage, an added prestige bestowed on the husband" (Meer, 1972: 43). Before, it would be said that "educated girls do not make good marriages" (44) as education caused them to become too independent and assertive. Following rising costs of living, the narrative changed to claim that "educated women are more considerate and [...] efficient in running the home, that they make better mothers and offer husbands better support" (44-5). These ideas led to the creation of the 'superwoman' ideal where women "exert themselves to play out the roles of successful housewives and career women simultaneously" (45). Thus, even with changed attitudes towards female education and women working, the emphasis remained on what the woman could offer to a husband rather than her accomplishments as an individual. This is seen in both Jennifer and Shanti's characters as their domestic skills are emphasised over their work performance or career aspirations, as explored in Chapter Two.

Post-apartheid, movement out of exclusively 'Indian' areas coupled with increasing globalisation and westernisation, egalitarian relationships are on the rise, though it has not completely overcome the expectations of women to bear the double load. Ultimately, South African Indian women are still learning to juggle tradition with modern needs and sensibilities as they integrate themselves into the larger South African society, a struggle which is seen in the *Kandasamy* films as seen in Jennifer and Shanti's shortcomings within their respective Superwoman and Sita identities, as explored in Chapter Two, and in Jodi's hybrid identity which charts a path for the balancing of tradition and western demands, as explored in Chapter Three.

Additional Social Factors that Contribute to Perceptions, Representations, and Expectations of South African Indian Women

It is clear that within the South African Indian community, like in any other society and culture, “the position of women varies greatly from one historical period to another” (Pathak, 2019: 228). In India, during the early Vedic Period “women enjoyed more or less the same status as men” (229). There is a “profound respect for the feminine principle” in ancient Hindu scriptures as seen in goddesses (228). Most of all, this respect for the feminine principle is seen in the “Supreme Being, from whom everything emanates [...] Shakti in the form of Durga” (228). However, historical forces (228), especially the “establishment of Aryans in the northern region of India” (231), “deepened, distorted, modified, and appropriated what the early Vedic scriptures had directed [...] making them] compatible and advantageous for particular races as well as [...] kings and certain sections of society predominantly constituted of men” (228). Thus, as Pathak says, the “biggest paradox found in the Hindu society is its general attitude towards women” (232). Goddesses are worshipped and revered “but on the other hand [...] women are the victims of everyday domestic violence [...] and] have always been considered the weaker sex [...] by the patriarchal society” (232). While not explicitly present in my texts, *Kandasamys: The Wedding*, alludes to Aya’s past with her ex-husband who used to “hit” (Moodley, 2019) her. Furthermore, Shanti being revered as the centre of her household and simultaneously being marginalised, reflects such a paradoxical attitude.

Matriarchal Societies

Despite “some aspects of Indian culture” being oppressive to women, “Hindu culture embodies the necessary ingredients to be deemed a matriarchal culture” (Laltha, 2023: 2; 5). There is some debate over what the term ‘matriarchy’ means as it is used “generally [to refer] to domination by female members of society” (Parker, 2024: 8). An alternate interpretation of the word, proposed by feminist anthropologists, explains ‘matriarchy’ as referring to “the cultural roles of mother in knitting together the social ties of daily life in their various activities including the ritual exchange of gifts in the life cycle” (8). Matriarchy can be used to refer to “mother-centred societies” and is seen in “life cycle and daily activities based on maternal-

fraternal values, consensus decision making, peace building, and negotiating controversy towards peaceful ends” (8). Then, there is the matter of matrilineality, which is the tracing of descent through the maternal line. In such a system, a “man is not a member of the matrilineage into which he has married and remains a member of his mother’s lineage” (19).

In a matrilineal society, men “are usually structurally marginal in houses” as “the house itself is for his mothers and sisters” (19). Thus, a man’s place is outside of the home or domestic sphere. In this dissertation, ‘matriarchy’ leans towards the socio-cultural explanation of the term and includes a matrilineal aspect. The outsider status of men is present in my selected texts through the attitudes of Jennifer and Shanti’s husbands, Elvis and Peggie, who avoid anything that appears even remotely domestic in nature and often prioritise enjoying themselves over participating in family-oriented activities.

Matriarchy denotes the centrality and power¹⁷ of women in the daily life of the culture as well as ‘life cycle’ events¹⁸. It also denotes the importance of women, mothers especially, when it comes to kinship. As all my selected characters are or, in Jodi’s case, become mothers, the matriarchal nature of South African Indian families is important to understand. Jennifer and Shanti particularly show the matriarchal power of women as they are the ones concerned over their children’s romantic relationship, fight over planning Jodi and Prishen’s wedding, and organise Arya’s naming ceremony. Aya’s narration also emphasises the power of the mother as she has the first and last word in each film.

The “Monster”-in-Law

Through colonialism and worlding¹⁹, western patriarchal ideas and norms have been imposed on Eastern and Southern cultures, including those who already had patriarchal social systems imposed upon them²⁰. In matriarchal cultures which mark kinship through “the female line” (Göttner-Abendroth, 2004: 77), “daughters and granddaughters never leave the clan-house of

¹⁷ Power referring to decision making and capability to influence social attitudes

¹⁸ For example, births, birthdays, weddings, and funerals.

¹⁹ Worlding is “the process by which a person, family, culture, or people is brought into the dominant Eurocentric/[w]estern global society” (Mitchell, 2024. Online).

²⁰ Such as Indian societies as mentioned previously.

their mother” (77) remaining there even after marriage. A married man also remained in his mother’s house, visiting his wife at night and returning to his mother’s house at dawn²¹. A husband’s “primary duties and right were as *mamak* (mother’s brother) to his sisters and her children” (Parker, 2024: 10). With the imposition of patriarchal societal structures, women began moving into their husbands’ houses and ‘competing’ with his mother and sisters as the one to whom his primary duties and rights were connected. Of course, with her son as her primary mode of accessing power, the mother will not be quite willing to relinquish her claim to him. For the son, as his primary attachment figure, his mother’s opinion is the one that matters to him the most, making the favour of her mother-in-law one of the most important factors shaping the life of a new wife. The attachment of the son to his mother is encouraged by traditional Indian beliefs about the relationship between mother and son as stated by Swami Vivekananda. Saha describes him as “unequivocally [stating] that the mother is the God and it is the duty not only of the son but also his wife to ‘worship’ the mother” (2024: 3). This is the dynamic that Shanti expects when Jodi and Prishen become engaged. It is also the dynamic that characterises Aya and Jennifer’s relationship, as further explored in Chapter One and Chapter Two.

Previous Representations of Women Characters in South African Indian Literature and Film

Having set forth the reasons for my selection of texts, it is necessary to acknowledge some of forerunners who have presented and re-presented South African Indian women, as Jayan Moodley is not the first woman to present the stories of South African Indian women, nor is she first director to do so. South African Indian literature features a greater variety of texts that both focus on women and are created by women when compared to South African Indian film. Notable authors include Shevlyn Mottai, Joanne Joseph, Praba Moodley, and Sumayya Lee²².

²¹ This form of marriage is known as “visiting marriage” and the men “have no right to live in the house of their wives” (Göttner-Abendroth, 2004: 78).

²² Shevlyn Mottai’s *Across the Kala Pani* (2022) and Joanne Joseph’s *Children of Sugarcane* (2021) both address the journey from India to Natal (South Africa) and life on the plantations for women. Both novels shed light on the suffering that women indentured workers experienced and some of the impossible choices they were compelled to make in order to survive. Praba Moodley’s *A Scent So Sweet* (2006), set post-indenture, follows Lalita who trains as a classical dancer, moves to India, and returns home to South Africa where she takes up teaching at her old dance school. The differences between Indians and South African Indians are alluded to in the novel. More importantly, the expectations and needs of South African Indian women of different classes are

Many of these novels, however, do not engage with the present realities of South African Indian women which led to my decision to provide an analysis of the four films in the *Kandasamy* franchise. South African Indian film that is created by and for South African Indians is largely the domain of Kumaran Naidu who wrote and directed the *Broken Promises* franchise and *Run for Your Life* franchise, as well as various other films, including his 2014 *The Curse of Highway Sheila*, based on a popular urban legend from Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Author Shamim Sharif directed a 2007 film of her novel *The World Unseen* which goes by the same title. Besides the *Kandasamy* franchise, Jayan Moodley also directed *White Gold* (2010) which focuses on indenture. Judy Naidoo wrote and directed *Kings of Mulberry Street* (2019) and *Kings of Mulberry Street: Let Love Reign* (2023) set in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1990s.

Though *Kings of Mulberry Street* (2019) and *Kings of Mulberry Street: Let Love Reign* (2023) focus primarily on Tikki and Baboo, Charmaine (Tikki's mother), Aya (Tikki's paternal grandmother), and Leila are distinct personalities in the films. In the second film the women play key roles, driving the plot. Class, as an intersectional vector contributing to characterisation, comes into play in these films as Charmaine's rather uncouth ways are contrasted with Leila's grace and refined behaviour. This feeds into the stereotype that South African Indian women of the lower working class being too unruly for polite society.

Kumaran Naidu's *Broken Promises* (2003) portrays women in a relatively nuanced and sympathetic manner as a result of his desire to address real life issues within the South African Indian community. The film addresses Tamil-Hindi relationships, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflict, and the dependence of women on men even as they exercise agency in the domestic sphere.

highlighted. In Moodley's *The Ties that Bind* (2014), Gayatri's picture-perfect life falls apart because of her rigid adherence to the expected gender norms. As toxic as her ideal of womanhood and her drive to be the perfect woman is, it is clear that this ideal gives Gayatri a solid sense of identity and helps her navigate the challenges that she faces. Like Moodley's *The Ties that Bind*, Sumayya Lee's *The Story of Maha* (2007) and *Maha: Ever After* (2009) are set during apartheid and the transition era. Maha, Lee's protagonist, struggles to convince her family, who believe that a woman's place is in the home, to allow her to pursue tertiary education and enter the workforce. Maha battles against the cultural expectations of her as a woman in a culture that shelters her from the rapidly changing outside world even though she would prefer to be part of it. The novels highlight the struggle of maintaining and loving one's culture while resisting the oppression that has become the norm in it.

The Curse of Highway Sheila (Naidu, 2014) is based on the urban legend of highway Sheila, which originated in Durban, and portrays women as both independent actors in their own lives as well as being victims of abuse. The film can almost be considered a cautionary tale against disrespecting women and taking advantage of them as throughout the film, it is men who have disrespected women who suffer. *The Curse of Highway Sheila* (Naidu, 2014) positions women as both strong and as victims. Women are never blamed for the actions of men towards them and men who abuse women are duly punished. The main and supporting characters are predominantly women and thus the film foregrounds women, as does *Broken Promises* (Naidu, 2003), showing them as capable and independent. With the variety of women characters, Naidu's film also showcases a variety of identities without creating an unhealthy sense of competition or valuing one identity over another.

Common and relevant themes in these films include agency and identity. Whether their agency is limited or not, the women in the selected films exercise the power they have to steer their lives of their choosing. This expression of agency is also seen in the *Kandasamy* films. Furthermore, the characters are unapologetically themselves and do not try to alter themselves to fit other peoples' preconceived ideas of how they should behave. It is interesting to note that the texts maintain that a key aspect of a woman's identity does involve monogamous, heterosexual marriage and having biological children which can be read as the continued promotion of conservative, traditional South African Indian norms. The various approaches to representing women as seen in these films, and others that have not been mentioned, are worth analysing, yet there exists a blank space in academic research.

Acknowledgment of Previous Research on South African Indian Literature and Film

Academic attention has been given to South African Indian literature; however, this attention generally prioritises male authors, thus creating a one-sided picture of South African Indians. Furthermore, due to a lack of contemporarily based writings, the academic literature does not reflect current identities and realities of the South African Indian community. Academic attention for South African Indian film is even more impoverished than that for literature. This is possibly due to South African Indian films being created for a minority audience who are

infrequently relevant in the broader socio-political context. The academic literature I have selected thus prioritises authors who have a focus on South African Indian women or actively note the position of women in the selected media they analyse.

In *Afrindian Fictions* (2008), Pallavi Rastogi examines apartheid and post-apartheid era South African Indian literature and what these texts have to say about South African Indian identity in terms of belonging in South Africa and the wider South-East Asian diaspora. Felicity Hand and Esther Pujolras-Nogeur's *Relations and Networks in South African Indian Writing* (2018) covers a range of South African Indian literary texts with various authors who examine themes of transnationality, women's roles, identity, the idea of home and belonging, the effects of apartheid, political resistance (or the lack thereof), and the idea of boundaries and living in-between the black-white binary, as seen in South African Indian writings. The ambiguity and disruptive nature of South African Indian identity is also examined, as are the effects of class and gender on those already marginalised through race.

Arguably one of the most important academic sources regarding the representations of South African Indian women's identities in literature is Devarakshanam Betty Govinden's *Sister Outsiders* (2008). Govinden focuses on the variables that shape people's lives and experiences, exploring both the similarities and differences that appear in her selected authors' works. She focuses on the different ways in which the selected writers approach and deal with gender, race, ethnicity, and class, and in doing so shows diversity within the group of peoples termed South African Indians. Govinden makes note of the social constructions that influenced the selected writers' identities, taking into account how various intersecting factors shaped both the writers' identities and the identities of the characters in their works. In her introduction, Govinden (2008: 2) says that writings "produced by Indian women in South Africa constitutes a way of talking back" and that including women in the literary tradition also functions "to write women back into every other sphere of social life" (3). Therefore, her examination of a range of 'Indian' women's writings serves to write a diversity of women into the literary sphere and social life. Admitting to straddling the line between essentialism and non-essentialism in her work, Govinden employs an essentialist notion of race while rejecting an essentialist idea of what a woman should be, allowing the diverse experiences and identities of her writers to be examined without judgement against a singular standard.

In the article “Reconsidering South African Indian Fiction Postapartheid”, Frenkel (2011) examines how then-contemporary South African Indian fiction creates space for and gives rise to new ways of thinking about South African culture. She examines selected works of Imraan Coovadia, Achmat Dangor, Farida Karodia, Beverley Naidoo, Shamin Sarif, and Ishtiyaq Shukri who allow her to consider the “conception of race as a social category shaped by its historical routes” (Frenkel, 2011: 2). Frenkel describes Coovadia and Sarif’s presentation of Indian identity as “mobile [...] moving simultaneously towards difference and continuity in the realm of identity politics” (3). Furthermore, both authors contradict the idea “that Indians moved solely to alleviate poverty” (3) which diversifies the narratives of South Africans of Indian descent that are often presented. In discussing Dangor’s novel, *Kafka’s Curse*, Frenkel says that he “opens the question of what our identities mean when we are left with who we were under apartheid, without the violence that forced us into those particular categories” (12). In other words, what does it mean to be South African Indian, what qualifies one as South African Indian if race is removed from the equation. Frenkel concludes that her selected texts enabled her to develop a “context bound paradigm of South African postcolonial theory [...] that is able to account for the heterogeneity and ambiguity of this cultural milieu across historical sites, while highlighting an ascendant cosmopolitanism” (15). She acknowledges the issues of “migration, diaspora, transnationalisms, hybridity, difference, cultural undecidability, and a blurring of boundaries” (15) that are present in South African Indian literature post-apartheid.

In 1994 the South African Historical Journal published *Eastern Roots: A Representation of the History of Indian South Africans in Film*, written by Uma Shashikant Mesthrie. In the article, Mesthrie (1994: 235) compares the newly (then) released *Eastern Roots*, a “six-part series [...] screened on ‘Impressions’, the weekly ethnic slot for Indians on SABC TV’s CCV channel” to *They Came from the East*, a 1976 series created “to facilitate ‘intercultural communication’, by introducing South African whites to Indian South Africans” (240). Mesthrie comments both on who and what was represented in the shows and who and what was not. Regarding *They Came from the East*, Mesthrie says the “question that arises [...] is not whether what is portrayed is accurate or not. Rather it is the silences [...] that are most striking” (240). The

series supported the apartheid regime's separatist ideals, presenting "an exclusively Indian world that is 'isolated from and unaffected by the balance of South Africa's people'" (242). Indian South Africans were presented as "an organic, autonomous group" (242), distinct from the South African population.

The near opposite of the series "commissioned by the SABC" (239), *Eastern Roots* was born from a "desire [...] to educate an Indian audience about its past" (243). The series covers the arrival of indentured labourers in Natal up until Mandela's Nobel Peace Prize of 1993, focusing on the lives and issues of South African Indians. While the series is still imperfect, the writers of *Eastern Roots* were aware of "a dislike of the stereotype of the wealthy Indian and a suspicion of the segregationist and ethnically separatist machinations of the apartheid state" (244). Part of the series consisted of interviews that were used "to explain various historical episodes, provide some commentary and factual information and, in some cases, to share personal experiences" (238). Mesthrie critiques the interviewees solely representing "middle-class achievers [as] the ordinary person's experiences hardly ever feature" (239). She also critiques the series' "particularly chauvinistic [...] representation of indentured women" (239) as well as the predominance of male interviewees "both in numbers and in the time allocated to them" (239). Mesthrie's concluding remarks describe *Eastern Roots* as being "grounded in the South Africanness of Indians and a shared political struggle with Africans against apartheid [...] also [representing] a celebration of Indian struggles and the Indian past" (251).

Unlike the SABC TV backed series that Mesthrie examined, Subeshini Moodley's (2003, 2008) work on South African Indian women and film draws attention to the stories of South African Hindu women, as told through participatory video and to representations of Indian women in diasporic film. Moodley's work focuses on the "impact or influence of religion in [South African Hindu women's] lives" (2008: 124). Her aim in using participatory video as a tool for feminist research was to allow "South African Hindu women to re-invent the narrative constructions within the medium of film and video [...] in a way the uniquely speaks of their resistances" (124). Moodley's writing on Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta's films foregrounds the idea of accented cinema, a term coined by Hamid Naficy to describe "films directed/produced by exilic and diasporic people around the world" (2003: 66). The term refers to the "the belief that diasporic and exilic filmmakers seem to exhibit specific similarities – at levels of technique,

style, aesthetics, and ideology – in the production of their films” (66) which differ from those of the dominant cinema as well as to the “interstitial” (67) nature of such films.

Similar to Subeshini Moodley’s work is Sachin Narain’s dissertation, *Exploring social identity in South African Indian cinema through filmmaking* (2022). Again, Narain is more interested in the filmic aspect of representation focusing “on how issues of social and cultural identity in South Africa are addressed by Indian filmmakers” (v). His dissertation looks at the works of South African producer Anat Singh and British Indian filmmaker Avie Luthra and the manner in which they approach social identity in South Africa but does not foreground South African Indian identity.

In “Made in India, Proudly South African: Commemorating 150 Years of Indian Presence in South Africa”, Rehana Ebrahim-Vally emphasises the diversity in the midst of assumed “Indian” homogeneity while foregrounding the South Africanness of South African Indians. Ebrahim-Vally reports on the Laudium community’s celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa – “The 1860 Legacy Foundation: The Pretoria Chapter” – and discusses some of the ways that Indianness was presented and performed. She points out the diversity of the South African Indian community – with specific reference to the way that Hindus and Muslims presented their cultures – while noting the unifying power of the catch-all “South African Indian” identity. Ebrahim-Vally further notes that the identity of “Indian” itself in an everyday context is made most tangible through “food and the different styles of regional cooking and religious rituals” (67) though “social stratifications that divide South Africans of Indian origin into different caste-type and religious communities” (67) remain. Thus, the identity of Indian refers to a non-homogenous cultural community and India as a space, while it may still hold “meaning for an older generation [...], to the youth it [is] a space that [has] very little relevance in their lives” (69). To this end, Ebrahim-Vally notes that “commemoration and rituals are a form of collective remembering” (73) and that “[t]he performers looked hard to find ways of combining their South African and Indian cultural identities in positive ways” with their “messages [conveying] a mixture of religiosity, culture, and compassion” (75). She concludes saying that the event “provided the scope for Laudium residents of Indian origin to affirm their South African identity: ‘We are culturally Indian but our hearts are South African’” (76).

The only academic work I have been able to source on commercial South African Indian film is Sogen Moodley and Arushani Govender's article, "The Role Of Place and Identity As Core Contributing Success Factors in Jayan Moodley's 'Keeping up With the Kandasamys' and 'Kandasamys: The Wedding'" (2020). The article examines the reaction to the films, shedding light on the local success of the first two *Kandasamy* films. This is valuable as the impact of representation is described. They argue that it is the accurate representation of South African Indians and life in Chatsworth that drew in audiences and created a fanbase. The "authentic portrayal" resulted in "feelings of visibility and nostalgia" (230). They argue that place identity – a "mix of memories, ideas, conceptions, interpretations, and feelings about place" (236) – lies at the heart of a sense of belonging has greatly contributed towards the success of the films. Furthermore, South African Indians saw themselves portrayed not as one-dimensional stereotypes, but as "relatable characters" (240), reinforcing positive feelings of identification. Thus, the films evoke a positive feeling of home and belonging contributing to the films' popularity.

Research Methods

Supporting my analysis of Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi from my selected texts, this dissertation makes use of textual analysis, literary study, and film study. Textual analysis involves closely reading a selected text/texts to interpret its meaning. The process of interpreting meaning involves asking questions about the text such as: what is the text about? What prior knowledge is necessary to understanding the text in context? How does locating the text historically and in conversation with other texts contribute to understanding and interpreting it? What are the positions and readings that the text is offering to the reader? (Belsey, 2013: 161).

As meaning is plural, textual analysis examines the readings and meanings offered by the text as well as how these readings can be rejected and what other possible readings and interpretations of the text can arise. Meaning is taught and "subsists in the relations between people, inscribed in signifiers, sounds or images" (167). Textual analysis, then, examines the

signifiers present in a text and links it to meaning, to what is being signified. Thus, my study analyses my selected films as texts.

Within film studies, the range of signifiers is broad, as it can involve the study of film as “a particular signifying practice” (Turner, 2006: 282). Therefore, it is necessary to define the parameters of what is studied and analysed in the selected films. This is accomplished through ‘reading’ the films as literary texts and analysing them using a literary study. A literary study can be defined as “the finding of meaning through the interpretation of the text” (Kusch, 2016: 6). Text refers to “a coherent, delimited, comprehensible structure of meaning [...] [containing] a complex of events that are related to each other within a context, which can be a story or a narrative” (Kolker, 1998: 12). Interpretation can be understood as “the effect of a relation between the reader and a text” and thus, meaning is influenced by the particular lens that the text is being examined through (Belsey, 2013: 166). Therefore, the aim of a literary study is to “invite certain readings and ‘offer’ specific positions (167) from which to “re-understand [...] a text by translating [it] into a new frame of reference” (Kusch, 2016: 31). Thus, in this dissertation I analyse the selected films as texts, using the frameworks of intersectionality, postcolonialism, and feminism to offer interpretations of the narratives and characters that reflect the lives and stories of South African Indian women.

This frame of reference is determined through the use of cultural studies which asks “what is the meaning of [...] a code of manners [...] a norm of conduct, [or] a system of belief” (Longhurst, Smith, Bagnall, Crawford, and Baldwin, 2008: 2). Cultural studies aims to understand why people believe what they believe and how this informs and impacts their behaviour. Culture has typically been studied in three different ways. First is the study of “artistic or intellectual activity”, second, the study of culture as a “[way] of life”, and finally, the study of the historical “development of culture” (4). Cultural studies emphasises considering at all three areas and the manner in which they overlap, informing each other. As “power and culture are inextricably linked” (12), cultural studies also pays attention to “politics and power relations” (12), and the ways in which culture can be used by either dominant or subordinate groups.

Film studies, in addition to examining film as a “signifying practice” examines film as “a cultural industry and as a component of the political economy of the media and entertainment industry” (Turner, 2006: 281). This movement away from an aesthetics based study allows for film to be studied as “a locus of sociocultural history [and] as a site for the examination of sociocultural change” (282). The study of film as a sociocultural artefact is then accomplished using textual analysis, as described previously. The ways in which character is created and signified in the films is a central point of analysis.

Finally, comedy studies is useful in analysing the genre of the films and how the conventions of the genre are utilised in the films. Comedy studies is “geared more to considering the response of audiences or multiple spectators” (Wilkie, 2019: xi) and offers theories to explain why certain audiences find certain scenarios or actions humorous. As “commercial comedy always has embedded within it a set of assumptions that amplify some voices while silencing others” (Marx and Sienkiewicz, 2018: 13) comedy studies also examines the underlying social frameworks from which comedy arises and that it “seeks to distort” (Stott, 2014: 9). comedy studies provides a useful framework for situating and interpreting the signifiers within the cultural context that the films are experienced. As the films were written and directed by a South African Indian woman, the presentation of South African Indian culture and South African Indian women serves to amplify their voices in a genre that has a history of silencing and misrepresenting people of colour and, more specifically, women.

Close Reading as a Research Method

Bringing all these studies together is the use of close reading as my primary research method. Close reading involves “establishing the text’s readability and the purpose of reading it, exploring the text, and interpreting the text” (Ohrvik, 2024: 241). In analysing the films as text, I employed a both a realist reading of selected scenes, some of which I transcribed, others of which I simply conducted scene analyses on, and an overall subversive reading of the films.

Norman K. Denzin (2004: 240) explains that the realist reading assumes “that pictures are windows to the real world”. The realist reading of the films was provided through “a close reading of [selected scenes’] contents, its attention to detail, its depiction of characters, and its dialogue” (240). The scenes were taken at face value and understood to mean what they

appeared to mean on the surface. This realist reading of the films was employed to demonstrate that the *Kandasamy* films do represent real-world realities of South African Indian women.

Further employing the use of close reading, is my subversive reading of the films as text. Subversive readings “suggest that realism in visual texts is always filtered through preconceptions and biases” (240). Using the adversarial context, defined by David Greenham (2019: 128) as being “at least equally interested in [...] theory that is not, in essence, literary, and in ideas that [are not] straightforwardly generated by the text itself”, I was able to use cultural studies to inform my interpretation of Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi’s characterisations. The semantic, involving the situational and historical contexts where the text is examined for possible meanings and the most appropriate is selected, as well as the figurative context where singular or pared down references represent a much larger context; syntactic, in which various items, words, and even sound choices “create literary effects by being put together in a particular order” (49); thematic, referring to texts being “more often than not explorations of particular ideas” (49) and the importance of interpreting it “in the light of the whole” (49); iterative, referring to repetition of motifs, ideas, symbols, narratives, with difference; and generic, referring to genre conventions and expectations which shape how you read and interact with a text, contexts then enabled me to conduct a literary study, as defined by Belsey earlier, to interpret the visual signifiers of identity and culture that contribute to their characterisations within an intersectional feminist framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks employed in this dissertation are intersectionality, feminist film studies, cultural studies, and postcolonialism. It is first necessary to establish what identity means in the context of this dissertation as identity is what is being examined. The use of an intersectional framework, which looks at the various factors that converge to create an identity, relies on an understanding of what identity is, as do the postcolonial and feminist frameworks. Due to the limited literature on South African Indian women’s experiences and identity I have drawn from a broader range of literature when it comes to theoretical frameworks, as seen in the use of an intersectional framework, and in explaining historical attitudes towards women which continue to inform the creation of women’s identities today. Some of the literature I refer to in the dissertation has been written by Black women about Black women (often African

American), and by Indians about Indian women. The reason for this is the similarity in many women of colour's experiences, especially in relation to colonialism and the patriarchy and because South African Indian culture is a hybrid culture, negotiating Indian and South African culture and context. Additionally, cultural ideas regarding women and women's roles are also similar across cultures. While I refer to literature and ideas based on Black and Indian experiences, my focus is specifically South African Indian women, and the ideas are adapted to the context of the South African Indian woman.

Understanding Identity

In discussing non-western identities, Min-Sun Kim (2002: 8) states that “ways of being a person are shaped according to the means and practices of a given cultural community, and communities are maintained by these ways of being in the world”. Her discussion and explanation of non-western identity describes people as having multiple situationally based identities. The individual is seen as better adjusted when she is able to adapt to different roles required for different situations, unlike the western concept of identity which values consistency in identity across all situations and allows for less social adaptability.

In a collectivistic culture, as opposed to an individualistic one, identity is more focused on who an individual is within the community, as opposed to the person as an isolated individual. This concept fits in well with the South African concept of *ubuntu*²³ as it is the interactions between people that make up the individual's identity as a person does not have a complete identity if she is divorced from her community. Additionally, the characters analysed are defined, in part, through their relationships with other people. Therefore, for the purpose of this dissertation, identity (referring to a singular person) can be understood as referring to the individual as part of the community and the roles that she plays within her community.

Using such a definition of “individual” identity also plays a crucial role in developing an analysis that is not dependent on western beliefs and ideology. This allows my selected texts to

²³ Ubuntu is often translated as “personhood” or “humanness” and refers to a “a genre of philosophy that one may [...] refer to as African ethics” (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019: 96). The values of Ubuntu are “based on ethical beliefs, moral judgements, or ideas such as prizing communal relationships [...], rather than respect for autonomy or impartial cost-benefit analysis [as] are prevalent in the West” (96).

be more accurately analysed and understood and is in line with the postcolonial framework that is employed. Similar to the understanding of individual identity as just defined, group identity refers to a specific set of ways of being that a particular group of people ascribe to and find commonality in. Group identity affects individual identity. The group identities relevant to this dissertation are South African Indian identity, women's identity, and South African Indian women's identity. Ways of being can thus be seen as a better means to understand identity as it describes the way in which a person acts within her cultural community. As this dissertation is examining a culturally mediated way of being – that is, South African Indian ways of being a woman – this understanding and interpretation of identity is vital.

Intersectionality

To acknowledge and analyse the differences among women and the various cultural and historical factors that converge to create these differences, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality, which encompasses the ideas of postcolonialism and cultural, is employed. Intersectionality's examination of "the dynamics of difference and sameness [when considering] gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines" makes it a useful "tool to interrogate and intervene in the social plane" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013: 786-87). Within the academic sphere, intersectionality is especially helpful as it highlights "how discourses of resistance [...] could themselves function as sites that [produce] and [legitimise] marginalisation" (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, 2013: 304). As a framework, intersectionality conceives "of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013: 795). Furthermore, giving "explicit attention to multiple dimensions of privilege and difference is necessary to develop awareness about a whole spectrum of subordinated histories and struggles" which in turn builds stronger alliances and "coalitions" which can have a "broader impact" than those which privilege unchanging sameness (801).

Cultural Studies

As identity is a culturally mediated way of being, cultural studies necessarily forms part of the theoretical framework. Cultural studies is concerned with the creation and dissemination of meaning through various mediums, including literature and film. As a cross-disciplinary field, Cultural studies is able to bridge the gap between English studies and film studies, allowing film to be read for meaning in a similar manner to written literature. Cultural studies enables examination of the “social practice of signification” (Hall, 2019: 314) in film and written text in which signification is “the practice through which the ‘labour’ of cultural and ideological representation is accomplished” (314). Codes allow signs to “reference a wide domain of social meanings, relations, and associations [and] constitute the crisscrossing frames of reference, the sedimentations of meaning and connotation, which cover the face of social life and render it classifiable, intelligible, [and] meaningful” (315). Stuart Hall notes that “hegemony is accomplished through the agencies of superstructures – the family, education system, the church, the media, and cultural institutions” (318), and that through these superstructures “certain of the available meanings and values through which the different classes of men love their conditions of life are ‘chosen for emphasis’, others discarded” (317). Additionally, “the many meanings and values which lie outside of the selective and selecting emphases of this central core are continually ‘reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture’” (317).

Postcolonialism

This awareness of the reinterpretation, dilution, or otherwise adaptation of meanings and values that lie outside of hegemonic discourses is something that Postcolonialism concerns itself with. Thus, the postcolonial framework in this dissertation serves to give voice to those subordinated and silenced due to gender, race, and culture. Postcolonialism is a way of ‘writing back’. Writing back can be writing back against the empire or writing oneself and, representationally, one’s community back into the narrative from which they were previously excluded. Postcolonialism seeks to give a visibility to experiences that have “not typically been registered or represented at any institutional level” (Young, 2009: 13). It rejects the imposed silence and repression of the voices of the subaltern (Spivak, 2006).

The subaltern, as defined by Gayatri Spivak (2006: 30), is “a person without lines of social mobility”. The subaltern occupies a subordinate position “in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture” (Prakash, 1994: 1477). Although the subaltern is not dependent on the dominant elite, they are affected by and “subject to their activity” (1477). The subaltern has historically been silenced by the dominant group and systematically denied opportunities to use their voice. This dissertation examines the writing back of South African Indian women against the hegemonic narratives imposed by the patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the history of apartheid, which still seem to characterise academic studies today.

Feminism

The writing back of women into the narrative is a feminist concern and thus, feminism constitutes part of the theoretical framework employed. Bell Hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (2000: 1). Barbara Smith’s (2023: 65-6) definition of feminism emphasises that feminism is a theory and practice that aims to “free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women” with “[a]nything less than this vision of total freedom” being “not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement”. Audre Lorde (2007: 130-131) expresses similar ideas in *Sister Outsiders* stating that it is a must to “recognise differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each others’ difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles”. Gayatri Spivak (1996: 59) does the same stating that she “would see [her] work as the developing of a reading method that is sensitive to gender, race, and class”. Furthermore, she claims that the nativist argument for not questioning “Third World mores is of course unexamined imperialism” (69), encouraging women to examine and criticise power relations from cultures that are not western.

Feminist Film Theory

In analysing identity in film from a feminist perspective, it is necessary to employ feminist film studies for the analysis of my chosen texts. As explained, a framework that can account for difference within identity is important, especially when engaging with representations of

women of colour. While Laura Mulvey's (1989) theory of visual pleasure is a staple of feminist film studies, the focus of her theory on sexual difference completely fails to account for class and racial differences. Using a "a psychoanalytical model to explain Black [...] relations [forces] an erroneous universalisation, and inadvertently [reaffirms] white middle-class norms" (Gaines, 1986: 61). Thus, such a theory would be limiting as part of the theoretical framework for this dissertation. A theory that can account for the multiple converging factors that make up identity is what is needed.

Noël Carroll's (1990) paradigm scenario theory is based on Ronald de Sousa's (1987: 182) paradigm scenarios hypothesis in which people are "made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with paradigm scenarios [which] are drawn first from [...] daily life [...] and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which [they] are exposed [... later being] supplemented and refined by literature". Paradigm scenarios are created from exposure to "a situation type providing the characteristic objects of the specific emotion-type [...] and second, a set of characteristic or 'normal' responses to the situation" (182). Carroll (1990: 357) states that "paradigm scenarios may be derived from films, or, more likely, films may reflect, refine, and reinforce paradigm scenarios already abroad in the culture". Thus, it is possible to study the image of women in film through an identification and examination of "widely disseminated paradigm scenarios that contribute to the shaping of emotional responses to women" (357). While the existence of certain paradigm scenarios in films do "not imply that every [person] or even any [person] mobilises it [...] it does at least present a potential source or resource for [...] behaviour" (357) and beliefs. If "[r]ecurring, negative images of women in film [can] warp the emotions of those who employ them as paradigm scenarios" through distorting "the way women are attended to emotionally by presenting wildly fallacious images" or presenting an "impoverished [...] repertoire of images of women" (357), then recurring, positive images that are realistic and rich in representation can enrich and improve the emotional responses of those who encounter these paradigms.

Carroll's paradigm scenario theory works well with a feminist framework as it does not restrict the interpretation of the images of women found in film. The focus on the images of women as they are represented in film supports my analysis of the identities of the selected women characters and what they represent off-screen. The paradigm scenario theory allows for various

culturally mediated interpretations of representations of women to be identified and studied. It does not demand an interpretation through the western lens of psychoanalysis as Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure does, further supporting the feminist intersectional framework. In analysing the selected women characters from my selected texts, Carrol's theory allows for the cultural context of South African Indians to inform the analysis of the women's identities presented. This intersectional feminist theoretical framework is applied to the reading of the films as text through the method of close reading as outlined in the Methodology section of this chapter.

Summary of Chapters

Through the characters in the films, the diversity of the South African Indian community is celebrated with a specific focus on the diversity of women's identities within the community. Chapter One analyses Aya's representation and re-presentation of old women as well as her re-presentation of Sita. Chapter Two analyses Jennifer and Shanti and their representations of the Superwoman and Sita stereotypes. Their occasionally clashing identities represent South African Indian women in a way that is positive, recognising the heterogeneity of the community. Finally, Chapter Three analyses Jodi's characterisation as an Everywoman, facilitating her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture.

Chapter One analyses Aya, the matriarch of the Kandasamy family. The oldest character in the franchise, she reproduces and challenges both negative and positive stereotypes of old women in films. Aya's health scare in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) reproduces the image of old women as frail and ailing but is challenged by her good health in the subsequent films, particularly *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), where she plays paintball and enjoys dirt-biking, playing into the stereotype of the golden ager. Aya also reproduces the image of old women as invisible as she is often left on the sidelines when the action is taking place. Her reaction to being sidelined, particularly by Jennifer, is to act the part of the shrewish mother-in-law who is forever dissatisfied, challenging one negative representation with another. However, the image of mothers-in-law as shrewish old women is challenged by Aya's willingness to reconcile with Jennifer, her daughter-in-law, which also

shows older people as being open to change rather than stuck in their ways. Further challenging the negative representations of older women that she presents, Aya is depicted as wise, caring, and, at least to her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, unconditionally loving. Her narration framing each film creates a universal image of old women being wise and a guiding voice for the younger generations. Her care is shown in the way she treats Jodi, looking out for her and being a source of comfort and support in her life. These contrasting aspects of her characterisation enable Aya to be seen as filling different roles, based on who she is with, emphasising the multifaceted identity that real women live out.

Aya as a character also presents a reimagined Sita who rejects her husband completely and does not relinquish her son to his care. She rejects the expectation of a wife to remain devoted to a husband who causes her suffering but emphasises the expectation of a woman to be a good and devoted mother. Despite her deviation from the traditional way of being a woman, Aya is not punished but is shown as strong and resilient for taking action and is rewarded with a fulfilling life. Thus, Aya has been shown to re-present the image of the old woman on screen in a manner that gives her agency and complexity, challenging stereotypical representations and traditional expectations.

Chapter Two discusses how Jennifer and Shanti's characterisation represents and re-presents the stereotypes of Superwoman and Sita. Representing Superwoman – the one who effectively juggles a demanding job with being a good mother and wife – Jennifer is portrayed as stylish, put together, and highly successful in her position as CEO of the business she started with her husband. Her success is shown in the films through material means – her house, clothes, and car – rather than through any interaction with colleagues and the corporate world. The lack of focus on what she actually does at work creates an illusion that her job is relatively undemanding, theoretically making it easy for her to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Jennifer's emphasis on staying fit serves to reinforce this idea as she maintains a trim and attractive figure, further increasing the desire to also be a Superwoman.

Re-presenting and challenging the Superwoman identity, however, Jennifer is shown to fail in her role as a South African Indian mother and wife. Jennifer is the opposite of the warm and

always on-call mother that is the expected norm. From preferring bottle-feeding over breast-feeding, to prioritising work over being a present mother, Jennifer is depicted as having failed in her role as a mother. Even her attempts at mothering an adult Jodi reinforce this idea as she comes across as ignorant of her child's needs, despite her good intentions. Her good intentions being misinterpreted due to the context she finds herself in are seen again in her relationship with food. Jennifer views food as fuel and her health-conscious food choices are tolerated, rather than embraced by her family. Her inability to cook makes her seem uninvolved as a mother and, as a woman – preserver and teacher of culture – she is neglecting one of her duties in failing to pass along cultural culinary skills to her child. Within this South African Indian context that Jennifer's eating habits can be linked to the idea of an eating disorder as well as social isolation and loneliness, highlighting some of the negative effects of trying to live up to the Superwoman identity. Finally, Jennifer's distance and disconnection from other people is emphasised and explained through her emotional attachment to the business that she and Elvis built from scratch. The business functions as a stand-in for her child and her position as CEO fulfils her need to feel wanted, needed, and like number one as she does not receive validation in her identity as a wife and mother when at home.

On the other hand, Shanti represents Sita – the perfect wife and mother, quietly supportive and sacrificial – through her prowess in the kitchen and her devotion to her son and husband. Shanti's continued association with preparing food throughout the films and being acknowledged as a good cook reinforces her traditional identity as desirable. Shanti's representation of Sita is also reinforced through her catering wholeheartedly to Prishen, her son, cooking his favourite meals. However, Shanti subverts the Sita identity as, unlike Sita, she is unprepared to step back when Prishen no longer needs her to be intimately involved in his life. Her focus on Prishen also causes her to neglect Desan, her younger son, and she fails to be a good mother to him. Thus, Shanti's identity as mother both reinforces and subverts the ideal mother stereotype.

Shanti's representation of Sita is then, again, proved by her devotion to Peggie, her husband, making sure that he has freshly cooked meals every day, making him tea, and even going to far as to cut his nails for him, without receiving thanks or appreciation for her efforts. It is in this context that Shanti re-presents Sita, as Peggie is made to recognise and appreciate Shanti – a

deviation from the expected norm. Finally, Shanti also challenges the Sita identity through her boldness and occasional unladylike manners, proving that women do not need to restrain, reduce, and refashion themselves for the sake of men – and society – to gain fleeting approval and identity validation. Having analysed Jennifer and Shanti separately, this chapter then briefly examined the shared oppression they face, despite their different circumstances in life and noted how their different identities are presented as equal and enables them to support each other. Thus, through analysing their representation and re-presentation of the Superwoman and Sita identities, this chapter has shown how the *Kandasamy* films, through Jennifer and Shanti, present realistic representations of South African Indian women in a way that is positive as they recognise differences among women, treating different identities as equal, neither inferior nor superior.

Chapter Three analyses Jodi's characterisation as an Everywoman, facilitating her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture. First, Jodi's relationship with Jennifer is shown to represent the ways in a mother views her daughter as an extension of herself through whom she can re-experience the world and live the life she was denied while redeeming herself from her own failures as a woman. Even through the care that Jennifer gives Jodi, it is clear to see that she shields not just Jodi but herself as well from (re)experiencing the hardships of life as seen in her drawing attention to Prishen's tendency to prioritise his mother over Jodi which mirrors Elvis' prioritisation of Aya over Jennifer. Jennifer is only able to let go of Jodi and embrace her own identity as a whole woman after she realises that Jodi mothered her and she works through her own issues with Aya, leading to the resolution of her identity. From a site of personal identity projection and negotiation, Jodi is then discussed in her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of culture.

Through food, Jodi experiences the pressures of traditional culture and western culture, respectively represented by Shanti and Jennifer and their approaches to food. Resolution comes when Jodi learns to cook from Anjali, her Mauritian neighbour, thus creating a fusion style of cooking, representing a hybridised identity. Jodi's hybridised identity incorporates the best of traditional culture and western culture, proving her identity as a fully realised woman as she embodies the role of mother and daughter simultaneously, being both a transmitter of culture while reinterpreting, and thus re-presenting, inherited gender scripts.

Finally, Jodi's role as a site to facilitate a societal attitude shift towards mental health is discussed through a comparison of her experience with post-partum depression to Jennifer's experience of post-partum depression. Jodi's ability to talk about her struggles is contrasted with Jennifer's inability to do so, as is the support Jodi receives with Jennifer's lack of support, representing the ability of younger generations to address mental health issues as they have tools that were not readily available to older generations. The explicit focus on the issue of post-partum depression in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) also challenges the prevailing attitude amongst South African Indians that it is shameful to talk about mental health issues, facilitating a shift towards addressing such issues in an open and judgemental free manner. Thus, Jodi is shown to fill the role that is less of a character and more of a personification of a site for the negotiation of identity and culture.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has highlighted the need to give academic attention to contemporary representations of South African Indian women in South African film and how this dissertation achieves this. Through analyses of four characters – Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi – from Jayan Moodley's *Kandasamy* films, utilising a feminist cultural studies framework with cultural studies uniting literary and films studies as research methods, enabling the reading of film as text, this dissertation contributes to recognising and building a robust national literature that is accurately representative of South Africans and their experiences. The selection of these films has been justified by pointing out their cultural impact within South Africa and noting the more global reach that the films have when compared to other South African films dealing with South African Indians. This introduction has also presented the background that informs the creation of the specific characters' identities, pointing out the increasing expectations placed on South African Indian women and noting the ways in which women have been represented on-screen. Specifically, the stereotype-identities of the Superwoman and Sita have been explained as they constitute the most important influences on the representation of identity in the films. The marginalisation of older women has also been discussed as the central characters of the films, Jennifer and Shanti, are middle aged.

CHAPTER ONE: AYA'S (RE)PRESENTATION OF OLD WOMEN

Introduction

This chapter analyses the character Aya from the *Kandasamy* films first examining the different stereotypes of old women that she represents and then offering a reading of Aya as Sita reimagined to demonstrate that her characterisation presents her as a complex character who defies the marginalisation and stereotypical presentation of old women on-screen as well as subverting traditional expectations of South African Indian women. Aya's representation of multiple stereotypical identities for old women include old women as frail, ailing, and invisible. These stereotypes are subverted by her presentation as the shrewish mother-in-law. In turn, the shrew stereotype is subverted as some of the motivating forces behind her attitude towards her daughter-in-law are revealed. The negative stereotypes are then collectively challenged by her presentation as a golden ager and a loving, wise grandmother. The interplay between these contrasting stereotypes presents Aya as a realistic woman who is an important part of the narrative. Furthermore, Aya as Sita reimagined challenges the expectation of South African Indian women to be submissive to their husbands – something unheard of for her generation. This disruption of tradition, however, is couched by her reinforcement of the role of mother being the highest calling in a woman's life.

Representing and Challenging Stereotypical Presentations of Old Women

As noted in the introduction, the representation of older women in the *Kandasamy* films is important as it challenges the idealisation of youth. Aya is beyond being an “older” woman and is, simply, an “old” woman as she celebrates her 80th birthday at the end of *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). Typically, Hollywood, Bollywood, and European cinema shy away from representing older and old women in central roles as “for the most part [...] it is essential to be youthful in order to ‘look’ significant on screen” and, for “women, youthfulness lies in the charm of the female body” (Kumar, 2022: 335), with ageing meaning a loss of femininity. When old women are present, they are often an unwelcome presence, “lowering the aesthetic of a film scene” (336). Lemish and Muhlbauer (2012: 167) describe

women as vanishing “from the screen in central and powerful roles as they mature”, less likely than their male age cohorts “to be presented as authority figures who are influential in the workplace”, and having a “largely muted sexuality” as “their bodies [are] displayed as objects of ridicule rather than objects of desire”. Older women are seen as other, “categorised as ‘invisible’, except for her role as either mother or grandmother, [... and] is used as a ‘metaphor’ [...] linked with disease, isolation, worthlessness, vulnerability, dissatisfaction, and decrepitude” (167). When present, representations of women in desirable positions “[are] still the prerogative of a closed club of high-powered older women: lesbians and women of colour are rarely included” (176). While representations of women being powerful as they age, where “having it all [refers to] wealth, beauty, sex, [and] control”, this presents a false image of women and “embodies several forms of “enlightened sexism” [...] which suggests that feminism is “passé”, as it has already achieved its goals” (173). Furthermore, the women represented tend to “abide by three criteria” being “White, rich, and [still] beautiful and desirable to men” (173). Such representation cannot be considered truly feminist in nature as only one type of woman is represented, ignoring “the majority of older women who are not rich, [...] white, [...] “hot”, and not leading associates in famous law firms or medical practices” (174).

These findings are similar to Femke De Sutter and Sofie Van Bauwel’s (2023: 21) study in which they state that “[p]revious studies of ageism in media [...] show that women are often invisible in popular media culture and are thus symbolically annihilated” losing visibility as they grow older, as opposed to increased visibility for men. They also say that “the most recurring representations of ageing women [...] include depictions of them as witched, passive, and bossy” (21) and even “representations of ‘successful ageing’ can be problematic [...] as a large part of the population cannot meet these expectations” (21). De Sutter and Van Bauwel go on to identify several common stereotypes that characterise representations of older individuals – women and men – in film. These stereotypes include “severely impaired”, “the shrew”, “perfect grandparent”, and “golden ager”. The severely impaired stereotype resonates with the use of the aged woman as a metaphor linked to disease, isolation, and decrepitude, the “stereotype of feminine incompetence and powerlessness associated with senility” (Dey and Tripathi, 2021: 264), and the aged female body as a site for the projection of fears of ageing and death, portraying “older adults as frail, physically and/or mentally limited, and/or dependent on others [...] characterising them] according to their deteriorating health, mobility,

or cognitive abilities” (De Sutter and Bauwel, 2023: 22). The “shrew” stereotype “portrays older adults as difficult, argumentative, or bossy, often characterised by their rigid adherence to rules and tendency to criticise others” (22). This stereotype goes hand in hand with the evil mother-in-law stereotype. Contrasting these negative stereotypes, the “perfect grandparent [...] idealises older adults as wise, caring, and unconditionally loving grandparents” and the “golden ager [...] represents [them] as optimistic, healthy, and active people who enjoy leisure activities, volunteering, and contributing to society” (22).

As an elderly woman, Aya’s character does reproduce some negative stereotypes particularly in relation to her ill health, as she faints during Jennifer and Shanti’s climactic fight in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). Aya suddenly collapsing serves to heighten the tension of the climax and also reflects the invisibility of elderly women. After Jennifer and Shanti reveal that they conspired to drive Jodi and Prishen apart, both families rush outside. Jodi and Prishen leave the scene so they can talk unimpeded by their mothers and the two older couples, along with Aya and Desan, are left standing in the street. Visually, the couples are separated by Aya and Desan – Jennifer and Elvis on the right-hand side and Shanti and Peggie on the left. The scene’s shots focus mostly on Shanti and Jennifer, excluding Aya from view. Even when the shots show all the characters, Aya and Desan are usually out of focus in the background. The audience is able to witness Aya’s indications that she is feeling unwell, but the couples do not notice or even seem to remember that she is there until she collapses and Desan calls out. Once she is admitted to hospital, there is no explanation of what happened and, in-between Jennifer, Shanti, Elvis, and Peggie addressing the aftermath of the fight, the audience is shown Aya in her hospital bed, sleeping and attached to an IV drip. Aya’s hospitalisation plays into the idea of older characters being defined by their deteriorating health as well as presenting her as a site on to which the audience can project their fears of ageing and the lack of focus on her condition also causes her to fade into the background, reinforcing the idea of older women being invisible. Further contributing to the invisibility of older women is Jennifer’s treatment of her mother-in-law. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Jennifer talks about Aya to Elvis as if she is not present. Additionally, whenever Jennifer is reminded of Aya’s existence, she seems annoyed, something particularly evident when Aya arrives at the beach house in *Trippin’ With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021).

Being left on the sidelines sometimes works out in Aya's favour as the lack of focus on her means she is generally free to do whatever she wants to do, like scheming with Muthu in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), thus subverting the stereotype. However, Aya's main resistance to marginalisation comes in the form of her playing into the trope of the shrewish mother-in-law. From the beginning of Jennifer and Elvis' relationship, Aya has thought that Jennifer is not good enough for her son. As a mother-in-law, Aya judges Jennifer, deeming her cooking and child-care to be subpar and inserting herself into situations to remind Jennifer of her failures. It is revealed in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) that she described Jennifer as "weak and needy" (Moodley, 2023) following Jodi's birth. Aya is forever unsatisfied with Jennifer's performance as woman claiming that she would have preferred Shanti as a daughter-in-law.

While the presentation of Aya as the shrewish mother-in-law cannot be called a positive representation of older women, it does highlight the limited roles available for older women within film. Additionally, the shrewish mother-in-law can be seen as representative of real world issues in which a mother-in-law sometimes feels the need to "ensure that her daughter-in-law does not develop the confidence nor gain the loyalty of her son sufficient to encourage him to break the joint family" (Vera-Sanso, 1999: 4 – 5) which means an uncertain future for her, especially if her husband has died. In Aya's case, rather than the breaking of the joint family, she wants to prevent Jennifer from encouraging Elvis to leave Chatsworth or possibly even committing her to an old age home. If Jennifer were to become the most important person to Elvis, Aya risks losing her son – the loss of Elvis also means the loss of safety, comfort, and freedom. Thus, while Aya does reinforce some negative perceptions of old women, the narrative either actively works to contradict these representations, using the shrewish mother-in-law to contradict the invisibility of old women, or re-presents these perceptions through implying the reality that they are based on, such as Aya's reliance on Elvis to take care of her, especially as she is separated from her husband.

The subsequent films further challenge the negative stereotypes that Aya periodically reinforces. While idea of Aya being frail and incompetent is directly challenged by her independence in travelling to the market alone in the first film, her clandestine visit to her ex-husband in the second film and her enthusiasm in playing paintball and mountain biking in the fourth film

emphasise that she is far more than a sickly old woman. Aya as a healthy and active old woman is a far more prevalent image than her as weak and sickly however, as she is hospitalised for unknown reasons in the first film, the possibility of her health failing remains in the mind of the audience. The presence of both the frailty that comes with ageing and the capability to retain physical independence presents relatively neutral expectations of older women without implying that they can be only one or the other.

Like the nuanced picture of physical ageing that is presented through Aya's character, the image of woman as mother-in-law is presented in a nuanced manner as well. Initially presented as a nitpicking and shrewish mother-in-law, Aya's duality in her role as mother-in-law is first seen in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021) when, instead of turning a blind eye to Elvis' flirting with another woman, Aya tells Jennifer and Shanti that she is proud of them for speaking back to their husbands. Contrasting her usual dissatisfaction of Jennifer, and even her preference of Shanti, Aya is shown as caring and supportive of her daughter-in-law. Furthermore, Aya's revealed history presents her actions as trauma born and a tactic to avoid losing her son, which in her mind, frames her negative attitude towards Jennifer as necessary in order to ensure her well-being but does not excuse or condone her actions. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Aya is confronted with the hurt she caused Jennifer through her actions and, rather than dismissing Jennifer's feelings, Aya chooses to mend their relationship. Thus, Aya's characterisation challenges one-dimensional portrayals of mothers-in-law as she presents the shrew stereotype while also being supportive of her daughter-in-law and open to changing her behaviour to mend the gap between them. This change of heart also depicts old people as open to change rather than set in their ways and beholden to outdated traditions or norms.

Further challenging the negative representations of old women that Aya does play into, she is also depicted in the positive roles of the perfect grandparent and golden ager, enjoying her life and being a doting grandmother to Jodi. As the perfect grandparent, Aya is "wise, caring, and unconditionally loving" towards Jodi. She immediately acts in defence of Jodi when she confronts her mother about trying to reunite her with her ex-boyfriend, demanding to know what Jennifer did. In *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), the audience is shown Aya brushing Jodi's hair, comforting her after Prishen missed their meeting with the pundit. These

moments emphasise how much she cares for her granddaughter. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Aya comes up with a plan to reunite Jodi and Jennifer, coupling care with wisdom in order to heal and repair their relationship. Additionally, at the end of the film, Aya reveals that she scammed Elvis, Peggie, and Jennifer in order to buy a real gold *nazariya*²⁴ chain for Arya, her great-granddaughter, painting her mischievous ways in a new light emphasising her love for not only her granddaughter but her child as well. Further contributing to the wise and caring grandparent persona, Aya's narration frames each film, recounting the past and offering relevant moral observations on the present happenings in the films. Her voice-overs are usually accompanied by aesthetically pleasing shots, creating the feeling of being caught up listening to your grandmother tell a story, reinforcing the image of a wise and loving grandparent. Her disembodied voice contributes to the idea of a universal grandmother figure, reinforcing mental images of older women as wise grandmothers who are capable of advising and guiding the younger generations.

As the golden ager, Aya is lively and capable despite her age and, though she does not seem to care much for being a volunteer and contributing to society as a whole, she is shown to care deeply about her family. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Aya is shown going to the market by herself to buy fresh produce. This moment, and her clandestine trip to see Rogers in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), emphasises her independence as she is not reliant on her son or daughter-in-law to provide her with transport. In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), her role as Baby's distraction, which included taking her to the casino, shows Aya as a capable individual who contributes to society (society being Jennifer and Shanti). *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) presents the golden ager stereotype most of all as Aya is enjoying herself playing paintball and dirt biking while in Mauritius. Her bartering in the market, the scheme she runs with Muthu – the chauffer, and her orchestration of Jennifer and Jodi's reunion all demonstrate her command of her mental faculties and her active involvement in the communities and society that she finds herself in. Despite not being the most optimistic character in the franchise, an award that should go to Shanti, Aya does thus reproduce some of the characteristics of the golden ager stereotype.

²⁴ Traditional Indian jewellery usually made from gold and featuring black beads. The bracelet is believed to ward off evil and negative energies.

Aya's characterisation as the golden ager and perfect grandparent reinforce positive stereotypes of old women. As a character Aya proves that one can be old and still independent, active, enjoying life, and have a relevant role in family life as opposed to a frail, shrewish woman who is often forgotten. However, like negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes can become restricting if they are the only representations of a demographic. Having discussed the ways in which Aya, as a character, reinforces various aspects of both negative and positive stereotypes ascribed to older characters, especially older women, it becomes clear that she embodies multiple, sometimes contrasting, characteristics.

These contrasting aspects of her characterisation enable Aya to be seen as filling different roles, based on who she is with, emphasising the multifaceted identity that real women live out. Thus, as a character, Aya fulfils both the thematic and mimetic functions of a character. The stereotypical aspects identified in Aya's character enable her to be read as fulfilling a thematic function as stereotypes exist as a shorthand manner of conveying information to an audience. Thematically, Aya can be said to represent fears surrounding ageing, becoming obsolete as those important to you move on in their own lives, and a lack of independence – for women especially – experienced within the South African Indian community, as well as representing the security and comfort of the extended family – an important aspect of South African Indian life, and the desire to live a fulfilling life as one ages. The contrasting aspects present in Aya's characterisation are what enable her to fulfil the mimetic function, appearing as a realistic person to the audience. This mimicry of a real person enables Aya to be analysed using an intersectional paradigm scenario theory in which she appears differently in various situations. When interacting with Jennifer, Aya is the shrewish mother-in-law; when interacting with Jodi, she is a loving grandmother; with Elvis, a proud mother; on her own, she is an independent, active woman. These aspects, and others, intersect to create the character of Aya, much like the different roles an individual plays in life converge to influence who they are as a single entity.

Aya's mimetic function thus gives rise to her challenging of the stereotypes that she also, at times, embodies. Aya challenges the stereotype of old women as invalid through her embodiment of the stereotype of the golden ager and vice versa. She challenges the shrewish mother-in-law stereotype by supporting Jennifer when Elvis flirts with another woman and in her acknowledgement of the hurt that she caused Jennifer. Her role as the perfect grandparent is unchallenged in a direct sense however, presenting her in roles other than the perfect

grandparent resist the idea of the perfect grandparent being her entire identity. This resistance of Aya's to being defined by a single trait also challenges the tendency to reduce representations of older and old characters to a one-dimensional stereotype within film.

Aya as Sita Reimagined

Having discussed the stereotypes regarding old women that Aya embodies and how her characterisation resists being solely defined through stereotypes, I want to present a less obvious but no less important aspect of Aya's characterisation: Aya as Sita reimagined. As set forth in the introduction, Sita, the wife of Rama, was banished by her husband due to him doubting her fidelity. Pregnant with Rama's sons, she finds refuge in Valmiki's hermitage and, after giving birth, raises her sons – Lava and Kusha. Once they are grown and Rama acknowledges them, Sita appeals to her mother, the Earth, to release her from the sorrows of life, and she is thus swallowed by the earth. Rejected by her husband and no longer needed by her sons, Sita thus becomes superfluous and retreats into the background. Sita's removal of herself from the story once her maternal duties are fulfilled can be seen as her refusing to remain in a situation where she is undervalued and unappreciated, speaking to women's agency, however the overall message of women having no place in a "man's world" overpowers such a reading, instead contributing to the marginalisation of women. Sita's return to her mother involves being swallowed by the earth, removing her from daily life, and thus can be considered her death as well as her release, implying the non-existence of women without husbands or children (sons).

Aya, as is revealed in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), left her husband, taking a young Elvis with her, never returning to her husband. Aya clearly dedicated herself to taking care of Elvis, a feat that was not easy as it was only the two of them. While Aya's reason for leaving was domestic abuse rather than Rogers, her husband, doubting her, the image is similar to Sita being driven away by her husband and dedicating herself to raising her sons. However, unlike Sita, once her son became a man, Aya did not fade into the background, removing herself from her son's life to become a non-entity – she remains and is an active part of his life. Elvis may not need her any longer, but he does not abandon her in his newly empowered identity.

Furthermore, Aya is not a bereft, banished woman. Aya is a Sita who lives in triumph, having survived the disgrace of being un-husbanded to claim her own identity. She grows old, losing the charm of youth and beauty, becoming a grandmother and great-grandmother, holding a place of honour in her family. This honour is not posthumously bestowed, when she can become a legend who cannot through agency contradict the idealised icon memory has made her, but honour is given to her as a woman who has faults and her own will but is still loved and respected and cared for.

In addition to remaining relevant and active within her family after her son has achieved independence, Aya refused to put up with her husband's abuse simply because that is what was expected of her as a good and dutiful wife and is not passive when it comes to him. Sita, wrongfully treated by her husband, silently submits to his rule revealing no emotion and takes no action in any form against him, as did many women whose husbands mistreated them. However, Aya, in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), makes a short visit to his workplace in order to bribe him into not attending Jodi and Prishen's wedding. While there is fear in her actions, as she is clearly uncomfortable being around him, telling Rogers to stay away from the wedding is an act of defiance on Aya's part, even with the bribe money.

Furthermore, in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), Aya tells Elvis and Peggie to "wake up" and not take their wives' for granted and expect life to return to normal once Jennifer and Shanti have had a chance to cool off after their actions deeply hurt them, reminding them that they know the problems she had with her husband. In referring to her past with Rogers and the difficulties she faced in order to actively change the present and interacting with him for the same reasons, Aya deviates from the narrative of silent suffering that Sita embraced and that many other women were forced into. Aya's agency in going against tradition is emphasised in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), when she tells Jennifer and Shanti that she is "proud" of them for not being quiet about the pain their husbands caused them like her generation had to be.

As has been shown, Aya as Sita reimagined does challenge the "traditional narratives [that] often depict women as dependent on external forces for their identity" portraying her "independence and agency" (Kumar, 2024: 864) through her rejection of a husband as the defining factor of her identity, however, she does reinforce the centrality of motherhood and

the importance of being a good mother in claiming her identity as a woman. The importance of motherhood is re-presented in Aya's narrative as, while she venerates motherhood, she challenges the idea of it being a woman's duty to provide her husband with (male) heirs and of women accepting and enduring whatever treatment they received from their husbands in order to keep the family together. When Aya left her husband, she took a young Elvis with her. In doing this, the idea that a mother leaving her husband is selfish and weak is challenged. Taking her child with her leaves no room for anyone to accuse her of being a bad mother, selfish, or neglectful of her duties. This action also implies that Aya knew it would be unsafe for Elvis to remain with his father, adding the interpretation that Aya left not only for herself because she was 'too weak to endure the difficulties of her marriage', but also for the safety of her child, whom she, as a good mother, placed first and foremost in her life.

One could even argue that it was Elvis who gave Aya the strength and motivation to leave the abusive marriage and, if it had not been for her concerns over his safety, she might have remained with Rogers. Aya, as implied in *Kandasamy: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), is capable of 'standing up' to Rogers on behalf of others, but not herself, even if her going against him results in her being extorted. Her defiance, as explained, is seen in her attempt to pay Rogers off so that he does not attend Jodi and Prishen's wedding. She goes alone to give him the money and tell him to stay away. Later in the film, Rogers arrives at the Kandasamy home and barges into the kitchen where Jennifer and Aya are. Aya is clearly terrified and Jennifer steps between her and Rogers before Elvis appears and tells his father that he is not welcome in their home. This scene emphasises Aya's courage in leaving Rogers as the long-term psychological effects of abuse are seen. When Rogers enters the Kandasamy house, Aya is unable to do anything, freezing with fear, even after the decades that she has lived away from him. The effects of the abuse Aya endured – fear and uncertainty – are shown to be things that do not disappear, and abuse is seen as inexcusable. There is no attempt to justify or normalise domestic violence and the idea of violence being inherent to men or a manly trait is thrown out of the window when Elvis tells his father that Kandasamy men do not hit their wives. Despite her earlier courage, when confronted with Rogers in an unexpected situation, Aya is unable to stand her ground, lending credibility to the idea that her courage in leaving him was due to her desire to protect Elvis.

Aya's actions also challenge the generally passive image of mothers as individuals who provide care and support from background position. Sita-like mothers support from the sidelines²⁵, are enforcers of the father's or another male character's will²⁶, or disappear²⁷. Mothers who deviate from their support roles and take action in their children's lives²⁸, or embrace an identity outside of being a mother²⁹, are punished. Aya was an active agent in her own life and her son's life. She is presented as the protector of a young Elvis and her protection did not involve the sacrifice of her life, as a mother's protection is often portrayed³⁰, but is based on action which is a more 'masculine' form of protection, further challenging the narrative regarding how women should behave and what they can do. Aya continues to be an active agent even after Elvis is married, much to Jennifer's dismay, and is the reason that the family remained in Chatsworth. Additionally, Aya has an identity outside of being a mother (and grandmother) as explained through the golden ager stereotype. Despite her deviation from the traditional mother identity, Aya presents motherhood as the highest calling in a South African Indian woman's life and thus, is not punished but rather shown as strong and resilient for taking action and is rewarded with a fulfilling life.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Aya, the matriarch of the Kandasamy family. The oldest character in the franchise, she reproduces and challenges both negative and positive stereotypes of old women in films. Aya's health scare in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) reproduces the image of old women as frail and ailing but is challenged by her good health in the subsequent films, particularly *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) where she plays paintball and enjoys dirt-biking, playing into the stereotype of the golden ager. Aya also reproduces the image of old women as invisible as she is often left on the sidelines when the

²⁵ For example, Madhu, Lalita's mother in Praba Moodley's *A Scent so Sweet* (2006).

²⁶ Like Naani, Maha's maternal grandmother in Sumayya Lee's *The Story of Maha* (2007).

²⁷ Natasha's older sister who fills the mother role in her life in Kumaran Naidu's *Broken Promises* (2003) leaves South Africa with her husband, which removes her from the narrative and Natasha's life.

²⁸ Deviki, in *A Scent so Sweet*, is overly active in her son's life and, as a result, loses him and subsequently, her sanity.

²⁹ Maryam, Maha's mother in *The Story of Maha*, is involved in anti-apartheid efforts and loses her life when she is shot during a meeting.

³⁰ Mothers' sacrifices often involve being human shields for their children or fighting and dying to protect their children.

action is taking place. Her reaction to being sidelined, particularly by Jennifer, is to act the part of the shrewish mother-in-law who is forever dissatisfied, challenging one negative representation with another. However, the image of mothers-in-law as shrewish old women is challenged by Aya's willingness to reconcile with Jennifer, her daughter-in-law, which also shows older people as being open to change rather than stuck in their ways.

Further challenging the negative representations of older women that she presents, Aya is depicted as wise, caring, and, at least to her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, unconditionally loving. Her narration framing each film creates a universal image of old women being wise and a guiding voice for the younger generations. Her care is shown in the way she treats Jodi, looking out for her and being a source of comfort and support in her life. These contrasting aspects of her characterisation enable Aya to be seen as filling different roles, based on who she is with, emphasising the multifaceted identity that real women live out. Aya as a character also presents a reimagined Sita who rejects her husband completely and does not relinquish her son to his care. She rejects the expectation of a wife to remain devoted to a husband who causes her suffering but emphasises the expectation of a woman to be a good and devoted mother. Despite her deviation from the traditional way of being a woman, Aya is not punished but is shown as strong and resilient for taking action and is rewarded with a fulfilling life. Thus, Aya has been shown to re-present the image of the old woman on screen in a manner that gives her agency and complexity, challenging stereotypical representations and traditional expectations.

CHAPTER TWO: SUPERWOMAN VS SITA, JENNIFER AND SHANTI'S REPRESENTATIONS OF TWO IDEAL IDENTITIES

Introduction

This chapter analyses Jennifer and Shanti, the polar opposite protagonists of the *Kandasamy* film series. Superficially presented as Superwoman and Sita, Jennifer and Shanti both reinforce and challenge these stereotypes, as they are presented in multiple scenarios, contributing to a repertoire of complex and realistic images of women. Jennifer and Shanti's successes in their respective roles reinforces perceptions of women as Superwoman and Sita. However, they also challenge the respective "ideal woman" that they represent. Jennifer and Shanti fail in various aspects of their performances as mothers and show the negative aspects and effects of the identities that they try to live up to, some of which are directly addressed within the films.

Analysed first, Jennifer as Superwoman, is a very successful careerwoman who also presents a picture-perfect home life to the world but simultaneously challenges the Superwoman stereotype through her inability to be a warm and loving mother – one that lives up to the ideal South African Indian image of 'mother'. She also challenges the independence and strength associated with being a Superwoman as struggles with feelings of abandonment and inadequacy. Second, Shanti as the Domestic Sita takes pride in her role as a good mother and wife. However, like Jennifer challenges the Superwoman stereotype, Shanti challenges the Sita stereotype being a good mother to one son but not the other. She is also rather bold and assertive, subverting the expectations of women to be demure. The most impactful manner in which the Sita stereotype is challenged however is when Peggie, Shanti's husband, is forced to recognise her as a person and mindfully acknowledge everything that she has done for him and their family. This recognition and active appreciation of Shanti challenge the narrative that women should sacrifice and suffer silently in order to serve their husbands.

Thus, through presenting both their ability to successfully embody the Superwoman or Shanti stereotype and presenting lived realities of women, the *Kandasamy* films, through Jennifer and

Shanti, present realistic representations of South African Indian women. These representations, in their differences, gives expression to Audre Lorde's (2007: 130 – 131) statement that it is a must to “recognise differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles”.

Jennifer

The stereotype that Jennifer embodies is the Superwoman stereotype. The superwoman is the ultimate ‘modern’ woman. She is at the top of her game when it comes to her career. She is independent and confident. She attends to domestic matters efficiently and is as successful at home as she is at work. In short, she has it all and can do it all. Examining the reality behind the stereotype however reveals the negative effects of being the one who ‘does it all’, especially for women of colour. The pressure to be perfect and present an image of strength tends to render women who live up to the superwoman identity as incapable of relying on those around them and suppressing their emotions. Hyper-independence, the “overvaluing [of] individualism³¹ and undervaluing interdependence” (Isaacson, 2020: 375), becomes the Superwoman's primary operational mode. In women of colour, African-American women especially, this reinforces the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype. Jennifer's character reflects how Cailyn Petrona Stewart (2017) describes the Strong Black Woman. She “keeps her dynamic emotions and complex issues from being expressed and affecting the lives of other people” (31), has learned “that her needs always [come] behind the needs of others [and thus] doesn't expect [anything] in return” (33) and, as “she is her own responsibility [...] she must support herself” (33). Finally, what is perceived to be the Strong Black Woman's greatest strength is her “ability to operate unremittingly” (33).

While this image of the Superwoman/Strong Black Woman reinforces the idea that women are capable and *can* do it all, it also creates an expectation that women *will* do it all. Factors such as support are not considered important when these expectations are placed on women because the Superwoman identity says that you can and should be able to do it. Women themselves internalise the idea that they should be capable of excelling in a demanding position at work

³¹ Individualism is, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2023. Online), “a social or cultural tradition, ideology, or personal outlook that emphasises the individual and their rights, independence, and relationships with other individuals”.

while simultaneously being the perfect mother, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law. Jennifer simultaneously reinforces and challenges the idea of the Superwoman. Her Superwoman persona in the films reinforces the idea that the Superwoman identity is something to aspire to as it is connected with material success and affluence. However, the revelation that Jennifer's Superwoman identity is in fact a façade and that she has and still struggles to live up to the expectations of the identity play an important part in challenging the blind acceptance or belief that women can and will do it all.

Superwoman at Work and to the World

Jennifer certainly appears to be capable of doing it all. She is a mother and wife, who, judging by the introduction of her family on screen, does a good job of making sure her husband, daughter, and mother-in-law are taken care of, as they exit their home in style. The films offer glimpses of what her life outside of her home is like. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), she is introduced as she returns from the gym, her choice of food a post-workout smoothie as her trim figure show her to be a woman who takes care of herself, a trait emphasised by her running with Jodi in the second film as a way to make sure they are both in shape for Jodi's wedding. Jennifer's general style of dressing – office formal – marks her as being a competent professional, especially when compared to the more casual style the other characters tend to embrace.

In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), she is shown in her work environment, which is as polished as put together as Jennifer likes to present herself. There is, however, a clear lack of focus on Jennifer's professional life as the plot and drama of films all revolve around private matters, thus the impression of being a successful CEO is considered sufficient to deem Jennifer a Superwoman. While the lack of focus on Jennifer's actual work life serves to downplay the importance of her career in her identity, the material benefits – an above average house, being able to afford two BMW's, high quality clothing, and, as seen in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), the funds to commission real gold jewellery from India – present the Superwoman identity as desirable. The glamour of the high profile career aspect of the Superwoman identity is foregrounded,

while the reality is completely ignored, contributing to the perception that it is easily within the realm of doable for women to excel in a high-pressure work environment and at being a full-time mother and wife simultaneously. Thus, Jennifer's characterisation as Superwoman serves to reinforce the identity and the expectations that come with it.

Superwoman at Home

As being a Superwoman means being a woman who excels in the corporate world as well as in the traditional roles a woman is expected to fill. The roles of mother and wife are the roles that the Superwoman should excel at within the context of the *Kandasamy* films – that is, a South African Indian context. Through Aya's character, it was shown that the role of mother outweighs even the role of wife in importance, making “mother” the most important role to perform well in, alongside that of the career woman for Jennifer's Superwoman identity. Thus, Jennifer's performance as Supermom is analysed to determine her success in living up to the expectations of this part of her Superwoman identity.

A Supermom is a mother “who creates a [...] balance between her own space, taking care of herself [...] and her family” (Shah, Gandhi, Shinde, and Chaudhry, 2025: 7). There is also an “emphasis [placed] on self-care [...] [which] challenges the traditional expectations that mothers must constantly sacrifice for others” (7). Jennifer has been shown to achieve success in work and in taking care of herself. Unlike the traditional expectation of women taking “less interest in her personal grooming and [devoting] herself to the care of her husband, children, and in-laws” after marriage (Wiesinger, 1965: 148), Jennifer takes care to present herself well. Her performance as a mother and wife, however, are less successful by cultural standards.

Jennifer, the Not-so-Super Mom

As a mother, Jennifer comes across as cold and detached, having a very untraditional approach to parenting. Cultural norms expect mothers to be warm and caring, devoted to fully supporting their children. Mothers are expected to have a “comprehensive knowledge of her child's needs

and desires” which enables her to “provide [her child] with the best care possible”, dedicating “her body, her time, and her undivided attention to her child” (Schmidt, Décieux, Zartler, and Schnor, 2022: 62). Thus, a mother is expected to always be “on call” (Roychowdhury, Das, and Ray, 2025 :31) and to respond immediately to her child’s needs. Jennifer does the opposite of this in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) when she prevents both Jodi and Shanti from comforting a crying Arya, stating that to scurry around after every peep a baby makes encourages the wrong behaviour. Jennifer’s method of leaving her granddaughter to quiet down on her own is in direct opposition to the expectations of mothers as she actively makes herself ‘unavailable’ to attend to Arya. Jennifer’s unavailability as a mother is emphasised in the film when she recalls Jodi “bringing [her] tea, making [her] sandwiches, [and] mothering [her]” (Moodley, 2023). Jennifer’s preoccupation with work rendered her unavailable to Jodi to the point where their roles became reversed and Jodi was the one to “provide [her mother] with the best care possible” (Schmidt, Décieux, Zartler, and Schnor, 2022: 62). While Jennifer’s intention of raising a winner through encouraging independence in Arya can be viewed as her taking care in preparing her for the future, the deviation from the expected norm presents her as a cold and distant mother figure. Furthermore, her role reversal with Jodi presents her as a selfish mother figure whose attention is not directed towards her child. Thus, Jennifer does not live up to the cultural expectations of her as a mother and can be considered to be a ‘bad’ mother.

The idea of Jennifer being bad at mothering is reinforced in her preference for bottle-feeding as opposed to breastfeeding. Many mothers do bottle-feed their infants for a variety of reasons, including socio-economic status, however prevailing attitudes and understandings reinforce breastfeeding as the better option. Experiences of bottle-feeding mothers include guilt over “not doing what was best for the baby” (Lakshman R., Ogilvie, D., and Ong, K., 2009: 4) and “sense of failure” (5), but also relief in finding “a solution that made things easier” and helped ensure that their baby was “getting enough” (5). A study (Horwood, C., Surie, A., Haskins, L., Luthuli, S., Hinton, R., Chowdhury, A., and Rollins, N., 2020: 5) conducted in South Africa and India mention that “[w]omen in both countries strongly valued and acknowledged the importance of breastfeeding for child health and development”. Negative perceptions of bottle-feeding were emphasised by women who “gave examples of how they perceived that their children were healthy because of being breastfed, or that their children became sick or did not grow well once breastfeeding was stopped” (5). Whether or not these negative perceptions are grounded in genuinely perceivable effects or coincidence was taken as correlation, bottle-

feeding implies that a mother is not always on call to attend to her baby. Jennifer's admission that she bottle-fed Jodi thus serves to reinforce the idea that she is a selfish mother who refused to dedicate her body, time, and attention to her child.

Finally, Jennifer displays a lack of understanding of Jodi's needs and desires even as an adult. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Jennifer attempts to reunite Jodi with her ex-boyfriend Asheel. The reunion is part of Jennifer and Shanti's plan to separate Jodi and Prishen. Jennifer does not approve of Prishen at all but mentions liking Asheel and thinking that he and Jodi are a good match. Jennifer's lack of perception regarding her daughter's needs is highlighted when Jodi confronts her mother, who told Asheel that Jodi was "pining" (Moodley, 2017) for him and reveals that the reason she broke off her relationship with Asheel was due him having cheated on her more than once. In *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), Jennifer accepts a job offer on Jodi's behalf because she does not want to see Jodi make the same mistakes that she did and sacrifice a career opportunity for the sake of her relationship. Once again, Jennifer failed to see Jodi's needs and desires, as Jodi rejected the offer so that she would be able to leave Chatsworth and start an independent life with Prishen. In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021) and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Jennifer fails to see Jodi's needs and is completely insensitive to the struggles that she is facing. In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), Jennifer snaps at Jodi and Prishen, who are struggling to fall pregnant, that not everyone can have a perfect life like them. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), she gifts Jodi the family business, expecting her accept the position of CEO without considering if it is something that Jodi wants. She is also ignorant of Jodi's struggle with post-partum depression and, out of anger, accuses Jodi of lying about being able to cook. Jennifer's disconnection from the realities of Jodi's life and her needs and desires, once again, present her as a bad mother who is more invested in her own life, her own wants and needs, than she is in the life of her child.

Food Fuelled Identity

Jennifer's anger and insecurity over Jodi's cooking skills, and Jennifer's perception of those skills as a lie, stem from her own lack of skill in the kitchen. Being able to cook is an important

part of being a ‘successful’ woman in the traditional sense and is a very important aspect of being a good wife and mother. Like with breastfeeding, a mother is expected to be able to provide her child “access to healthy, low-risk food” which will aid in “ensuring the child’s physical and cognitive development” (Schmidt, Décieux, Zartler, and Schnor, 2022: 63). Mazonetto, Melo, Dean, and Fiates (2024: 119 - 120) report that “for older women, the duty of cooking is assumed at the moment of marriage, for younger ones, it begins with motherhood” and that “[p]roviding well-balanced meals became a condition for performing well and identifying as a mother” (120). Thus, it is clear that the pressure to perform well in the kitchen is a constant for women. Tulasi Srinivas (2006: 193) links food to culture, pointing out how urban middle class Indians in Boston use authentic food in an attempt “to create a cultural utopia of ethnic Indian-ness that is conceptually delinked from the Indian nation state”. Simply put, food represents shared culture which makes cooking and learning to cook, especially within a diasporic community and in the age of globalisation, an act of preserving and teaching culture. As the preservation and transmission of culture and tradition is primarily the duty of women, cooking then becomes an even more important skill for women to master and failure to do so can be viewed as failing in one’s identity as a woman.

Jennifer is never seen cooking, and her lack of culinary skills is something that is brought up throughout the films. Jennifer views food as fuel and her health-conscious food choices are tolerated, rather than embraced by her family. Through *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Jennifer’s lack of food is contrasted with Shanti’s abundance of food. Shanti’s food included curries and biryanis as well as snacks like *murku*³², *chevda*³³, and *jalebi*³⁴. Jennifer’s food includes smoothies, protein shakes, crackers, and while her table looks professionally laid, what is on the table is never in focus, highlighting the marginal status of food within her house. Jennifer’s failure in the kitchen is highlighted when Jodi and Prishen swap lunches. Jodi’s lunchbox contains crackers and cheese, Prishen’s lunch, on the other hand, looks “delicious” and includes roti rolls. Prior to this, the brief view into her fridge at the beginning of the film shows a lack of fresh ingredients as neatly pre-packaged salads sit on the

³² Murku/ murukku/ murukku is an Indian snack with a crunchy texture, usually made with rice flour and urad dal bean flour combined together into a spiral-shaped paste that is deep fried in oil. Murku is usually flavoured with jeera (cumin), onion powder, or chili.

³³ Chevda/ chevra/ chivra/ chivda is a snack mix made with flattened rice flakes, spices, dried fruit, and nuts.

³⁴ Also known as zulbia, jalebi is a sweet dessert made from a batter (flour and yoghurt or ghee with baking soda or yeast added) poured in circular patterns into hot oil. Once fried, it is drowned in thick syrup and can be flavoured with rosewater, saffron, honey, orange blossom water, or elaichi (cardamom).

shelves³⁵. The general lack of ‘Indian’ food – or even freshly prepared food – in Jennifer’s house implies her failure as a mother and South African Indian woman. While she may provide sustenance for her child and husband, its pre-packaged nature is associated with being less wholesome and certainly less flavourful. As a mother it makes her seem uninvolved and, as a woman – preserver and teacher of culture – she is neglecting one of her duties in failing to pass along cultural culinary skills to her child.

It is also within this South African Indian context that Jennifer’s eating habits can be linked to the idea of an eating disorder as well as social isolation and loneliness, highlighting some of the negative effects of trying to live up to the Superwoman identity. When compared to Shanti and even Jodi’s ideas of food, Jennifer comes across as divorced from food. This disconnection from food is very visible in the first film as the only time Jennifer actually eats something is when she gets tipsy at the golf club estate with Shanti. Other than this singular incident, Jennifer is only seen drinking a protein shake and it is implied that she drinks smoothies. Furthermore, Jennifer smokes which is likely due to stress but could also be due to smoking inhibiting appetite, making it easier for Jennifer to avoid eating. While Jennifer is not anorexic, her eating habits tend towards being disordered. Jennifer restricts her food intake in order to maintain her figure. Her view of food as fuel, as mentioned previously, is shaped by western ideas regarding health³⁶. This view is in direct contrast to South African Indian views on food, which is an important part of life, especially in social settings. Jennifer’s disconnection from food and distance from South African Indian culture is emphasised in the first film when she leaves the wedding reception hall for a smoke break. Jennifer smoking by herself occurs for plot reasons, as she happens upon Jodi and Prishen making out, but also emphasises her isolation and loneliness as the scene is contrasted with the uncles all having congregated at the boot for their customary *dop*³⁷.

³⁵ The difference between Jennifer’s pre-prepared food and Shanti’s freshly cooked meals also relates to their respective socio-economic statuses as Jennifer can afford to buy pre-prepared food, which frees up a lot of time for her, while Shanti does not have that option.

³⁶ Americans “associate foods most with health and least with pleasure and make great efforts to alter their diet in the service of health” (Pereira and Alvarenga, 2007: 142).

³⁷ Often, during events such as weddings, and even casual get-togethers, the men will drink together. This typically takes place around the car boot of whoever brought the alcohol.

Identity Validation at Work vs Invalidation at Home and the Importance of Support for 'Supermom'

A more realistic view of the Supermom describes her as someone who “manages everything [...] with others’ help” (Shah, Gandhi, Shinde, and Chaudhry, 2025: 9), however, Jennifer, is unable to bring herself to rely on others. She is “expect[ed] [to not] make any mistakes [and] to be perfect in every category” (10), that is, perfect at work and at home in everything that both those roles entail. Jennifer does not receive the support she needs in order to be “perfect” in everything, which is an “absurd” (10) expectation in the first place. She most lacks support in her role as a mother which leads her to seek identity validation from her position at work where she is supported in her efforts. This lack of social support leads Jennifer to distance herself from other people, lest they too place unreasonable demands on her and judge her for being unable to deliver.

Jennifer’s distance and disconnection from other people is emphasised and explained through her emotional attachment to the business that she and Elvis built from scratch. The discussion thus far has led to the conclusion that work, rather than being a wife and mother, is what provides Jennifer with a sense of belonging, security, and self-worth. In the fourth film, *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Jennifer and Elvis reminisce on the beginnings of their company which they started out of their own garage. It was not an easy time for Jennifer and Elvis, working eighteen hours a day, borrowing money to pay back loans, and juggling the management of multiple branches to build the Kandasamy family legacy. Later in the film, Jodi describes the business as being her parents’ everything, emphasising the amount of time and energy they put into building it up. The centrality of the business in Jennifer’s life is made clear in these two scenes, highlighted by her admission to being a workaholic. Because she cannot bring herself to rely on people and cannot derive sufficient affirmation in her identity as a wife and mother, the business and her position as CEO, rather than her child, provide her with a sense of security, emotional well-being, and a symbolic connection with a valued other.

Jennifer’s inability to rely on other people, including her husband, Elvis, can be attributed to her relationship with her mother-in-law, Aya. While Jennifer, as the Superwoman, is capable of operating unremittingly, her ability to keep moving at all times was learned the hard way. Aya did not approve of Jennifer as a partner for Elvis from the beginning of their relationship and

did not offer Jennifer the support she needed as the young couple embarked on their journey together and, whatever support was given, Aya seems to hold it over Jennifer's head. Though Jennifer and Elvis fought to be together, Elvis appears to be generally removed from the conflict between his wife and his mother. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), he asks Jennifer why she is always fighting – first with his mother, then Shanti. Earlier in the film, when Jennifer complains to him about Aya's behaviour, he dismisses her points saying that she should give his mother a break because she is old. In the second film, *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), Jennifer tells Elvis that her entire life she has put him and his mother first and she has accepted that she will always come second place to Aya in Elvis' eyes.

Kandasamys: The Baby (Moodley, 2023) confirms Elvis' bias towards his mother when Aya is confident that even if Jennifer tells Elvis that she has been working with Muthu, the chauffeur, to scam him out of his dollars, he will believe whatever his mother tells him. From these incidents, it can be said that Elvis did not provide Jennifer with the support that she needed within their family, leaving her to navigate her struggles alone. Elvis' lack of interest and intervention in the conflict between Jennifer and Aya pushes Jennifer to be a person who tends to keep her “dynamic emotions” and “complex issues” (Stewart, 2017: 31) to herself as she is not taken seriously when she does express herself. Furthermore, Jennifer recalls Aya telling Elvis that she was “weak and needy” (Moodley, 2023) when she was struggling after Jodi's birth. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Aya tells Jennifer outright that she was a “bad mother”. Being ignored and belittled by Aya reinforced the idea that Jennifer was responsible for herself and thus could only rely on herself. Elvis, who is unconcerned about domestic matters such as child-care, evidently did not step up to provide the support Jennifer needed as a new mother further proving that her needs are irrelevant to those around her. Left to drown, Jennifer had no choice but to pull herself together, be her own support, and power through the fear and confusion of being a new mother. As driven and independent as Jennifer may be by nature, the extent of her aversion to relying on others and tendency to continue pushing forward, no matter the obstacles, can be traced to the lack of support she receives within her home and from her family.

A result of this forced sense of independence and lack of appreciation is that Jennifer spends the majority of her time at work. Her position as CEO fulfils her need to feel wanted, needed, and like number one, much like a mother gains validation from being wanted and needed by her child. Thus, her dedication to the business that she and Elvis built can be, at least partially, attributed to her marginalisation within her home. For Jennifer, the business and, thus, work likely remind her of Elvis and the support she received from him during that time. Their business is proof of his support and the possibly the only thing she can rely on to remind her of the sense of safety and connection that she had with her husband.

Work as Jennifer's retreat and 'safe' space is shown in the third film, *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), as she hides in her office after Elvis' flirtation with Baby. It is clearly a place where she feels in control as she has her PA talk to Elvis and tell him that she is too busy to see him when he arrives bearing flowers as a peace offering. The sense of safety, connection, and belonging that Jennifer derives from the Kandasamy business are also what makes it difficult for her to relinquish control of it, much like a child will protest separation from their transitional object³⁸. Those feelings, as well as having struggled to build the business contribute to her feelings of anger when she perceives Jodi as being ungrateful for the opportunity to be the CEO of the business and continue the family legacy. Similarly, Jennifer is angered by Jodi and Prishen's desire to not have her (and Shanti) heavily involved with Arya's care as she feels that her support and expression of love are being rejected when she is giving them everything she wishes she could have had as a new parent. Furthermore, Jennifer likely sees Jodi and Prishen's independence and minimisation of her role in taking care of Arya as them rejecting her because she is not good enough, which along with the memories of being an inadequate mother, cause her to lash out at the both of them.

³⁸ In Tyia Grange Isaacson's article, *Metaphors of Agony: Culture-bound Syndromes of Hyper-Independence* (2020), she talks about unsoothability as well as the use of transitional objects. Donald Winnicott first described transitional objects and believed that they were "universal, necessary, and healthy", later John Bowlby "theorised that there would be less reliance upon transitional objects in less complex societies" (Isaacson, 2020: 376). Despite his concept of 'less complex societies' being rather unsound, Isaacson does acknowledge that Bowlby was "correct in noting the significant cultural variability in the use of transitional object and, moreover, the link to the value of independence and the use of transitional objects in child rearing" (376). She notes that in cultures where "children [are] not being forced towards independence" (376) there is a low percentage of children who use transitional objects compared to cultures that highly value independence and force children to be independent. Isaacson further notes that "unsoothability reactions against forced hyper-independence [...] are evident across the life span and include: colicky babies, pre-menstrual syndrome, panic attacks, post-partum depression [and] eating disorders" (377) among other reactions.

As Jennifer does not receive “verification of [her] mother identity” (Stets and Lee, 2021: 145) which “raises feelings of competence and belongingness” (147) or of her identity as wife, she turns to her work to give her “a feeling of worth beyond being a mother” (145) and wife. While this is a logical course of action, Jennifer’s replacement of the traditional avenues for identity affirmation – that is, her identity as wife and, more importantly, mother – with her position at work – unorthodox for a woman – portrays her as failing in her primary duties and as a “bad” mother, leading to further disconnection and rejection from those who would be able to affirm her motherly identity. This results in a cycle where being invalidated as a wife and mother pushes her to increasingly rely on her position at work to provide affirmation, support, and acceptance, which in turn leads to her identity as wife and mother being further invalidated. Furthermore, this atypical identity of Jennifer’s leads to her being socially ostracised, as evidenced in her being the topic of criticism amongst Shanti and co-workers and clients in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), enforcing her belief that she cannot rely on other people.

Thus far, it has been shown how Jennifer, as a character, challenges the Superwoman ideal, primarily through her deviation from the traditional expectations of what a mother should be, though the very presence of the identity does serve to reinforce its legitimacy. Challenging the Superwoman identity, Jennifer is shown to fail in several ways as a mother in the films. First, Jennifer is not warm and openly loving but comes across as self-centred as she is often insensitive to the needs of her child. Second is her inability to cook. Cooking, alongside symbolising the ability to care for your family and the love of a mother (and wife), represents the preservation and transmission of culture especially through the act of teaching a child how to cook. Jennifer’s failures in the kitchen show her as failing at being a mother and, as a woman, failing at preserving and teaching culture. Finally, the business taking the position of child in Jennifer’s life emphasises her disconnection from her role as mother to Jodi and thus her failure in performing the role. The lack of support Jennifer receives, which contributes to her isolation, has been shown as a contributing factor in her inability to live up to the expectations of the Superwoman, further challenging stereotypical representations of the Superwoman identity.

Shanti

Shanti, the thematic opposite of Jennifer's Superwoman, embodies a traditional image of the South African Indian woman as a devoted mother and wife – the Domestic Sita. Like Sita, Shanti's children and husband come first in her life. She also prides herself on being an above average cook and homemaker. However, like Aya and Jennifer, Shanti subverts and challenges her initially stereotypical presentation, contributing to the films' portrayal of nuanced and realistic women characters. Sometimes, her dedication to being a specific way is her undoing as her dedication to being a good mother to Prishen, her elder son, causes her to be occasionally overbearing and to push her younger son, Desan, to the sidelines.

The Domestic Sita

The Domestic Sita stereotype refers to a representation of a woman who is very traditional, specifically in the South African Indian context. I have adopted the term from Sumayya Lee's *The Story of Maha* (2007), where Maha refers to her mother as having been trained to be the perfect Domestic Sita as she learned how to cook perfectly a wide variety of dishes. This goes hand in hand with her idea of the "round roti" women – women who can roll round rotis and are therefore goddesses in the kitchen, representing the ideal woman within her culture. Her position as the goddess of the household also implies that she has little to no business with the world that exists outside of her home. Sita, as explained previously, is self-sacrificing, placing the needs and wants of her husband and children above her own; reserved and humble, removing herself from the scene when she is no longer needed and carries out her duties without expecting recognition; finally, as a woman, she is also concerned with upholding the traditions and values of her culture. Thus, the Domestic Sita is a woman who is skilled in the kitchen and the running of a home as well as being unassuming, devoted to her husband and children, and quietly sacrificial.

As the Domestic Sita, Shanti takes immense pride in her cooking, one of the most stereotypical aspects of her characterisation. She cooks a variety of curries, biriyanis, and chutneys which

are complimented by various characters, including Jodi, in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), where food frequently features. In the opening scene of the film, in opposition to Jennifer, Shanti's fridge is full of fresh produce. She also chooses the open-air produce market as a rendezvous location for one of her planning meetings with Jennifer. Shanti's ease at the market emphasises her familiarity with the duties of a housewife and cook. Further emphasising her identity as the Domestic Sita, Shanti is shown "cooking all [Prishen's] favourites" (Moodley, 2017) and later learning how to make Divani's Crème Brûlée in exchange for teaching her how to make fish biriyani. In *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), Shanti's identity as an ideal wife (and mother) is contrasted with Jodi's struggle to perform the traditionally wifely task of cooking as her biriyani outshines Jodi's first attempt. In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), Shanti's shots in the opening scene are of her in her element as she cooks breakfast. Shanti's continued association with preparing food throughout the films and being acknowledged as a good cook thus reinforces her identity as traditional and reinforces the desirability of embodying the Domestic Sita identity.

Shanti, the Not-so-Perfect Mother

Shanti's Sita identity is also reinforced through her being a good mother although this facet of her identity also challenges the traditional Sita identity. Sita is a good mother to her sons, and they are her reason for living after Rama banished her. Like Sita, Shanti is a good mother to Prishen. She caters to him and always tries to make sure that he has the best that she can give him. Her love and care are, of course, shown primarily through the food she cooks for him. In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), Prishen actively acknowledges the effort that Shanti makes to take care of him and their family, "always [putting] everyone first" (Moodley, 2021) and he says that now that she is 50, "it's [their] turn to put [her] first" (Moodley, 2021). Through Prishen's appreciation, Shanti's identity as a good mother is validated.

However, unlike Sita, Shanti is unprepared to step back when Prishen no longer needs her to be intimately involved in his life. She laments her son leaving her when Prishen decides to accept a scholarship to study in Cape Town and consistently encroaches on Jodi and Prishen's time together in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), during the lead up to their

wedding. She derails Prishen and Jodi's lunch reservation, telling them to come eat at home, and uses the drive as an opportunity to grill Jodi on Prishen's food preferences. Later in the film, she interrupts their time together to present Jodi with a cookbook of her own recipes, claiming that it is all she needs to keep Prishen satisfied. While Shanti might be ensuring that her son will be well taken care of once he is married, her approach leaves much to be desired as she comes across as actively working to undermine Prishen's relationship with Jodi. Her worst offence, however, is when she cancels Jodi and Prishen's honeymoon reservation because she has decided that they will stay with her immediately after their wedding. Shanti, while being a good mother, is thus also too preoccupied with taking care of Prishen, contradicting the idea of mothers remaining in the background of their grown children's lives.

Shanti's preoccupation with Prishen also means that she neglects her younger son, Desan. From the first film, *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Desan is portrayed as a child who is left to his own devices. This is evidenced in his sitting at the table during a supper with guests with his headphones on, completely disconnected from everything happening around him. He is present, but rarely part of the action and, unlike Aya who he is often paired with, he only receives any significant screen time in the fourth film, *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023). In the fourth film, Shanti tells Desan to not make a scene about not being allowed to come with them to Mauritius to see Jodi, Prishen, and his newborn niece as this is an important moment for his brother, emphasising how little Shanti recognises her second child. This comes after Shanti refusing to compliment him on his save during a soccer game and instead commenting on his subpar grades. Further on in the film Prishen calls his mother out for the way that she treats Desan, leaving him in his 'pokey' little room even after Prishen moved out. It is also revealed that Desan has become a school bully, using the injuries he sustains as a method of gaining his mother's attention. Finally, Desan writing and recording a song about how he feels abandoned by his mother leaves no room for argument that while Shanti might have been a good mother to Prishen, she failed Desan. Therefore, Shanti is presented as both a good and a bad mother in the films, both reinforcing and challenging the traditional expectations and representations of South African Indian women.

The Recognition of Sita

Shanti's identity as a wife also simultaneously reinforces and challenges the idea of what a South African Indian woman should be. She is very devoted to Peggie, her husband, making sure that he has freshly cooked meals every day, making him tea, and even going to far as to cut his nails for him. Like Sita, her efforts are overlooked by her husband who only seems to notice her actions when something displeases him. Shanti's "forbearance [and] acceptance" (Blackwell, 1977: 43) are taken for granted by Peggie who, in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), complains about Shanti having cut his nails too short, cannot find something nice to say to her during her 50th birthday celebration, and gives her pots as a present because "they're the ones [she] said [she loves]" (Moodley, 2021). The sacrifices she makes generally go unnoticed and unacknowledged and Shanti herself fades into the background of Peggie's life despite doing everything for him. The amount of care and consideration for her husband that Shanti displays generally overwhelms anything that Peggie does for her. This is not an uncommon scenario as South African Indian women tend to be taught that it is up to them to make their marriage work and keep their husbands happy³⁹. This is made clear in the film when Shanti says that she cannot tell Peggie that she is unhappy with Baby moving into their house because he was happy about it. Like Elvis, Peggie ignores his wife in favour of Baby, his younger sister, even praising her cooking efforts, highlighting how invisible Shanti has become in his life. The narrative, however, forces Peggie to recognise and appreciate Shanti – a deviation from the expected norm and the Sita model as Rama is not afforded the opportunity to reconcile with Sita. Thus, Shanti's Sita identity, while promoting devotion to a husband also rebels "against [...] unreasonable demands" (Kishwar, 1997: 94) and the normalised invisibility of wives in their husbands' lives.

Trippin' With the Kandasamys (Moodley, 2023) facilitates Shanti's rebellion against being marginalised as it leaves Peggie with no choice but to recognise and appreciate his wife based not on what she does for him but who she is as a person in his life. However, this recognition and appreciation is preceded by Peggie's obliviousness and carelessness in the way he treats Shanti. His initial birthday gift to Shanti, a set of pots and pans, demonstrated

³⁹ In *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 20021) Aya says that in her day women had to keep quiet and were not encouraged to talk back to their husbands.

some level of recognition of what Shanti does *for* him, but the recognition and appreciation go no further. He is unable to say anything about Shanti on her birthday and his presentation of the gift is marked by him saying “it’s the ones you said you love” (Moodley, 2023) and mentioning that a free colander came with the set. While this vague recognition is meant to imply that Peggie pays attention to Shanti, it really highlights how little he pays attention to her if the only thing he could remember her commenting on is cooking ware.

Peggie’s change of attitude does not come naturally to him. It takes being called out by Jennifer on his behaviour, Shanti giving him the cold shoulder, and most importantly, Aya scolding him for thinking that Shanti will get over the incident without him apologising for his careless behaviour to start making amends. As proof of his turning over a new leaf and making sure that demonstrates his appreciation for Shanti in a manner that will genuinely make her feel appreciated and acknowledged, Peggie makes her tea, admits to and apologises for taking her for granted, and presents her with jewellery as her fiftieth birthday present. During this scene, Peggie addresses Shanti twice using her full name, drawing attention to her as a person, contrasting his inability to acknowledge her during her birthday celebration.

What is important to note is that Shanti does not have to change herself in any way to regain Peggie’s affection and notice, she does not have to present herself for the male gaze⁴⁰. In fact, when Shanti puts in extra effort to look good, for her husband and for her birthday dinner, during the beach getaway, Peggie does not notice. In the scene where Peggie apologises to Shanti, she is dressed in her usual attire. Thus, the message conveyed in *Trippin’ With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), is that women deserve respect and recognition for who they are as people without needing to change themselves to appear more desirable, as well as for the

⁴⁰ Unlike Charmaine from *Kings of Mulberry Street: Let Love Reign* (Naidoo, 2023) whose husband, Reggie, only notices her after she undergoes a makeover and another man falls in love with her. This sub-plot in the film, while cute, focuses on physical presentation and attraction as the motivating factor for husbands to put effort into showing their wives affection and appreciation, thus basing affection and appreciation on what a wife has to offer her husband. It also replicates the idea of the “status gap [coupled] with a culture gap” (Meer, 1972: 38) that caused South African Indian women to remain out of the public eye so as not to embarrass their husbands with “their peasant manners” (38), implying that the only way for a woman to become deserving of her husband’s respect is to change herself.

way they take care of and provide for their families, challenging the idea of devotion including suffering and invisibility.

Shanti's Resistance of Restriction

A continuation of the challenge Shanti poses to the traditional expectation of women to be invisible until their presence is wanted, is her unmissable on-screen presence and comedic role. The *Kandasamy* films empower women through the narratives presented and through the characters that take centre stage. However, as comedies, the *Kandasamy* films cannot entirely escape reiterating dominant ideologies, some of which can seem to oppose the overall messages of equality and empowerment for women. Thus, despite the potential misinterpretation of the identity that Shanti portrays in the films, the existence of a protagonist who is a lower-class, middle aged, plus size woman, who is unrestrained and unabashedly herself is valuable. It is valuable because the films unapologetically represent women as they are in the world, legitimising identities that are often overlooked and ignored.

As part of the lower-middle class, Shanti is less poised and cultured than Jennifer. She is a plus size woman and, as a character, some of her comedy is physical rather than cerebral. The physical comedy builds on the class difference between Jennifer and Shanti as physical comedy, such as slapstick, is considered to be lowbrow⁴¹. Physical humour has also traditionally been considered to be very 'unladylike'. Critics of the early twentieth-century "generally felt that physical comedy was antithetical to delicate femininity" (Wagner, 2011: 35). Such attitudes

⁴¹ Claessens and Dhoest (2010: 50) define high, middle, and lowbrow tastes as follows: highbrow, the legitimate "taste is mostly that of the highly educated, who display an aesthetic disposition prioritising form over content", lowbrow or popular taste tends to be the taste of "people with a low level of education, who prioritise the practical over the aesthetic", and finally, middlebrow or intermediate taste is "mostly attributed to the *petite bourgeoisie* with an intermediate level of education". Furthermore, popular and legitimate taste are defined in opposition to one another with popular taste having "a preference for logical chronological plots with a happy ending, for simple characters and situations rather than ambiguous, symbolical figures, enigmatic problems, formal experiments or innovation" (50) which are typical characteristics of legitimate taste. Despite the existence of 'cultural omnivores', that is, people who withhold discrimination and consume highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow content, "there is strong evidence that high-low taste distinctions are now being detected *within* the popular arts" (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013: 181). Furthermore, it is generally those who possess greater legitimate cultural capital who are in a position to enjoy or engage with all forms of content. Pierre Bourdieu theorised that the "division of capital leads to the concept of a class habitus, a scheme of behaviour, perception, and appreciation (or taste), which in turn determines lifestyle" (Claessens and Dhoest, 2010: 50). While today class is less rigid and more permeable, education and socio-economic class are still closely related. As "a cultural object is only meaningful when one has the cultural capital to understand it" (50) and people who have received education of a higher standard and gone on to pursue further education tend to have "acquired more socially recognised 'legitimate' cultural capital" (50), cultural tastes are still partially defined through class.

still persist in various forms today, whether the comedy is physical or not, and are often coupled with racism. In *Voices from the Comedy Contact Zone: Regarding Performative Strategies Towards Race and the Transnational Body* (2022), Rachel E. Blackburn notes some of the criticism and reception of Gina Yashere's performances. Yashere, a Black woman, "is no louder in vocal volume than the majority of white, cisgender male comics [however she] is given a two-fold negative critique" (Blackburn, 2022: 14). Her 'in your face' style of comedy is considered too American for European audiences and as too masculine. However, "white women comics in the UK [...] use similar vocal patterns and gendered presentation without facing this same criticism" (15). Blackburn attributes these criticisms to Black women being "derogatorily painted as masculine to the benefit of white supremacist patriarchal hegemony, in order to characterise and punish women for not performing femininity 'correctly'" (15).

The idea of punishing gender performed 'incorrectly' is not unique to the comedy scene. South African Indian women who did not live up to the ideas of femininity that their husbands encountered in westernised society were considered embarrassing and were generally confined to the house and immediate community. Their behaviour was fine for a certain location – home but not in public, like Yashere's comedy is "appropriate for the U.S." (15) but not for the UK. In the *Kandasamys*, Shanti displays 'masculine' traits which cause her to fail in certain aspects of her performance of a South African Indian woman's identity⁴². Shanti's boldness, a traditionally 'masculine' trait, is a deviation from the correct performance of femininity, which tradition sees as being passive, and thus her boldness can be construed as a negative trait. Shanti's uninhibited boldness is fine at home, but when she is out in society, Jennifer finds her behaviour unbecoming and embarrassing. Furthermore, Shanti's 'unfeminine' and in your face physical humour – the camera focusing on her rear as she bends over in an unflattering manner, physically fighting with Jennifer, getting a Brazilian wax – can be tied to the idea of South African Indian women as being "primitive, uncouth, and ignorant"⁴³ (Lee, 2007: 52).

⁴² Jennifer displays 'masculine' traits as well. Jennifer's logical and, at times, clinical approach to life is great in the boardroom but causes her to fall short of what is expected of her as a mother and wife.

⁴³ In *The Story of Maha* (Lee, 2006), Maha's Headmistress at her secondary school aimed to turn "all of [the] ruffians into Civilised Young Ladies" (52). The Headmistress tells the girls that it is their responsibility to "dispel the notion that [...] Indian females are all primitive, uncouth, and ignorant" (52). The punishment of nonconformity or incorrect gender performance in Lee's novels is a prominent theme.

Put together with her lower (socio-economic) class status and her ethnicity, Shanti's non-conformity to certain gender expectations, as explained, can be interpreted as creating an unfavourable representation of South African Indian women. However, comedy has always been a medium through which social systems can be critiqued and, for women especially, it has allowed for the challenging of gender norms and assumptions. Physical humour especially allowed women to "[defy] expectations regarding ladylike behaviour and proper femininity, contradicting notions of how women should behave" (Wagner, 2011: 35). As one of the protagonists, Shanti's disregard for some notions of proper femininity, while occasionally playing into the idea of older women's bodies being "displayed [on-screen] as objects of ridicule rather than objects of desire" (Lemish and Muhlbauer, 2012: 167), challenges the pressure for women to look youthful in order to appear "significant on screen" (Kumar, 2022: 335) as well as the expected invisibility of women. In the *Kandasamys*, the 'incorrect' performance of gender is important to the development of the heterogeneous women's identities that exist in the films as the characters are presented in multiple contexts. Thus, the *Kandasamy* films challenge both hegemonic western ideas of womanhood and South African Indian ideas of womanhood.

Shanti has thus been shown to challenge the marginalisation of women as well as the perfect mother aspects of the Sita stereotype. In addition to this, her character challenges the expectation of women to restrain, reduce, and refashion themselves for the sake of men – and society – in order to gain fleeting approval and identity validation. Shanti is thus an interesting foil to Jennifer who, despite her attempts to be perfect in everything, is considered to fall short and was trapped in a cycle that perpetuated the invalidation of her identity. Despite the differences in identity validation, Jennifer and Shanti do share similarities in the struggles that they face and the manner in which they are treated, which contributes to the films' presentation of the two women as equals.

Superwoman and Sita, Sisters

There is an overlap in Jennifer and Shanti's experiences as mothers, wives, and women in the workforce that emphasises the "one size fits all" expectations of women. Both Jennifer and

Shanti are taken for granted by their husbands. Elvis and Peggie both emotionally hurt their wives in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), ignoring them and their efforts, in favour of Baby, Peggie's younger sister. They both act as if their wives are there only to serve them and that spending time with them is an unpleasant chore. This attitude is highlighted when they go fishing, with Prishen, when their wives had arranged a picnic as a way of spending time with them. Elvis and Peggie lie to Jennifer and Shanti that they are at the supermarket and there has been an emergency there that Prishen has to attend to which is keeping them away. Their disrespect is emphasised when Prishen refuses to lie to Jodi about where they are and what they are doing, which Elvis and Peggie mock him for. Even after facing the consequences for their lack of care and repenting, their general attitude does not change. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Elvis and Peggie once again make fun of Prishen, this time for being an active father and not leaving all the parenting duties to Jodi. Their aversion to being involved in taking care of domestic chores and even taking care of their own children emphasise the unfair expectations placed on women who are expected to attend to such matters regardless of their feelings towards such work or other demands on their time.

That being said, other occupations that place a demand on a woman's time do not appear to be taken seriously in the films. Jennifer and Shanti are part of the workforce – Jennifer as CEO of the business that she and Elvis built, and Shanti as a hairdresser. I have already touched on how Jennifer's actual work life is of little relevance in the films. Shanti's work is treated similarly. She is only shown at work in the first film where, distracted by Jennifer's appearance, she messes up a client's hair. There are no repercussions for her mistake which frames her work as undemanding and insignificant. Thus, women's work, whether it be in a traditionally masculine or feminine field, is undervalued and sidelined in favour of focusing on their performance as wife and mother. These two examples show the attitudes regarding what is considered a woman's role and how women are still marginalised, reduced to a single identity within the home which they are often unappreciated in. The common marginalisation of women, despite their differences emphasises the need for women recognise each other's differences and use those differences to uplift and support one another.

The opening scene of *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) presents the theme of multiple women's identities which are united through their shared identity of woman.

Specifically, the scene demonstrates the heterogeneity of South African Indian women, presenting the opposing characters Jennifer and Shanti, who are treated as equals. The establishment of a shared “Indian” identity reminds the audience that these two characters are both beholden to the same standards and expectations. Their differences serve as reminders that, despite expectations of what a woman should be, women are a heterogeneous group who cannot be reduced to a single stereotype.

Scene Analysis of the Opening Scene in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys*

Keeping Up With the Kandasamys (Moodley, 2017) begins with an Extreme Long Shot (ELS) of the ocean taken from a High Angle. The lighting of these shots is warm and the focus is a little hazy. The sky is a warm orange-pink with grey-blue clouds which is reflected on the surface of the water. Classical Indian music with a slow and steady beat is played over the sound of the waves. The camera pans towards the shoreline as Aya’s narration begins. As the beach is shown, through the use of more Extreme Long Shots, Aya describes Durban as “beautiful” and being “like one paradise”. However, over an Extreme Long Shot of the harbour, where private boats are docked, Aya says that what is being shown is not the real Durban. The “real deal” opens with a Close-up Shot of the Hanuman statue in Chatsworth.



Image 1 [00: 00: 07]: ELS, High Angle, of the ocean. Classical Indian music with a slow and steady beat is played over the sound of the waves.

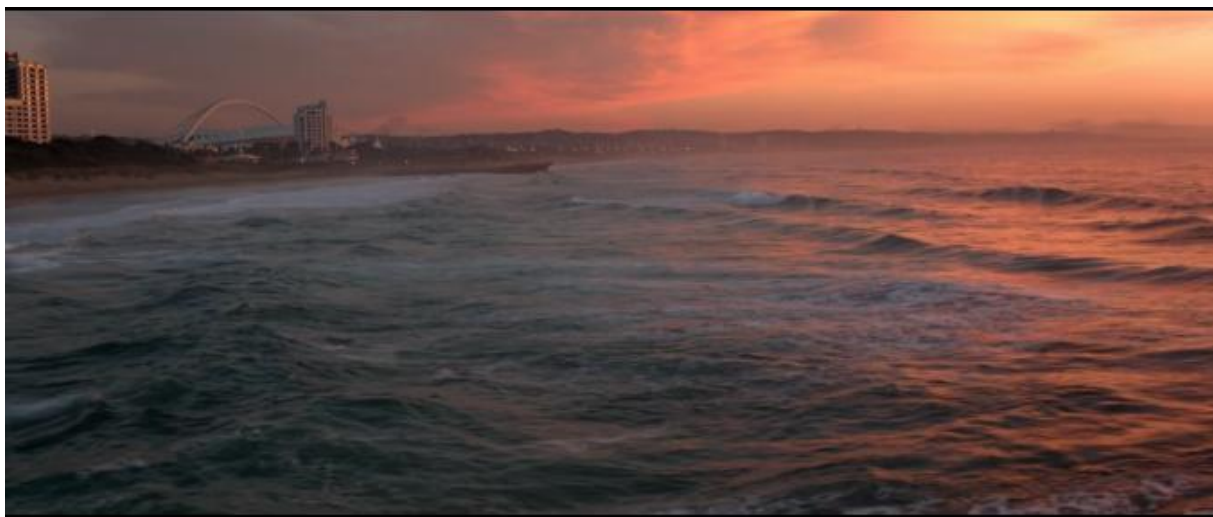


Image 2 [00: 13]: ELS, High Angle, of the ocean and shore with some buildings in the background. Aya's narration begins.



Image 3 [00: 00: 33]: ELS, High Angle of a harbour with boats.
Aya's narration: But you think this is the real Durban?



Image 4 [00: 00: 36]: ELS, High Angle, showing the beachfront, the beachfront buildings, and high-rise buildings facing the ocean.

Narration (cont.): Let me take you to the real deal.

The lighting becomes much brighter, and the focus becomes sharp. As the camera moves out and upwards, showing the height of the Hanuman statue as it looks over Chatsworth, Aya's narration turns to explaining how "the government took [...] all the Indian people and put [them] in one place". Moving to a street view, the street is rather narrow, with houses packed closely together and cars parked on the pavement. Aya comments on the closeness of both the

houses and the neighbours who “become like [...] extended family”. Of course, not everyone is so friendly, case and point being Jennifer and Shanti who “used to be best friends but now” are clearly not.



Image 5 [00: 00: 42]: Close-up, Eye-level shot of the Hanuman statue. The music changes to *Boom Boom* (Photronique, 2014). It is an upbeat pop song with Hindi and English lyrics. The musical style is predominantly Indian.



Image 6 [00: 00: 52]: ELS, Extreme High Angle, of the Hanuman statue and surrounding buildings.

Aya’s narration, paused for the beginning of the song, resumes. She explains how the Indians were moved to Chatsworth under the Group Areas Act.



Image 7 [00: 01: 05]: ELS, Extreme High Angle of a street in Chatsworth and the surrounding area.



Image 8 [00: 01: 13]: ELS, High Angle, of a narrow street with two cars driving towards the camera. Houses are visible on either side of the street and there are cars parked on the pavement in front of the houses.

This is where Aya's narration ceases and Jennifer and Shanti take over. The ex-best friends, despite being immediate neighbours, have vastly different houses and cars, as captured in the Extreme Long Shot. Shanti drives an old, red Toyota and lives in a semi-detached house. Jennifer drives a blue BMW, and her house is the size of Shanti's house, plus the house attached to it. There is another car, her husband's, parked further up Jennifer's driveway. Meanwhile,

Prishen's Citi Golf is parked on the pavement outside of the gate. Shanti's house is painted yellow, while Jennifer's is beige and has dark, reflective windows.

As the women exit their cars, the differences between them are reinforced as medium long



Image 9 [00: 01: 29]: Eye-level, ELS of neighbouring houses with cars parked in the driveways. The house on the left is small and painted yellow. It shares a wall with its immediate neighbour to the left (painted a peach-pink colour). The car parked in the driveway is a red Toyota. There is a light blue and white Citi Golf parked on the pavement in front of the yellow house. The house on the right is the size of both the houses on the left. It is painted beige and has very reflective blacked out windows. The car parked in the driveway is a dark blue BMW.

shots are used to show some details of their cars and clothing. Jennifer's clean and sleek car interior is contrasted with Shanti's decorated car interior. While Jennifer's dashboard is bare, Shanti has several small decorative objects on hers, including a small statue of the god Ganesh. Jennifer's calm and muted workout clothes contrast with Shanti's bright pink, rhinestone enhanced, velour tracksuit. The next shots show them entering their houses. Shanti's kitchen is bright and warm while Jennifer's is cooler and has a much more neutral feel to it. As she walks into her kitchen, Shanti calls for her sons and husband to let them know that she is back home. Jennifer says nothing as she enters her house and heads to her kitchen. She simply takes a bottled smoothie from her (organised) fridge and goes to sit at the breakfast bar. Shanti's fridge appears to be fully, if somewhat haphazardly, stocked, as she eats a piece of burfi.



Image 10 [00: 01: 32]: A Medium Close-up of Jennifer in her car. She has just picked up her gym bag and is opening the door to get out. She is turned away from the camera. The inside of the car is neat and clean.



Image 11 [00: 01: 39]: A Medium Close-up of Shanti as she walks towards her house. The shot is taken from inside her car, focusing on the white fluff and assorted decorations – a pink heart, white teddy bear, and golden lucky cat – on the passenger side of the dashboard. Beads hang off the rearview mirror and a small statue of Ganesh is visible on the middle of the dashboard which is the extreme right side of the shot.

The last shots of the scene, medium long and taken at eye level, bring the audience face to face with the characters, almost as if they are speaking directly to the audience. Here, their feelings about the morning wedding they are about to attend, cements their personalities as being polar

opposites. Shanti loves morning weddings, while Jennifer considers those who have morning weddings to be idiots. The characters' accents, as they speak for the first time, further emphasise their differences. Shanti has a more typical 'Indian' accent and way of speaking, as opposed to Jennifer who is more "proper" in her manner of speaking.



Image 12 [00: 01: 49]: Eye-level, Medium Close-ups of Shanti (left) and Jennifer (right). This shot is the first time the audience sees their faces. The two women are in their respective kitchens.

Shanti is holding a piece of burfi up to her mouth, about to eat it. She is standing in front of her open fridge. It is full of various food items. Shanti is wearing a bright pink tracksuit, large hoop earrings, has her hair in an updo and her maang tikka in place.

Jennifer is sitting at her breakfast bar holding a bottled smoothie. Her hair is down and neatly ironed. She is wearing a blue sports jacket with a light pink sports shirt.

Speaking to the camera, Jennifer, then Shanti express their feelings about morning weddings.

Jennifer: What kind of idiot plans a morning wedding?

Shanti: I love morning weddings!

The opening scene of any film is important as it helps to set the tone and expectations for what is to come and the *Kandasamys* is no different. The opening scene focuses on South African Indian identity and zeroes in on the two main identities of the film. As these identities are presented in the form of Jennifer and Shanti, it is made clear that the film will focus on South African Indian women. Aya narrating the opening further confirms the centrality of women in

the film. The first forty seconds of the film allude to an idea of Indianness. Classical Indian music is played and the focus on the ocean recalls the journey across the Kala Pani that the indentured labourers endured to get to South Africa. These ideas of 'Indianness' are largely overshadowed by the otherwise generally neutral shots. Additionally, the continuous use of Extreme Long Shots from a high angle brings distance between the audience and what is happening on screen. This distance can also be considered as alluding to the distance between the South African Indian community today and their history of migration and indenture. The warm colours and hazy focus further contribute to the feeling of distant memory.

In contrast to the Extreme Long Shots of the ocean, the eye-level close-up of the Hanuman statue brings the audience much closer to what is happening on screen. As Aya says, what is being shown now is the "real deal". The pop song playing as this transition occurs emphasises that what is being seen now is current and alive, as opposed to the vague memories invoked earlier. The South African Indian community is placed in the spotlight, almost literally, as the brightness and sharpness of the shots contribute to the feeling of witnessing unfiltered reality.

The high angle of the extreme long shot while Aya narrates the effects of the Group Areas Act on South African Indians, like with the shots of the ocean and an idyllic Durban, has a distancing effect. The struggling, too, is more memory than reality now and distance from the apartheid era is created. The level of the next shot comes back to eye-level, creating a sense of intimacy with the audience that partially mirrors the intimacy of having neighbours so close you can smell the curry cooking. Furthermore, it grounds the audience in the current reality of what is taking place on screen.

As Shanti and Jennifer pull into their respective driveways, the diversity of the South African Indian community is established. This establishment of diversity within the community is important as it does away with the idea of South African Indians being an entirely homogenous group, as Aya's narration might have implied. While there is identification with the group as a whole, the separated status of Jennifer and Shanti as ex-best friends further promotes the idea of a multiplicity of identities within the community. Furthermore, Aya saying that she's "just lying" (Moodley, 2017) and not all neighbours are like extended family, refutes the idea that

just because the South African Indian community is a fairly insular one, everyone gets along. The disparity between Shanti and Jennifer’s socio-economic positions is shown in the cars they drive as well as their houses, and functions as a reminder that there is no singular South African Indian identity. It specifically debunks the idea of all South African Indians as being wealthy business owners.

With the focus now on the protagonists, the personality differences between Jennifer and Shanti are highlighted. Shanti is wearing a bright pink tracksuit with the word “JUICY” spelled out in rhinestones across the seat of her pants (Image 13). Jennifer is wearing workout clothes and carries a gym bag as she enters her orderly, modern, and pristine kitchen (Image 15 and Image 16). Shanti’s kitchen is smaller, but brighter and looks more used. There are magnets and photos on her fridge (Image 14). Jennifer’s fridge is almost as austere on the inside as it is on the outside. Shanti’s bright, maximalist, and unabashedly ‘Indian’ sense of style is contrasted with Jennifer’s subdued, modern, and more Western style. The shots remain at eye level and range from medium long shots to extreme close ups, creating a sense of intimacy with the characters. While the focus of the shots is what makes the differences in their personalities stand out, a consistency in the distance between the characters and the camera creates a sense of equality between them.



Image 13 [00: 01: 36]



Image 14 [00: 01: 43]

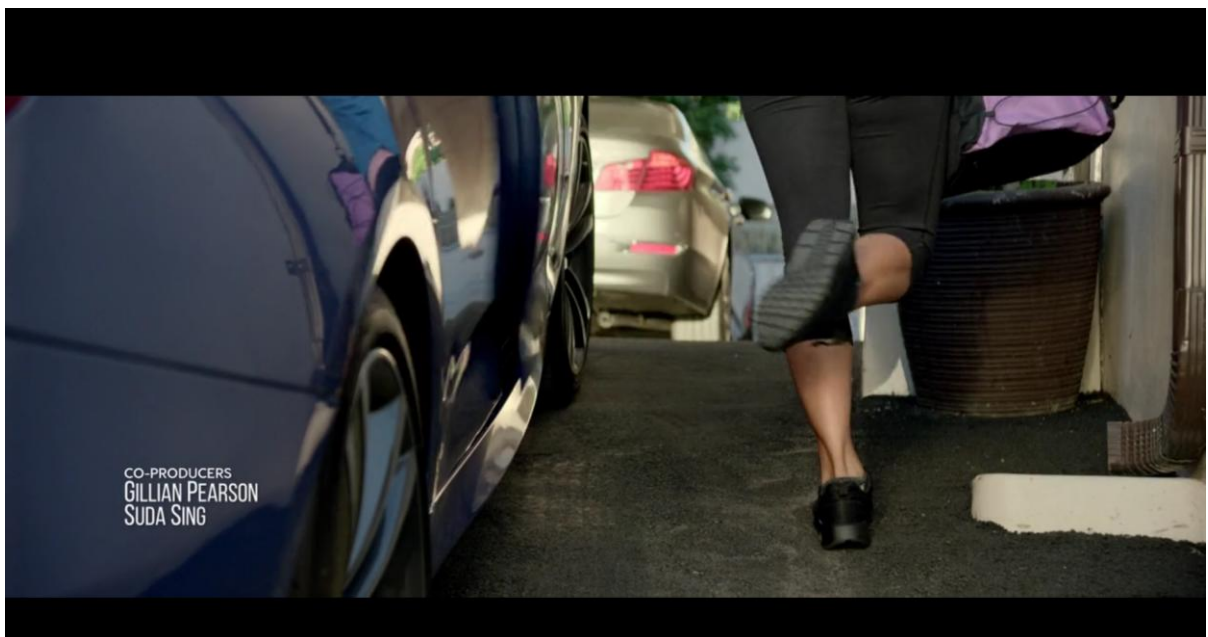


Image 15 [00: 01: 38]



Image 16 [00: 01: 41]

Having moved from an idea of Indianness to establishing two strong, contrasting personalities within the South African Indian community, the opening scene of *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) both recalls the history of South African Indians and distances the community from that history, drawing attention to current reality. It foregrounds South African Indian women through Aya as narrator and the introduction of the protagonists, Jennifer and Shanti. Through the protagonists' differences, the idea of a homogenous South African Indian identity is disproved. Most importantly, however, is the presentation of two identities, two stories, being shown without degrading one for the sake of uplifting the other.



Image 17 [00: 03: 46] (L) and Image 18 [00: 03: 58] (R)

The very next scene emphasises their equality as Jennifer and Shanti are shown wearing the same saree as they exit their homes (Image 17 and Image 18), before the scene cuts to them being seated at the same table during the wedding reception. During the wedding reception, it is revealed just how petty Jennifer and Shanti can be towards each other as they comment on how the same saree looks different on both of them. This frankly childish fighting of theirs reveals that Jennifer and Shanti might be more alike than that care to admit and neither one is better than the other. This highlights the difference that exists within shared identities. Throughout the films, Jennifer and Shanti continue to clash. The heat and hurts of their disagreements decrease with the films however, the root cause of their clashes – their contrasting personalities – does not. Additionally, although Jennifer and Shanti become less antagonistic towards each other, their personalities are not sacrificed. Jennifer is still too abrasive and headstrong at times, and Shanti continues to be overbearing (in a loving way) without realising it. The retention of their distinct personalities, alongside the identities of the other women characters in the films, is important to note as it emphasises that there is not a singular model for South African Indian women's identity. Furthermore, the closing scenes of *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), in which they purposefully wear the same saree, and their standing up for each other in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021),

calling out each other's husband for the way they hurt them, speak to the idea of sisterhood and cover each other's weaknesses.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Jennifer and Shanti's characterisations represent and re-present the stereotypes of Superwoman and Sita. Representing Superwoman, the one who effectively juggles a demanding job with being a good mother and wife, Jennifer is portrayed as stylish, put together, and highly successful in her position as CEO of the business she started with her husband. Her success is shown in the films through material means, her house, clothes, and car, rather than through any interaction with colleagues and the corporate world. The lack of focus on what she actually does at work creates an illusion that her job is relatively undemanding, theoretically making it easy for her to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Jennifer's emphasis on staying fit serves to reinforce this idea as she maintains a trim and attractive figure, further increasing the desire to also be a Superwoman.

Re-presenting and challenging the Superwoman identity, however, Jennifer is shown to fail in her role as a South African Indian mother and wife. Jennifer is the opposite of the warm and always on-call mother that is the expected norm. From preferring bottle-feeding over breast-feeding, to prioritising work over being a present mother, Jennifer is depicted as having failed in her role as a mother. Even her attempts at mothering an adult Jodi reinforce this idea as she comes across as ignorant of her child's needs, despite her good intentions. Her good intentions being misinterpreted due to the context she finds herself in are seen again in her relationship with food. Jennifer views food as fuel and her health-conscious food choices are tolerated, rather than embraced by her family. Her inability to cook makes her seem uninvolved as a mother and, as a woman – preserver and teacher of culture – she is neglecting one of her duties in failing to pass along cultural culinary skills to her child. Within this South African Indian context that Jennifer's eating habits can be linked to the idea of an eating disorder as well as social isolation and loneliness, highlighting some of the negative effects of trying to live up to the Superwoman identity. Finally, Jennifer's distance and disconnection from other people is emphasised and explained through her emotional attachment to the business that she and Elvis

built from scratch. The business functions as a stand-in for her child and her position as CEO fulfils her need to feel wanted, needed, and like number one as she does not receive validation in her identity as a wife and mother when at home.

On the other hand, Shanti represents Sita – the perfect wife and mother, quietly supportive and sacrificial – through her prowess in the kitchen and her devotion to her son and husband. Shanti's continued association with preparing food throughout the films and being acknowledged as a good cook reinforces her traditional identity as desirable. Shanti's representation of Sita is also reinforced through her catering wholeheartedly to Prishen, her son, cooking his favourite meals. However, Shanti subverts the Sita identity as, unlike Sita, she is unprepared to step back when Prishen no longer needs her to be intimately involved in his life. Her focus on Prishen also causes her to neglect Desan, her younger son, and she fails to be a good mother to him. Thus, Shanti's identity as mother both reinforces and subverts the ideal mother stereotype.

Shanti's representation of Sita is then, again, proved by her devotion to Peggie, her husband, making sure that he has freshly cooked meals every day, making him tea, and even going as far as to cut his nails for him, without receiving thanks or appreciation for her efforts. It is in this context that Shanti re-presents Sita, as Peggie is made to recognise and appreciate Shanti – a deviation from the expected norm. Finally, Shanti also challenges the Sita identity through her boldness and occasional unladylike manners, proving that women do not need to restrain, reduce, and refashion themselves for the sake of men – and society – to gain fleeting approval and identity validation.

Having analysed Jennifer and Shanti separately, this chapter then briefly noted the shared oppression they face, despite their different circumstances in life and noted how their different identities are presented as equal and enables them to support each other, emphasised with an analysis of the opening scene from *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). Thus, through analysing their representation and re-representation of the Superwoman and Sita identities, this chapter has shown how the *Kandasamy* films, through Jennifer and Shanti, present realistic representations of South African Indian women in a way that positive as they

recognise differences among women, treating different identities as equal, neither inferior nor superior.

CHAPTER THREE: JODI'S NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY

Introduction

Jodi is the character who is by far the most stereotypical due to her lack of a strong individual personality when compared to Aya, Jennifer, and Shanti. This chapter examines Jodi's characterisation as an Everywoman which facilitates her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture. First, Jodi's relationship with Jennifer and the manner in which Jennifer uses Jodi to realise her identity as a woman is examined. Second, Jodi's role as a site for cultural change through her hybridised identity as represented through food is discussed. Finally, I examine the changing attitudes towards mental health, as represented through Jodi and Jennifer's experiences with post-partum depression.

Jodi as Everywoman

From *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) to *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Jodi is a quiet, unassuming character. The best description of her character type is that of the girl next door as she is “young, good-looking, with little visible fat or muscle, and [carries] several visual markers of hegemonic femininity” (Farci and Scarcelli, 2024: 103), having long hair and wearing typically feminine clothing such as dresses. Her unthreatening feminine identity is further emphasised and placed within a South African Indian context through the sarees she wears and the bindi that becomes part of her everyday attire once she is married. Ultimately, she is presented as a “female figure that is ordinary and everyday” (104).

Jodi's Everywoman identity is supported by her narrative. Jodi is first introduced as a university student in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). She has a secret boyfriend – Prishen, a gay best friend, and is part of the student council. Having a secret boyfriend plays into the idea of youth being a time of ‘rebellion’ against one's parents, however, the challenge to parental authority is undercut by Elvis' secret friendship with Peggie and her ‘rebellion’ is contained within socially acceptable bounds and thus in the realm of normal, acceptable

feminine behaviour. Marlin, Jodi's gay best friend⁴⁴, provides the interpersonal relationships that women are expected to have without being a potential rival for Prishen's affections or a threat to Jodi's heterosexual identity.

Jodi's sexuality is also safe and unthreatening as, though she is comfortable talking about sex, she adheres to traditional expectations, telling Prishen that he has a long wait ahead of him after he jokes about it being his lucky day when he sees condoms in her car. The condoms are for restocking the distributor in the ladies' toilet as part of her student council duties and, with the assurance that they are not for her personal use, are rendered unthreatening. *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019) allows a more explicit expression of her sexuality, once she is engaged to Prishen, as Jodi uses innuendo to reaffirm her relationship with Prishen in response to Shanti's undermining interrogation.

Continuing Jodi's normal life, the second film sees her happily married to Prishen after the dealbreaker issue in their relationship – Prishen's attachment to his mother – is addressed. The preference for a nuclear family over the extended family is reinforced as Jodi makes decisions to ensure that she and Prishen can start their married lives free from their mothers' influence. The third film, *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021), shows her settled into her identity as a wife as she and Prishen try for a baby, reinforcing the idea of the nuclear, heterosexual family. Jodi's sexuality in this film is safely contained within the bounds of marriage and is associated with the hope of becoming a mother. Her struggle in this film is possible infertility which is devastating to her and Prishen but serves to present the desire for children as one that is inherent and natural to a woman. *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) sees the fulfilment of Jodi and Prishen's desire for a child as they welcome Arya into the world. Becoming a mother is the fulfilment of Jodi's identity as a woman and her sexuality⁴⁵ is non-existent in the film, reinforcing the idea of mothers as asexual beings.

⁴⁴ *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* uses queer characters to reinforce heterosexual, cis identities as the norm, however that discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁴⁵ There is far more that can be discussed regarding women's sexuality and its representation in the *Kandasamy* films which includes Aya, Jennifer, and Shanti's expressions of sexuality and the norms that they reinforce or challenge.

In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Jodi struggles to connect to her identity as a mother due to post-partum depression. While the explicit inclusion of mental health issues may seem to deviate from the norm, being open about mental health issues and seeking professional assistance when it is needed is something that is becoming normalised for the generation that Jodi is part of, thus making her relatable to the audience. Having reached the hallmarks of womanhood without any deviations from the expected norms, Jodi is thus presented as Everywoman, facilitating her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity. Her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity is further facilitated by her identity as a woman remaining unfulfilled until the fourth film, *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), where she becomes a mother, thus affording her a greater level of agency and individuality than she has as a daughter.

Mother-Daughter Relationships Represented Through Jodi and Jennifer

In “Mothers and Daughters”, Marianne Hirsch (1981: 202) states

There can be no systematic and theoretical study of women in patriarchal culture, there can be no theory of women’s oppression, that does not take into account woman’s role as a mother of daughters and as a daughter of mothers, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women, and that does not study that relationship in the wider context in which it takes place: the emotional, political, economic, and symbolic structures of family and society. Any full study of mother-daughter relationships, in whatever field, is by definition both feminist and interdisciplinary.

In this section, I focus on the relationship between Jodi and Jennifer to demonstrate the projection of the mother’s self onto the daughter as a means of living out what she could not. Discussing the formation of adult personality and gender configurations for women in western society, Chodorow and Flax (1978 and 1976, cited in Hirsch, 1981: 206) found that “mothers identify more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves”, that “[e]go boundaries between mothers and daughters are more fluid, more undefined”, and that “[t]he girl is less encouraged to be autonomous, but she is also less nurtured, since the mother projects upon her daughter her own ambivalence about being female in a patriarchal culture. Chodorow further elaborates, “a woman becomes a mother in order to regain a sense of being mothered and in order to compensate for a heterosexual relationship with a man who

values separation while she values connection and continuity”. She also claims that “in her relationship with her daughter, a mother works out her unresolved relationship to her own mother” (206).

Avneet Batra and Simran Kohli (2019) present a far warmer assessment of mother-daughter relationships than Hirsch does. In their article “Delving into the World of Mother-Daughter Relationship: A Qualitative Analysis” (2019: 551), they cite Rastogi and Wampler (1999) who found that “interdependence and emotional intensity is found to be the highest in a mother-daughter relationship and [that] this bond tends to have significant effects on [... daughters’] self-concept and identification, marriage, career decisions, [and] coping skills” amongst other areas. Furthermore, “the values and attitudes which are taught by mothers are often internalised into daughters’ value systems” (Looker and Magee, 2000, cited in Batra and Kohli, 2019: 555). Batra and Kohli found that mothers’ happiness is often directly correlated to their daughters’ happiness, that daughters function as guiding forces for their mothers to navigate socio-cultural changes, mothers and daughters view each other as friends, mothers are a valuable part of daughters’ support systems, and that mothers act as protective shields for their daughters. Nabiha Chaudhary and Anjali Dutt’s article “The Role of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Shaping Femininity Among Indian Immigrant Women” (2025) presents findings that agree with Batra and Kohli’s, most importantly noting that “mothers serve as key cultural transmitters [and] daughters also reinterpret the inherited gender scripts and often resist the hegemony of western feminisms, forging hybrid femininities that respond to both Indian and diasporic cultural logics and the demands of western cultural environments” (2).

Some of these dynamics can be seen at play in Jodi’s relationship with Jennifer, her mother. As a mother, Jennifer wants what is best for Jodi, even though the results of her actions may not always convey that sentiment, as shown in Chapter Two. This does not mean, however, that Jennifer does not care deeply for Jodi. Jennifer’s happiness is shown to be correlated with Jodi’s own happiness and wellbeing several times throughout the films⁴⁶. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), after seeing the hurt she caused Jodi by driving her and Prishen apart, Jennifer has a heart-to-heart moment with her daughter where she explains her history

⁴⁶ Similarly, Jennifer’s happiness is linked to the business that she and Elvis began, further lending credence to the idea that the Business replaced Jodi in Jennifer’s life.

with Aya and how it influenced her actions, and she comes up with a plan to reunite them. In *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), Jennifer's happiness being dependent on Jodi's happiness and success is even more clearly presented as Jennifer is thrilled at all that Jodi has accomplished, which includes having learned how to cook, and is devastated and furious when she thinks Jodi has lied about her accomplishments. This incident, like Jennifer's intervention on Jodi's behalf in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), when she calls out Shanti and Prishen's treatment of Jodi as Prishen continued to place his mother first in his life, presents Jennifer as not simply invested in Jodi's happiness and wellbeing but also as an extension of herself through whom she can re-experience the world and redeem herself.

Calling out Prishen's behaviour, which was similar to the way Elvis behaves in response to Aya, was Jennifer's way of preventing Jodi from experiencing the pain of coming second place to your husband's mother in his affections and priorities the way that she did. Jennifer thus takes a step in working out her unresolved relationship with Aya, her mother-in-law, as well as acting as a shield for Jodi. Jennifer can also be seen as acting as a guiding force in that moment as her actions push Jodi and Prishen into discussing the issue of Prishen's attachment to his mother and resolving it. Jennifer's acceptance of a high-profile job offer on Jodi's behalf can be said to serve the same purpose. Jennifer accepts the offer on Jodi's behalf as she does not want to see Jodi making the same "mistakes" that she did in sacrificing her career for the sake of her husband. Jennifer thinks that she is shielding Jodi from future disappointment and guiding her down the right path and while doing so will be allowed to live out her ambitions, cut short by her mother-in-law, through Jodi.

Kandasamys: The Baby (Moodley, 2023) sees Jennifer once again working out her relationship with her mother-in-law through Jodi as it is only after she accuses Jodi of being a failure as a wife and mother, which is also projection of identity on Jennifer's part, is she able to open up and address her issues with Aya. Furthermore, Jennifer's anger over her erroneous perception of Jodi as having lied about learning how to cook comes from her own insecurity regarding her failures in learning to cook. Jodi's newfound skill feels like redemption for Jennifer and thus the thought of Jodi's skill being a lie as she resorts to the same kinds of methods Jennifer does – claiming credit for cooking something she did not actually make – to appear "perfect" incenses her as her failures return to haunt her. Similarly, Jennifer's anger at being limited in

her contact with and the assistance she can offer in taking care of her granddaughter can be read as her reacting, not necessarily to the boundaries set by her child, but to the feeling of being excluded from her life and being denied the chance to redeem herself through parenting Arya from her lacklustre mothering of Jodi. Thus, as much as Jennifer cares for Jodi and wants her to have a good life, she also uses Jodi as a proxy to experience the life that she wanted but was denied or otherwise failed to achieve in her own era.

In addition to re-experiencing life – living vicariously – through Jodi, Jennifer sees Jodi as an extension of herself. Jodi is Jen Junior⁴⁷. *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) highlights this phenomenon the most clearly as Jennifer has already decided how Jodi is going to act as a mother and has the rest of her life planned out for her. She tells Shanti that Jodi clearly does not want to breastfeed, after mentioning how she bottle-fed Jodi and when Jodi responds saying that she wants to breast and bottle-feed Arya, Jennifer tells her that she does not want to do that. Later on, Jennifer discloses that she already has a routine drawn up for Jodi to follow when it comes to taking care of Arya and herself. While this routine is intended to help make things easier for Jodi, Jennifer’s actions imply that she does not see Jodi as an autonomous person, thus enforcing the idea of Jodi as an extension of her mother.

Jennifer’s announcement that she and Elvis have decided to pass the business, the “family legacy”, on to Jodi it comes with the expectation that she will pass it on to their “lovely granddaughter” (Moodley, 2023), demonstrating that Jennifer’s extension of self reaches even beyond Jodi to Arya. Jennifer’s treatment of Jodi as an extension of herself is pointed out by Jodi who tells Prishen that “[Jennifer will] never let [her] make any decisions” (Moodley, 2023) regarding the business, even if she becomes the CEO. Jennifer’s projection continues to the next day when she messages Jodi, addressing her as “Mrs CEO” to ask whether she and Prishen have thought of baby names yet and what is for lunch, saying that she is happy to babysit while Jodi cooks. While Jennifer initially comes across as an enthusiastic mother and grandmother, Jodi has not yet accepted the offer of the position of CEO and her comment during lunch that Jodi is brilliant in the kitchen and soon to be boardroom reinforces the idea that Jennifer has already made the decision for Jodi.

⁴⁷ Jennifer also sees Anjali, Jodi’s neighbour, as an extension of herself – to an extent.

A few scenes later, Jennifer once again treats Jodi as an extension of herself, bringing her a green smoothie to “help [her] get back in shape” (Moodley, 2023), and telling her that she “should aim to get into a little exercise routine”. Her comments turn into her and Shanti discussing what Jodi should be focusing on – her career, in Jennifer’s opinion – as if she is not a capable adult who is sitting across from them. It is only after Jennifer is forced into the realisation that Jodi is her own person, following her fight with Jodi and Prishen, that she is able to let go of Jodi and view her as an autonomous person rather than an extension of herself.

Jennifer’s revelation is evidenced in her admission that the tension between herself and Jodi was caused by her “domineering and always in control self” who had not stopped to ask at any point what Jodi wanted. Jennifer’s resolution comes with her final realisation that Jodi was the “one taking care of [her] all [those] years”. From the “time she was a little girl” Jodi was there for Jennifer, “bringing [her] tea, making [her] sandwiches, *mothering* [her]”. This realisation foregrounds Jennifer and Jodi’s reunion, demonstrating Chodorow’s point that a woman becomes a mother in order to regain a sense of being mothered, and now, having come to the realisation that she was successfully mothered Jennifer is able to release Jodi from being solely an extension of herself to be her own person.

For a chapter focused on analysing Jodi’s character, this section has spoken at length about her mother, Jennifer. While this may seem contradictory or even off-topic, the aim of this section has been to examine the relationship between Jodi and Jennifer to demonstrate the projection of the mother’s self onto the daughter as a means of living out what she could not. This aim has been achieved, as Jennifer’s relationship with Jodi has been shown as one in which Jennifer uses her daughter to find fulfilment and closure in her life. Furthermore, Jodi’s identity as a woman is only fulfilled at the end of *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) when Jennifer recognises Jodi as a mother in her own right and not solely a daughter which allows her to be recognised as a full person. This aligns with her lack of individual personality in the films, as being a good daughter, she is who her mother expects her to be, reaching the important milestones in her life, such as graduation and marriage, to maintain the family’s and her mother’s honour, thus emphasising the view of daughters in South African Indian society as extensions of their mothers.

Jennifer's use of Jodi as a site of negotiation thus presents the way in which daughters are seen as sites of not only personal but cultural negotiation within their families and communities as Jennifer is able to become fulfilled in her womanhood through Jodi's achievement of womanhood – where Jennifer failed, Jodi excelled. This recalls Chaudhary and Dutt's (2025: 2) point on women as “cultural transmitters”. Jennifer was unable to “reinterpret the inherited gender script [while resisting] the hegemony of [w]estern feminisms” and was thus unable to live up to the cultural expectations of her as a mother. Jodi, however, represents a “hybrid [feminism] that respond[s] to both Indian and diasporic cultural logic and the demands of [w]estern cultural environments”.

Women as Sites of Negotiation: Food as a Metaphor for Cultural Change

Jodi's hybrid identity and her journey to reach her identity can be read through her relationship with food in the first, second, and fourth films. Food represents culture, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. Thus, Jodi's approach to and relationship with food, particularly in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019) and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), can be read subversively as a representation of the negotiation between the demands placed on South African Indian women by Western culture and Indian culture and the synthesis of a hybrid identity that arises in response to the opposing demands. As set forth in Chapter Two, Jennifer's approach to food reflects a Westernised culture while Shanti's approach represents a stereotypically Indian culture. Jodi is pulled to and fro between her mother and mother-in-law until she achieves independence in Mauritius, which is reflected in not only her newfound ability to cook but also her utilisation of Mauritian cuisine, which breaks away from both Western American culture and traditional South African Indian culture.

As mentioned previously, Jennifer's relationship with food is practical to the point where it is disconnected from South African Indian culture. Her view of food is shaped by western American ideas regarding health, where they “associate foods most with health and least with pleasure and make great efforts to alter their diet in the service of health” (Pereira and Alvarenga, 2007: 142). Jennifer's lack of skill when it comes to cooking is thus a sign of her losing one of the only tangible markers of “Indianness” that exist in the everyday South African Indian context. On the other hand, Shanti prides herself in being a very good cook and this self-perception is validated by other characters who compliment her cooking and praise her skills.

Shanti's constant association with the tangible "cultural marker" (Ebrahim-Vally, 2012: 67) of Indian identity reinforces her traditional sense of identity. Caught between her mother and mother-in-law, Jodi struggles with her lack of cooking skills. On one hand Jodi is the modern, educated, and affluent woman that western feminism praises while on the other hand, she lacks the skills that traditionally defined womanhood and is limited in her expression of her identity as a South African Indian. Thus, the question of what makes a South African Indian when race is taken out of the equation is seen here (Frenkel, 2011: 12).

In the first two films, Shanti's perspective, or the traditional perspective is presented. This perspective implies that Jodi's lack of tangible traditionally Indian cultural practices 'disqualifies' her from being a real South African Indian. This can be subversively read from Shanti's evaluation of Jodi as an unsuitable wife for Prishen due to her inexperience in the kitchen and her use of food as a means of maintaining what she sees as her rightful place as the most important person in Prishen's life. In *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017), Shanti expresses her thoughts on Jodi's unsuitability as a wife due to her inexperience in the kitchen and tries to encourage Prishen to pursue Devani, who she sees as a good traditional girl, instead. Devani can cook and wants Shanti to help her improve her skills in the kitchen. Her adherence to traditional norms causes Shanti to view her favourably as opposed to Jodi.

Shanti's less than favourable view of Jodi continues into the second film, *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019) in which there are incidents in which Shanti asserts her superior traditional identity as a woman over Jodi through food. The first incident occurs when Shanti derails Jodi and Prishen's lunch date, insisting that they eat lunch with her at home since she cooked. Prishen, predictably, caves to his mother's wishes, saying that he and Jodi can go out at a later date. During the drive home, Shanti takes the opportunity to quiz Jodi on what Prishen likes to eat and how exactly he likes it prepared. When Jodi cannot remember the specifics, Shanti rather smugly comments that nothing can be better than a mother's cooking. The implication here is that when they are married, Prishen will not be content to live off takeout, restaurant, and prepackaged meals and will eventually return home due to a desire for good food. This can also be interpreted as comparing a lack of tangible tradition to starvation which will draw Prishen away from Jodi, thus prioritising tangible expressions of culture over race to qualify one as a South African Indian. Furthermore, cooking as an expression of culture is presented as a vital part of being a woman, with the unspoken implication that Jodi is not a woman because she cannot cook. However, Shanti's victory is undercut by the innuendo Jodi offers in return, asking if Shanti knows what else Prishen likes to eat. Jodi's response sets the

stage for her burgeoning hybrid identity that does not rely on tradition for validation as a South African Indian or as a woman.

Shanti's second challenge to Jodi's identity as a South African Indian woman comes in the form of a present – specifically a cookbook with Shanti's recipes in it. Shanti presents it to Jodi in front of Prishen and tells her that all she needs to do in order to make Prishen happy every night is to use the recipes in the book. Again, the implication here is that Jodi's non-traditional identity as a woman will not stand the test of time and she will have to conform to the demands of tradition in order to validate her identity as a woman.

Shanti's third and final challenge takes place over a joint Kandasamy-Naidoo lunch. Jodi tells Prishen to tell his mother (Shanti) not to bring any food, as she will be cooking the dishes for the lunch. Determined to learn how to cook, Jodi uses Shanti's recipes to prepare a meal for both families. Shanti ignores Jodi's request and brings biriyani to the lunch. During the meal it is clear that Jodi has not succeeded in her cooking endeavours despite following Shanti's instructions. This scene emphasises Jodi's non-traditional identity as a woman and the importance of her developing a hybrid identity. She has already moved away from portraying a purely western culture in her attempts to cook but, it is clear that she cannot rely on tradition to validate her identity as a woman. These three incidents imply that what is required to be recognised as a South African Indian (woman) is the ability to create and perpetuate the tangible “cultural markers” (Ebrahim-Vally. 2012: 67) of “Indianness”, again recalling the role of women as “cultural transmitters” (Chaudhary and Dutt, 2025: 2).

The resolution of Jodi's ‘identity crisis’ is shown in the fourth film, *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023). Jodi has become a mother and is shown to have learned how to cook, thus presenting the ‘superwoman’ identity in which she is expected to exert herself “to play out the roles of successful house[wife] and career woman simultaneously” (Meer, 1972: 43). Jennifer certainly expects this of Jodi and does her best to support and guide her daughter along that path. Jodi, in a manner similar to her non-conformity to a strictly traditional South African Indian identity, does not adhere to the modern ‘superwoman’ identity either. Prishen, her husband, shares the childcare duties with her and does not expect her to be the one taking care of him all the time. Jodi's relationship with Prishen is one of equality, where she is not expected to carry a double load, thus rejecting the ‘superwoman’ identity that we have seen represented by her mother, Jennifer.

Jodi's style of cooking, a fusion of South African Indian and Mauritian Indian, can be read as representing her freedom from a traditional South African Indian identity as well as the 'modern' westernised superwoman identity. She learned to cook from her Mauritian friend and neighbour, Anjali, representing a new era of South African Indian identity which brings in new "transnationalisms [and] a blurring of boundaries" (Frenkel, 2011: 15) as the South African Indian identity moves further away from race as a defining characteristic. Furthermore, Prishen's easy and genuine praise of Jodi's cooking contrasts his inability to compliment her (failed) attempt at cooking in *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019), thus validating Jodi's hybrid identity as a woman. Jodi's hybrid identity is additionally shown through her desire to both breastfeed and bottle-feed Arya, implying her commitment to both her child and her career in a manner that is sustainable for her. Thus, Jodi is shown as having found the balance between "Indian and diasporic cultural logic and the demands of western cultural environments" (Chaudhary and Dutt, 2025: 2) – the new ideal woman.

Attitudes Towards Mental Health: Jodi, Jennifer, and Post-Partum Depression

An important aspect of Jodi's identity as the new "ideal woman", is her representation of mental health issues – something of a taboo topic within the South African Indian community, yet one that is necessary to address. While the film's presentation of post-partum depression is rather on the nose, as Jodi's Google search of post-partum depression is shown, spelling out for the audience what is happening, and possibly medically inaccurate as, given the timeframe and onset of her perceivable symptoms in film, she might be suffering from the "baby blues"⁴⁸ rather than post-partum depression, it does provide a starting point for people – South African Indians, especially – to talk about mental health and mental health issues. This is a valuable representation of mental health issues as the film frames Jodi's experience in a value-neutral manner and contrasts her experience with Jennifer recalling her own experience as a new mother who was struggling and the negative reaction she received. Thus, *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) presents new and old attitudes towards mental health, which helps in

⁴⁸ Post-partum blues: "a milder type of mood disorder that happens within the first ten days of giving birth" in which the "symptoms will [...] go away by themselves and [do not] require any treatment" (Rathi, Khapre, Chavada, Gupta, and Singla, 2022: 1).

facilitating a more informed and neutral approach to mental health matters and giving visibility to women's experiences that are otherwise forgotten.

Post-partum depression, an identified yet “under-recognised and under-treated” (Rathi, Khapre, Chavada, Gupta, and Singla, 2022: 1) mental health issue, reportedly affects “15% of women during the first year after giving birth”, arising “up to a year after childbirth and can peak as early as four to six weeks after delivery” (1). Post-partum depressive symptoms “typically go away on their own between two and six months after giving birth, although they might remain longer” (1) and can include “melancholy, nausea, anxiety, irritability, feelings of loneliness, and abnormalities in sleep” (1) as well as “mood fluctuations, bouts of crying, [and] lack of interest in the child” (Agrawal, Mehendale, and Malhotra, 2022:1). In some cases, the mother even suffers with “thoughts of harming [herself] or the baby” (Rathi, A., Khapre, S., Chevada, J., Gupta, S., and Singla, T., 2022: 1). Risk factors associated with post-partum depression include “a lack of spousal and social support, previous psychiatric illnesses, [...] a negative birth experience, [...] lower socioeconomic factors, body image dissatisfactions, [... and, in some cases,] the gender of the baby” (Agrawal, Mehendale, and Malhotra, 2022: 5 – 6). Changes in hormone levels such as progesterone, oxytocin, and cortisol amongst other biological factors have been identified as “promising biomarkers for predicting [post-partum depression]” although “more research and substantiation are required before they can be used clinically” (Rathi, Khapre, Chavada, Gupta, and Singla, 2022: 4). This newer research demonstrates that it is likely that bio-medical reasons, such as hormone imbalances in the mother's body, play a significant role in the presentation of post-partum depression. Post-partum depression is thus regarded as cause of serious concern, affecting not only the mother, but the baby and even the rest of the family. A lack of education on the topic has led to stigmatisation of the associated behaviours and even curbs help-seeking action, a common trend seen in addressing mental health issues.

Mental health is not often a topic openly discussed or, in some cases, even acknowledged within the South African Indian community. If the discussion of mental health is uncommon, seeking professional help is even more so due to the general “sense that if you're seeing a therapist then there must be something wrong with you” and going to therapy means admitting to “the rest of the world [...] that [you] have a problem, and not just a small one” (Padayachee and Laher,

2014: 11). Going to therapy is thus seen as something shameful, as is admittance of struggling mentally. Contributing to this belief could be a belief in *Karma*, which leads to mental illness often being “understood as resulting from the [individual’s negative actions] of a past life” (3). Furthermore, “bad thoughts such as ill will, resentment or jealousy [...] produces bad karma as this conduct is not deemed righteous” (3) and may negatively affect the individual in their current life. Even without a strong belief in *Karma*, there is a prevailing attitude amongst the older generations of “we grew up that way and we had no problems” which leads them and, through learned behaviour, younger generations as well to view mental health issues as “a phase” (10) that the individual will get through. A similar attitude is one of “I grew up with a harder life than you, so how can you be struggling when I have made your life easy”, from parents/grandparents who worked hard to ensure that their children/grandchildren had better lives than they did. This attitude is evident in the *Kandasamy* films as Aya is dismissive of Jennifer’s struggles due to the hardships she faced as a mother, and Jennifer does not appear to notice Jodi’s difficulties either.

Jennifer and Jodi have both suffered with post-partum depression, though Jennifer’s is more implied than explicit, like many South African Indian parents’ mental issues are heavily implied throughout their lives without them being formally diagnosed. Jodi is clearly presented in *Kandasamy: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) as experiencing post-partum depression. Her exhaustion and irritability, particularly when it comes to her mother and mother-in-law, are the first signs, subtle, but important in the lead up to the narrative revelation. In the scene immediately prior to the one in which she is seen Googling “post-partum depression”, Jodi breaks down crying, telling Prishen that “[she does not] know if [she wants] to be a mom anymore” and that she “[does not] want to be with [Arya]” (Moodley, 2023). Finally, Jodi and Prishen are shown actively addressing the issue in a short scene, overlaid with Aya’s narration, “before we heal, we hurt”, where they meet with a psychologist. Contrasting the clarity with which Jodi’s experience is presented, Jennifer’s experience with post-partum depression is not explicitly stated for the audience the way that Jodi’s is, but it is heavily implied. Several negative factors of the Superwoman identity, such as “gender inequality, strained interpersonal relationships, social isolation” (Syed, Hirani, and Ahmad, 2025: 86), the suppression of emotions, “poor [...] sleep quality, [and] an emphasis on physical appearance to weight concern [and] dieting” (91) align with the post-partum depression risk factors of “lack of spousal and social support” and “body image dissatisfactions” as well as the symptoms of “melancholy [...]

anxiety, irritability, feelings of loneliness, and abnormalities in sleep” (Rathi, Khapre, Chavada, Gupta, and Singla, 2022: 1). Aya’s claims that Jennifer was a useless mother implies Jennifer’s lack of interest in Jodi when she was born as failed at attending to her needs. Thus, it can be concluded that Jennifer, like Jodi, suffered with post-partum depression.

Jodi and Jennifer’s experiences reflect the changing attitudes towards not only mental health issues but also the nature of support that mothers receive. The scene in which Jodi tells Prishen that she is not well does feel somewhat like therapy-talk in the way that Jodi clearly expresses what she is feeling, even though she does not know the cause, but it is important because of the emphasis on communication and the support she receives from Prishen. Jodi can express her feelings without traces of shame, rather she appears scared of her lack of “motherly” feelings towards her daughter. This sense of fear is highlighted in her nervous demeanour when she and Prishen meet with the psychologist. While fear often hides shame, a common emotion associated with mental illness, Jodi’s fear of feeling as if she does not want to be a mother anymore has to be considered in light of her desire to become a mother and her devastation when she thinks she may never be able to do so, as seen in *Trippin’ With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021). Jodi appears to be more confused about her feelings, reflecting Rathi’s statement that it “can be perplexing and upsetting to experience the tension between the happy emotions that new moms frequently believe they should feel and the depressive mood and worry that many of them experience” (1). This presentation of post-partum depression and its effects work to destigmatise mental health issues as Jodi is not presented as being at fault for her feelings or an inherently bad mother or person⁴⁹. Jodi’s ability to talk about her feelings also reflects millennial’s and Gen Z’s move towards being more emotionally open and mature than previous generations as well as being more equipped to talk about such issues. Finally, Jodi turning to Prishen as her main source of support and his response in handling the challenge as a team emphasises, once again, the increased support she has when compared to Jennifer.

Contrasting Jodi’s experience, Jennifer lacks the ability to talk about her feelings and lacked the spousal and social support that she needed when she was struggling. When she finally speaks about her difficulties as a new mother in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), over

⁴⁹ It simultaneously presents her as a good mother as she is worried about being a bad mother thus, once again, emphasising the centrality of motherhood in South African Indian women’s identities.

two decades after the event, she describes feeling as if she were “drowning” being “overwhelmed, and confused, and scared”. She wanted and needed Aya’s support during this time and Aya could see that Jennifer was struggling but instead of helping her, Aya told Elvis that Jennifer was weak and needy. Jennifer goes on to say that Aya “made [her] feel like something was wrong with [her]” (Moodley, 2023), echoing the sentiments noted in Padayachee and Laher’s article. Jennifer’s confrontation with and confession to Aya takes place on the same day as Jodi talking to Prishen about her struggles. As a result, the differences in their experiences are emphasised. Jennifer clearly lacked a support system, as explained in Chapter Two, and would have had limited access, when compared to Jodi, to resources about mental health and post-partum depression rendering her ill-equipped to handle such a challenge. Thus, Jennifer’s experience represents the experiences of older generations in relation to mental health issues.

The reaction of the older generation to younger generations’ mental health concerns is shown through Jennifer’s inability to see that Jodi is struggling as she offers her everything that she wanted as a new mother. Jennifer arrives in Mauritius equipped with a schedule to help Jodi learn how to juggle work and childcare. She is eager to be involved with taking care of the newborn Arya and take pressure off Jodi in that manner. Jennifer is ready to offer everything that she had to figure out herself to Jodi on a silver platter, much like she offers Jodi the business that she and Elvis built as a way of ensuring that Jodi will never have to struggle like they did. Thus, similar to how parents will dismiss mental health concerns expressed by their children because they have succeeded in giving them a life materially better than what they had experienced, Jennifer is unable to see Jodi’s struggles and is quick to find fault with her for being ungrateful for the support she has been blessed with when Jodi and Prishen express their independence and their desire to not have their mothers overly involved in their lives. Furthermore, as Jennifer sees herself as providing the support she wished Aya had given her and also sees Prishen supporting Jodi in a way that Elvis never did for her, when she perceives Jodi to be underperforming – lying about having learned to cook and not being proactive about her health and Prishen’s health, for example – she is quickly angered and driven to harsh criticism. This replicates the “I grew up with a harder life than you, so how can you be struggling when I have made your life easy” mindset seen in older generations, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the differences between Jodi and Jennifer’s experiences of post-partum depression can be read as representing the differences in attitudes towards mental health and

mental health issues between older and younger generations of South African Indians and facilitating a shift towards addressing such issues in an open and judgemental free manner.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Jodi's characterisation as an Everywoman, facilitating her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture. First, Jodi's relationship with Jennifer was shown to represent the ways in which a mother views her daughter as an extension of herself through whom she can re-experience the world and live the life she was denied while redeeming herself from her own failures as a woman. Even through the care that Jennifer gives Jodi, it is clear to see that she shields not just Jodi but herself as well from (re)experiencing the hardships of life as seen in her drawing attention to Prishen's tendency to prioritise his mother over Jodi which mirrors Elvis' prioritisation of Aya over Jennifer. Jennifer is only able to let go of Jodi and embrace her own identity as a whole woman after she realises that Jodi mothered her and she works through her own issues with Aya, leading to the resolution of her identity.

From a site of personal identity projection and negotiation, Jodi is next discussed in her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of culture. Through food, Jodi experiences the pressures of traditional culture and western culture, respectively represented by Shanti and Jennifer and their approaches to food. Resolution comes when Jodi learns to cook from Anjali, her Mauritian neighbour, thus creating a fusion style of cooking, representing a hybridised identity. Jodi's hybridised identity incorporates the best of traditional culture and western culture, proving her identity as a fully realised woman as she blends traditional South African Indian identity with the superwoman identity, being both a transmitter of culture while reinterpreting, and thus representing, inherited gender scripts.

Finally, Jodi's role as a site to facilitate a societal attitude shift towards mental health is discussed through a comparison of her experience with post-partum depression to Jennifer's experience of post-partum depression. Jodi's ability to talk about her struggles is contrasted with Jennifer's inability to do so, as is the support Jodi receives with Jennifer's lack of support, representing the ability of younger generations to address mental health issues as they have

tools that were not readily available to older generations. The explicit focus on the issue of post-partum depression in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) also challenges the prevailing attitude amongst South African Indians that it is shameful to talk about mental health issues, facilitating a shift towards addressing such issues in an open and judgemental free manner. Thus, Jodi has been shown to fill the role that is less of a character and more of a personification of a site for the negotiation of identity and culture.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has presented an analysis of four women characters from Jayan Moodley's *Kandasamy* films (2017 – 2023). I employed a feminist cultural studies framework to analyse selected representations and re-presentations of stereotypes that affect South African Indian women in real life as seen in the characters Aya, Jennifer, and Shanti, and the position of women as sites for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture within the South African Indian community through the character of Jodi.

The first chapter examined Aya, the oldest character in the franchise, who reproduces and challenges both negative and positive stereotypes of old women in films. Aya's health scare in *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) reproduces the image of old women as frail and ailing but is challenged by her good health in the subsequent films. This is particularly evident in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023), where she plays paintball and enjoys dirt-biking, playing into the stereotype of the golden ager. Aya was also shown to reproduce the image of old women as invisible as she is often left on the sidelines when the action is taking place. Her reaction to being sidelined, particularly by Jennifer, is to act the part of the shrewish mother-in-law who is forever dissatisfied, thus challenging one negative representation with another. The negative image of the mother-in-law as shrewish old woman is, however, challenged by Aya's willingness to reconcile with Jennifer, her daughter-in-law, thus presenting older people as open to change rather than stuck in their ways.

Further challenging the negative representations of older women that she presents, Aya is depicted as wise, caring, and, at least to her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, unconditionally loving. Her narration framing each film creates a universal image of old women being wise and a guiding voice for the younger generations. Her care is shown in the way she treats Jodi, looking out for her and being a source of comfort and support in her life. These contrasting aspects of her characterisation enable Aya to be seen as filling different roles, based on who she is with, emphasising the multifaceted identity that real women live out.

Aya as a character also presents a reimagined Sita who rejects her husband completely and does not surrender her son into the custody of the man who rejected her. She rejects the expectation of a wife to remain devoted to a husband who causes her suffering but emphasises the expectation of a woman to be a good and devoted mother. Despite her deviation from the traditional way of being a woman, Aya is not punished but is shown as strong and resilient for taking action and is rewarded with a fulfilling life.

Aya's "discourses of resistance" (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, 2013: 304) against negative stereotypes of old women in film such as the aforementioned positive stereotypes of the golden ager and perfect grandparent can be said to "function as sites that [produce] and [legitimise] marginalisation" (304) as, according to Femke De Sutter and Sofie Van Bauwel (2023: 21), even "representations of 'successful ageing' can be problematic [... as] a large part of the population cannot meet these expectations". Thus, the close reading of Aya as a multifaceted character through the use of an intersectional feminist framework reveals that she is simultaneously "successful" and unsuccessful in her ageing, enabling the presentation of a contradictory and nuanced character who is reminiscent of South African Indian women who exist in reality. Her simultaneous reproduction and subversion of both negative and positive stereotypes of old women in films recalls Ronit Frenkel's (2011: 3) comment on South African Indian literature presenting South African Indian identity as "mobile [...] moving simultaneously towards difference and continuity in the realm of identity politics".

From a feminist perspective, Aya continues this trend of simultaneous movement in opposite directions through her rejection of her husband which challenges traditional expectations of women while simultaneously upholding expectations through her devotion to Elvis, her son. She gives voice to the subaltern, representing women who often had no "lines of social mobility" (Spivak, 2006: 30), thus contributing to the writing back of South African Indian women into the national narratives and challenging the narrative of silent suffering that Sita and many South African Indian women following in her footsteps were forced to embrace. Through my analysis of Aya as Sita reimagined, I have shown how *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (Moodley, 2019) provides a criticism of power relations within the South African Indian culture, challenging the "unexamined imperialism" (Spivak, 1996: 69) which often prevents or rejects

criticism of non-western cultures. It is important to be mindful that this discourse of resistance does also have the potential to function as a site from which marginalisation is produced and legitimised as, once again, a large part of the population cannot, for myriad reasons, exercise their agency in such a fashion or give voice to their experiences. Ultimately, Aya's characterisation in the *Kandasamy* films primarily re-presents the image of the old woman on screen in a manner that gives her agency and complexity, challenging stereotypical representations and traditional expectations, thus contributing to enriched paradigm scenarios of women as represented in film.

Chapter Two's analysis and discussion of Jennifer and Shanti's characters again demonstrates how the *Kandasamy* films contribute to enriching and improving the repertoire of images of women that are presented in film thus improving the emotional responses of those who encounter these paradigms. Chapter Two analysed Jennifer and Shanti whose characterisations represent and re-present the stereotypes of Superwoman and Sita. Representing Superwoman, the one who effectively juggles a demanding job with being a good mother and wife, Jennifer is portrayed as stylish, put together, and highly successful in her position as CEO of the business she started with her husband. Her success is shown in the films through material means, her house, clothes, and car, rather than through any interaction with colleagues and the corporate world. The lack of focus on what she actually does at work creates an illusion that her job is relatively undemanding, theoretically making it easy for her to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Jennifer's emphasis on staying fit serves to reinforce this idea as she maintains a trim and attractive figure, further increasing the desire to also be a Superwoman.

Re-presenting and challenging the Superwoman identity, however, Jennifer is shown to fail in her role as a South African Indian mother and wife. Jennifer is the opposite of the warm and always on-call mother that is the expected norm. From preferring bottle-feeding over breast-feeding, to prioritising work over being a present mother, Jennifer is depicted as having failed in her role as a mother. Even her attempts at mothering an adult Jodi reinforce this idea as she comes across as ignorant of her child's needs, despite her good intentions. Her good intentions being misinterpreted due to the context she finds herself in are seen again in her relationship with food. Jennifer views food as fuel and her health-conscious food choices are tolerated, rather than embraced by her family. Her inability to cook makes her seem uninvolved as a

mother and, as a woman – preserver and teacher of culture – she is neglecting one of her duties in failing to pass along cultural culinary skills to her child. Within this South African Indian context that Jennifer’s eating habits can be linked to the idea of an eating disorder as well as social isolation and loneliness, highlighting some of the negative effects of trying to live up to the Superwoman identity. Finally, Jennifer’s distance and disconnection from other people is emphasised and explained through her emotional attachment to the business that she and Elvis built from scratch. The business functions as a stand-in for her child and her position as CEO fulfils her need to feel wanted, needed, and like number one as she does not receive validation in her identity as a wife and mother when at home.

The uncovering of Jennifer’s struggles through a subversive close reading of her character has shown the way in which what once seemed to be a positive identity – the “Superwoman” identity – and a discourse of resistance against the demand for women to stay at home became a burden for women of colour and a site that contributes to their marginalisation. As a woman of colour – a South African Indian woman – Jennifer is not dependent on the dominant cultural customs but *is* affected by and “subject to their activity” (Prakash, 1994: 1477). She charted her own course outside of the discourses of the South African Indian community, as represented in the *Kandasamy* films, particularly through Aya and Shanti, but is still affected by the demands of tradition and her “failure” to comply with them. It is the intersectional feminist framework that allows for this reading to take place as it was vital to examine Jennifer’s “Superwoman” identity from within the South African Indian culture rather than assuming that a western American or European cultural context would apply to her. Like the analysis of Aya’s character in Chapter One, the analysis of Jennifer’s character shows that the *Kandasamy* films do encourage women to examine and criticise power relations from within their own culture. Furthermore, analysing Jennifer’s relationship with Aya encourages women to be critical of power relations between not only men and women but between women themselves.

In the second part of the chapter, Shanti is shown to represent Sita – the perfect wife and mother, quietly supportive and sacrificial – through her prowess in the kitchen and her devotion to her son and husband. Shanti’s continued association with preparing food throughout the films and being acknowledged as a good cook reinforces her traditional identity as desirable. Shanti’s

representation of Sita is also reinforced through her catering wholeheartedly to Prishen, her son, cooking his favourite meals. However, Shanti subverts the Sita identity as, unlike Sita, she is unprepared to step back when Prishen no longer needs her to be intimately involved in his life. Her focus on Prishen also causes her to neglect Desan, her younger son, and she fails to be a good mother to him. Thus, Shanti's identity as mother both reinforces and subverts the ideal mother stereotype.

Shanti's representation of Sita is then, again, proved by her devotion to Peggie, her husband, making sure that he has freshly cooked meals every day, making him tea, and even going to far as to cut his nails for him, without receiving thanks or appreciation for her efforts. It is in this context that Shanti re-presents Sita, as Peggie is made to recognise and appreciate Shanti, a deviation from the expected norm. Finally, Shanti also challenges the Sita identity through her boldness and occasional unladylike manners, proving that women do not need to restrain, reduce, and refashion themselves for the sake of men – and society – to gain fleeting approval and identity validation.

Having analysed Jennifer and Shanti separately, Chapter Two then briefly noted the shared oppression they face, despite their different circumstances in life and noted how their different identities are presented as equal and enables them to support each other, emphasised with an analysis of the opening scene from *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017). This analysis and comparison was only made possible through the use of the intersectional feminist framework which allowed the examination of “the dynamics of difference and sameness” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013: 786) between the two characters. Thus, through analysing their representation and re-presentation of the Superwoman and Sita identities, Chapter Two has shown how the *Kandasamy* films, through Jennifer and Shanti, present realistic representations of South African Indian women in a way that is positive as they recognise differences among women, treating different identities as equal, neither inferior nor superior, promoting comradery amongst South African Indian women in real life.

Finally, Chapter Three analysed Jodi's characterisation as an Everywoman, facilitating her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of identity and culture. First, Jodi's relationship with Jennifer was shown to represent the ways in a mother views her daughter as an extension of herself through whom she can re-experience the world and live the life she was denied while redeeming herself from her own failures as a woman. Even through the care that Jennifer gives Jodi, it is clear to see that she shields not just Jodi but herself as well from (re)experiencing the hardships of life as seen in her drawing attention to Prishen's tendency to prioritise his mother over Jodi which mirrors Elvis' prioritisation of Aya over Jennifer. Jennifer is only able to let go of Jodi and embrace her own identity as a whole woman after she realises that Jodi mothered her and she works through her own issues with Aya, leading to the resolution of her identity. From a site of personal identity projection and negotiation, Jodi was then discussed in her role as a site for the projection and negotiation of culture.

Through food, Jodi experiences the pressures of traditional culture and western culture, respectively represented by Shanti and Jennifer and their approaches to food. Resolution comes when Jodi learns to cook from Anjali, her Mauritian neighbour, thus creating a fusion style of cooking, representing a hybridised identity. Jodi's hybridised identity incorporates the best of traditional culture and western culture, proving her identity as a fully realised woman as she embodies the role of mother and daughter simultaneously, being both a transmitter of culture while reinterpreting, and thus re-presenting, inherited gender scripts.

Finally, Jodi's role as a site to facilitate a societal attitude shift towards mental health was examined through a comparison of her experience with post-partum depression to Jennifer's experience of post-partum depression. Jodi's ability to talk about her struggles is contrasted with Jennifer's inability to do so, as is the support Jodi receives with Jennifer's lack of support, representing the ability of younger generations to address mental health issues as they have tools that were not readily available to older generations. The explicit focus on the issue of post-partum depression in *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) also challenges the prevailing attitude amongst South African Indians that it is shameful to talk about mental health issues, facilitating a shift towards addressing such issues in an open and judgemental free manner. Through this representation, Jodi is used to give a voice to subaltern and write women's experiences that challenge the status quo regarding motherhood into the narrative.

Thus, Jodi has been shown to fill the role that is less of a character and more of a personification of a site for the negotiation of identity and culture, reflecting the view of women as the preservers and transmitters of culture.

Despite her lack of “real” personality, Jodi exemplifies Audre Lorde’s (2007: 130 – 131) emphasis on “[recognising the] differences among women who are [equals], neither inferior nor superior, and [devising] ways to use each others’ difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles” as she synthesises her womanly identity from those presented to her by Jennifer, Shanti, and Anjali. Her hybrid identity illustrates intersectionality in practice as she is the site of multiple conversions which give rise to a new identity, more so than Aya, Jennifer, and Shanti. Jodi, most of all, is the character through whom the issues of “migration, diaspora, transnationalism, hybridity, difference, cultural undecidability, and a blurring of boundaries” (Frenkel, 2011: 15) that have characterised South African Indian literature post-apartheid are given new meanings.

Having provided analyses of South African Indian women’s identities and experiences of the present as told by South African Indian women, this dissertation fills the research gap regarding the present identities and representations of South African Indian women. The intersectional feminist framework has shown that the *Kandasamy* films mostly adhere to Barbara Smith’s (2023: 65 – 6) definition of feminism as a theory and practice that aims to “free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women”. Women of colour are represented in various ways in the films, including representations of working-class women (Shanti) and old women (Aya). This presentation of women who cannot be reductively defined by a single factor encourages the recognition of differences amongst women who are equals and consider the ways in which their differences enrich each other’s lives. The intersectional part of the framework has also allowed for the identification of discourses of resistance present in the films that have the potential to “function as sites that [produce] and [legitimise] marginalisation” (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, 2013: 304) such as positive stereotypes regarding old women in film and the “empowering” Superwoman stereotype.

Additionally, in reading the selected films as literary texts, this dissertation has contributed to filling the literary research gap regarding representations of South African Indian women’s

identities in mainstream media. Old themes and issues such as diaspora, migration, transnationalism, difference, and hybridity are given new life within the South African Indian context as the issue of identity is no longer between India and South Africa, but is rooted in a South African identity and how it relates to other international identities. In this manner, the narratives surrounding the South African Indian community are given a much needed update. Finally, this dissertation has contributed to field of film studies, focusing on South African Film, specifically South African Indian film of which there is little work at present.

Further Considerations

There are several topics that are worthy of discussion in addition to what I have discussed in this dissertation. First, it should be noted that there are more women characters in the films than I have analysed in this dissertation. This dissertation examined Aya, Jennifer, Shanti, and Jodi as they are the core characters in the films. However, they are not the only identities that are present in the films. The presence of Poobasha, Baby, and Anjali provide a wider range of identities potential analysis. Poobasha follows the conventional pattern of life, as far as the audience is shown in the films, offering an interesting perspective on the “ideal woman”. Baby, Peggie’s younger sister, is a playboy type of character, having no permanent roots and a gambling habit, presenting her as “other” from the rest of the characters. Anjali is the only character here who is not South African Indian but is Mauritian-Indian, offering a link to the examination of diasporic Indian women from other Southern countries. In an expanded analysis, these three characters would ensure that the discussion and analysis of identity is not confined to a narrow path as might be implied by the shift from Aya’s identity to Jennifer and Shanti’s identities which are then refined in Jodi’s character. Poobasha, Baby, and Anjali’s presence reminds the audience that there is a range of identities within the South African Indian community and that there are women’s identities that exist beyond the identities of South African Indian women and thus are worthy of academic attention.

The theme of motherhood is prevalent from *Keeping Up With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2017) to *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023). The films continuously reinforce certain ideas regarding what it means to be a good mother and praise the characters who embody these

ideas. Aya's re-presentation of what it means to be a mother was discussed in Chapter One where I offer a reading of her as Sita, Reimagined. I argue that it is her ability to be a good mother that prevents her from being disgraced and losing her identity as an unhusbanded woman. On the other hand, Jennifer, despite succeeding as a woman in the workplace, can be read as being denied her identity as a woman due to her failures as a mother. Shanti is interesting as she both succeeds and fails as a mother, receiving praise for her care of Prishen and punishment for overstepping her boundaries in his life and neglecting Desan. Jodi, characterised as Everywoman, is presented as an ideal mother, despite her struggles due to post-partum depression. The changing meanings of motherhood, as presented through these four characters deserves further attention, as does the films' insistence on motherhood being an integral part of South African Indian women's identities.

An intersectional analysis that focuses on class differences between the characters is another possible avenue of research as class directly affects the expected behaviours of women (and men). Jennifer and Shanti's lives are partially shaped by their different socio-economic statuses, which could not be examined in this dissertation, but is worthwhile examining possibly alongside the presentation of women and girl characters in Judy Naidoo's *Kings of Mulberry Street* films.

The presentation and characterisation of the men characters in the films is also an area of interest, particularly the difference between Elvis and Peggie's characterisation and Prishen's. The men are given little character development from film to film, but their attitudes and behaviour in *Trippin' With the Kandasamys* (Moodley, 2021) and *Kandasamys: The Baby* (Moodley, 2023) are important to the plot and in understanding the relationship dynamics of each generation represented in the films. Elvis and Peggie consistently urge Prishen to "do less" in his relationship with Jodi, even though such a strategy has been shown to have disastrous consequences for them. Elvis' relationship with Jodi also warrants further discussion as he seems to fail in recognising her as his daughter once she is married, bringing up questions of how fathers relate to their daughters within South African Indian communities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agrawal, I., Mehendale, A. M., and Malhotra, R., 2022. Risk Factors of Postpartum Depression. *Cureus*, 14(10), pp. 1 - 8.
[Accessed 25 August 2025]
- Al Issa, Y. M. A. and Chen, S., 2025. The Superwoman Schema (SWS): Origin, Overview, and Psychological Effects – Narrative Review. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Publishing*, 8(1), pp. 1 - 26.
[Accessed 25 August 2025]
- Arvind, L. S., 2022. Legitimizing Myths and Legends: The Social Construction of Gender Stereotypes. In: A. Nirmal and S. Dey, eds. *Histories, Myths, and Decolonial Interventions: A Planetary Resistance*. s.l.:Routledge, pp. 59 - 70.
[Accessed 15 June 2025]
- Batra, A. and Kohli, S., 2019. Delving into the World of Mother-Daughter Relationship: A Qualitative Analysis. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(3), pp. 550 - 561.
[Accessed 15 October 2025]
- Beall, J., 1990. Women Under Indenture in Colonial Natal 1860-1911. In: C. Clarke, C. Peach & S. Vertovec, eds. *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 57 - 74.
- Belsey, C., 2013. Textual Analysis as a Research Method. In: G. Griffin, ed. *Research Methods for English Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 160-179.

Bhattacharya, L., 2023. Time Allocation of Daughters-in-Law and Mothers-in-Law in India: The Role of Education as Bargaining Power. *GLO Discussion Paper*, No. 1343, pp 1 - 57.

[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Birjalal, A., 2018. *Broken Promises 4-Ever Raking in R1m in Just Three Days*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/broken-promises-4-ever-raking-in-r1m-in-just-three-days-16368253>

[Accessed 21 October 2024].

Blackburn, R. E., 2022. Voices from the Comedy Contact Zone: Regarding Performative Strategies Toward Race and the Transnational Body. In: *Punching Up in Stand-Up Comedy*. London :Routledge, pp. 110 - 128.

Blackwell, F., 1977. Misogyny and Philogyny: The Bifurcation and Ambivalence of the Stereotupse of the Courtesan and the Mother in Literary Tradition. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 12(3/4), pp. 37 - 43.

[Accessed 30 October 2024]

Broken Promises. 2003. [Film] Directed by Kumaran Naidu. Durban: South Africa.

Carbado, D. W., Crenshaw, K. W., Mays, V. M., and Tomlinson, B., 2013. Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory. *Du Bois Review*, 10(2), pp. 303 - 312.

[Accessed 25 June 2024]

Carrim, N. M. H., 2021. Sandwiched Between Groups: Upward Career Experiences of South African Indian Women. *South African Journal of Business Management*, pp. 1 - 10.

[Accessed 25 August 2024]

Carroll, N., 1990. The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 48(4), pp. 349-360.

[Accessed 25 August 2025]

Chaudhary, N. and Dutt, A., 2025. The Role of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Shaping Femininity Among Indian Immigrant Women. *Feminism & Psychology*, pp. 1 - 24.

[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Chaudhuri, S., 2013. Revisiting Sita: The Subversive Myths of Womanhood in Contemporary South Asian Women Writers. *The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship*, pp. 93 - 104.

[Accessed 30 September 2025]

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., and McCall, L., 2013. Toward a Field of Intersectional Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), pp. 785 - 810.

[Accessed 20 June 2024]

Claessens, N. and Dhoest, A., 2010. Comedy Taste: Highbrow/Lowbrow Comedy and Cultural Capital. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 7(1), pp. 49 - 72.

[Accessed 30 June 2024]

Clarke, C., Peach, C., and Vertovec, S. eds., 1990. *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Connolly, N., 2023. Fictional Characters and Characterisation. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 104, pp. 348-367.

[Accessed 15 August 2025]

- Czopp, A. M., Kay, A. C., and Cheryan, S., 2015. Positive Stereotypes Are Pervasive and Powerful. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(4), pp. 451 - 163.
[Accessed 25 September 2025]
- Denzin, N. K., 2004. Reading Film: Using Films and Videos as Empirical Social Science Material. In: Flick, U., von Kardorff, E., and Steinke, I., Eds. Translated by Jenner, B. *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. London. SAGE Publications, pp. 267 - 242.
- De Sutter, F. and Van Bauwel, S., 2023. Uncovering the Hidden Bias: A Study on Ageism in Hollywood's Portrayal of Aeging Femininities in Romantic Comedies (2000 - 2021). *DiGeSt Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 10(1), pp. 19 - 34.
[Accessed 30 August 2025]
- Dey, D. and Tripathi, P., 2021. Reconceptualising the (In)visible Aging Self of Women in Select Bengali Films. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 19(3), pp. 261 - 275.
[Accessed 30 August 2025]
- Eagly , A. H. and Koenig, A. M., 2021. The Vicious Cycle Linking Stereotypes and Societal Roles. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(4), pp. 343 - 350.
[Accessed 15 September 2025]
- Ebrahim-Vally, R., (2012). Made in India, Proudly South African: Commemorating 150 Years of Indian Presence in South Africa. In: Patel, S. and Uys, T., eds. *Legacies, Identities, and Dilemmas: Understanding Contemporary India and South Africa*. New Delhi, Routledge, pp 65 - 76.
- Ewuoso, C., and Hall, S., 2019. Core Aspects of *Ubuntu*: A Systematic Review. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*, 12(2), pp. 93 - 103.
[Accessed 30 October 2025]
- Farci, M. and Scarcelli, C. M., 2024. Negotiating Gender in the Digital Age: Young People and the Representation of Femininity and Masculinity on Social Media. *Italian*

Sociological Review, 14(1), pp. 93 - 113.

[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Frenkel, R., 2011. Reconsidering South African Indian Fiction Postapartheid. *Research in African Literatures*, 42(3), pp. 1- 16.

[Accessed 30 March 2026]

Friedman, S. and Kuipers, G., 2013. The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste, and Symbolic Boundaries. *Cultural Sociology*, 7(2), pp. 179 - 195.

[Accessed 25 June 2024]

Gaines, J., 1986. White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory. *Cultural Critique*, Volume 4, pp. 59 - 79.

[Accessed 25 September 2024]

Göttner-Abendroth, H., 2004. Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory. In: G. Vaughan, ed. *The Gift: A Feminist Analysis*. Rome: Meltemi, pp. 69 - 80.

[Accessed 15 June 2025]

Govinden, D. B., 2008. *Sister Outsiders: The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.

Greenham, D., 2019. *Close Reading: The Basics*. New York. Routledge

Gupta, T., and Negi, D., 2021. Daughter vs. Daughter-in-Law Kinship Roles and Women's Time Use in India. *Working Paper 2021 - 002*, Mumbai: Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, pp. 1 - 57.

[Accessed 25 October 2025]

- Hall, S., 2019. Culture, the Media, and the 'Ideological Effect'. In: D. Morley, ed. *Essential Essays / Stuart Hall*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 298 - 336.
- Hedren, K., 2015. Barakat! Means Enough. In: J. Mistry and A. Schuhmann, eds. *Gaze Regimes: Film ad Feminisms in Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 174 - 181.
[Accessed 30 June 2024]
- Hirsch, M., 1981. "Mothers and Daughters". *Signs*, 7(1), pp. 200 - 222.
[Accessed 15 October 2025]
- Hooks, b., 2000. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. New York: South End Press.
- Horwood, C., Surie, A., Haskins, L., Luthuli, S., Hinton, R., Chowdhury, A., and Rollins, N., 2020. Attitudes and Perceptions About Breastfeeding Among Female and Male Informal Workers in India and South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 20(875), pp. 1 - 12.
[Accessed 25 September 2025]
- IMDb, 2023. *Kings of Mulberry Street: Let Love Reign*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13014820/?ref=tt_mlt_tt_i_1
[Accessed 30 September 2024]
- Isaacson, T. G., 2020. Metaphors of Agony: Culture-bound Syndromes of Hyper-Independence. *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context*, 15(4), pp. 375 - 383.
[Accessed 15 October 2025]
- Joseph, J., 2021. *Children of Sugarcane*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball.

- Kandasamys: The Baby*. 2023. [Film] Directed by Jayan Moodley. South Africa: Urban Vision Productions.
- Kandasamys: The Wedding*. 2019. [Film] Directed by Jayan Moodley. South Africa: African Lotus Productions.
- Kappert, I., 2015. I am a Feminist Only in Secret. In: J. Mistry and A. Schuhmann, eds. *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminism in Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 10 - 17.
- Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*. 2017. [Film] Directed by Jayan Moodley. South Africa: African Lotus Productions.
- Kim, M. S., 2002. *Non-Western Perspectives on Human Communication: Implications for Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kolker, R. P., 1998. The Film Text and Film Form. In: J. Hill and P. C. Gibson, eds. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 11-29.
- Kumar, S., 2022. 'No Country for Old Women': Female Aging in Bollywood. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(2), pp. 335 - 352.
[Accessed 15 September 2025]
- Kusch, C., 2016. *Literary Analysis: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.
- Lakshman, R., Ogilvie, D. and Ong, K. K., 2009. Mothers' Experiences of Bottle-Feeding: A Systematic Review of Qualitative and Quantitative Studies. *Arch Dis Child*, 94(8), pp. 596 - 601.
[Accessed 15 September 2025]

Laltha, S., 2023. The Shadow Pandemic and the Divine Feminine in the Diaspora: An Analysis of Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth*. *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies*, 79(3).

[Accessed 30 August 2024]

Lee, S., 2007. *The Story of Maha*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Lee, S., 2009. *Maha: Ever After*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Lemish, D. and Muhlbauer, V., 2012. "Can't Have it All": Representations of Older Women in Popular Culture. *Women & Therapy*, Volume 35, pp. 165 - 180.

[Accessed 15 September 2025]

Lemon, A., 1990. The Political Position of Indians in South Africa. In: C. Clarke, C. Peach & S. Vertovec, eds. *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 11 - 148.

Longhurst, B. Smith, G., Bagnall, G., Crawford, G., and Baldwin, E., 2008. *Introducing Cultural Studies*. 2 ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Lorde, A., 2007. *Sister Outsiders: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Ten Speed Press.

Marx, N. and Sienkiewicz, M. eds., 2018. *The Comedy Studies Reader*. Texas: University of Texas Press.

Mazzonetto, A. C., Melo, J. N. M., Dean, M. and Fiates, . G. M. R., 2025. From 'Cooking Wife' to 'Cooking Mother': Exploring Generational Shifts in Perceptions Regarding Domestic Cooking Practices. *Nutrition and Dietetics*, 82(1), pp. 115 - 122.

[Accessed 25 August 2025]

- Meer, F., 1972. Women and the Family in the Indian Enclave in South Africa. *Feminist Studies*, 1(2), pp. 33 - 47.
- Mesthrie, U. S., 1994. Eastern Roots: A Representation of the History of Indian South Africans in Film. *South African Historical Journal*, 31(1), pp. 235 - 251.
- Misrahi-Barak, J., Tyagi, R., and Rao, H. K. eds., 2024. *Kala Pani Crossings, Gender and Diaspora: Indian Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Mistry, J. and Schuhmann, A., 2015. Introduction: By Way of Context and Content. In: J. Mistry and A. Schuhmann, eds. *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminism in Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. ix - xxxi.
- Moodley, K. A., 1975. South African Indians: The Wavering Minority. In: L. Thompson and J. Butler, eds. *Change in Contemporary South Africa*. California : University of California, pp. 250 - 279.
- Moodley, P., 2006. *A Scent So Sweet*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Moodley, P., 2014. *The Ties That Bind*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Moodley, S., 2003. Postcolonial Feminisms Speaking Through an 'Accented' Cinema: The Construction of Indian Women in the Films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mahta. *Agenda*, 17(58), pp. 66 - 75.
[Accessed 15 June 2025]
- Moodley, S. and Govender, A., 2020. The Role of Place and Identity as Core Contributing Success Factors in Jayan Moodley's Keeping Up With the Kandasamys and

Kandasamys: The Wedding. *Journal of African Cinemas*, 12(2 - 3), pp. 229 - 249.
[Accessed 25 June 2024]

Motsaathebe, G., 2018. South African Cinema and Its Depiction of Race, Gender, and Class: Portrayals of Black Women in Post-Apartheid South African Films. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 45(3), pp. 381 - 395.
[Accessed 15 September 2025]

Mottai, S., 2022. *Across the Kala Pani*. Cape Town: Penguin Books.

Mulvey, L., 1989. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In: *Visual and Other Pleasures*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 14 - 27.

Naidoo, A., 2023. 'Kandasamys: The Baby': Q & A with Director Jayan Moodley. [Online] Available at: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/celeb-news/kandasamys-the-baby-question-answer-director-jayan-moodley-netflix-20-october-2023/>
[Accessed 25 October 2024]

Narain, S., 2022. *Exploring Social Identity in South African Indian Cinema Through Filmmaking*. Johannesburg:University of the Witwatersrand.

Newman, L., 2023. *Love, Chaos Continues*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/post-south-africa/20231025/281771338873598>
[Accessed 25 October 2024].

Newman, L., 2018. *Kandasamys: The Wedding, Movie Shoot at Verulam Market*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/the-post/news/kandasamys-the-wedding-movie->

[shoot-at-verulam-market-17621774](#)

[Accessed 25 October 2024]

Ohrvik, A., 2024. What is Close Reading? An Exploration of a Methodology. *Rethinking History*, 28(2), pp. 238 - 260.

[Accessed 30 March 2026]

Padayachee, P. and Laher, S., 2014. South African Hindu Psychologists' Perceptions of Mental Illness. *Journal of Religion and Health*, pp. 424 - 437.

[Accessed 15 September 2025]

Parker, B., 2021. *Guzzie and Brazzo are back! We speak to Trippin' With the Kandasamys' Koobeshen and Yugan Naidoo.* [Online]

Available at: <https://www.news24.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/film/guzzie-and-brazzo-are-back-we-speak-to-trippin-with-the-kandasamys-koobeshen-and-yugan-naidoo-20210614-3>

[Accessed 25 October 2024].

Parker, B., 2021. *Trippin' with Madhushan Singh and Mishqah Parthiephal - the Kandasamys stars on the third film.* [Online]

Available at: <https://www.news24.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/film/trippin-with-madhushan-singh-and-mishqah-parthiephal-the-kandasamys-stars-on-the-third-film-20210609-2>

[Accessed 25 October 2024].

Parker, B., 2021. *Trippin' with the Kandasamys | We chat to Jayan Moodley, Jailoshini Naidoo and Maeshni Naicker.* [Online]

Available at: <https://www.news24.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/film/trippin-with-the-kandasamys-we-chat-to-jayan-moodley-jailoshini-naidoo-and-maeshni-naicker-20210604-2>

[Accessed 25 October 2024].

- Parker, L., 2024. Matrifocal, Matrilineal, or Matriarchal? Cultural Resilience and Vulnerability Among the Matrilineal and Muslim Minangkabau in Indonesia. In: A. Panakkal & N. M. Arif, eds. *Matrilineal, Matriarchal, and Matrifocal Islam: The World of Women Centric Islam*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3 - 42.
- Pathak, H. P., 2019. Hinduism and Women Religious Beliefs and Practices. *Proceedings of the 13th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities*, June. pp. 228 - 235.
[Accessed 15 June 2025]
- Pereira, R. F. & Alvarenga, M., 2007. Disordered Eating: Identifying, Treating, Preventing, and Differentiating It From Eating Disorders. *Diabetes Spectrum*, 20(3), pp. 141 - 148.
[Accessed September 2024]
- Prakash, G., 1994. Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism. *The American Historical Review*, December, 99(5), pp. 1475 - 1490.
[Accessed 30 June 2024]
- Rastogi, P., 2008. *Afrindian Fictions*. Ohio: The Ohio State University .
- Rathi, A., Khapre, S., Chavada, J., Gupta, S., and Singla, T., 2022. Postpartum Depression and Its Biological Biomarkers. *Cureus*, 14(11), pp. 1 -7 .
[Accessed 15 October 2025]
- Roychowdhury, T., Das, S., and Ray, D., 2025. Not All Mothers Are Saints: Exploring Maternal Ambivalence in Indian Narratives. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*,

Volume 16, pp. 21- 37.
[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Ryan, M., 2018. What are Characters Made Of? Textual, Philosophical, and "World" Approaches to Character Ontology. *Neohelicon*, 45, pp. 415 - 429.
[Accessed 25 August 2025]

Salangi, M. M., 2022. A Brief Study of Sati Custom. *Journal of History*, 104(1), pp. 12 - 17.
[Accessed 05 November 2025]

Santonnicolo, F., Trombetta, T., Paradiso, M. N. & Rollè, L., 2023. Gender and Media Representations: A Review of the Literature on Gender Stereotypes, Objectification and Sexualization. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5770), pp. 1 - 15.
[Accessed 15 September 2025]

Schmidt, E.-M., Décieux, F., Zartler, U., and Schnor, C., 2023. What Makes a Good Mother? Two Decades of Research Reflecting Social Norms of Motherhood. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 15(1), pp. 57 - 77.
[Accessed 25 August 2025]

Schweinitz, J., 2010. Stereotypes and the Narratological Analysis of Film Characters. In: J. Eder , F. Jannidis and R. Schneider, eds. *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 276 - 289.

Seedat-Khan, M., 2012. Tracing the Journey of South African Indian Women from 1860. In: S. Patel and T. Uys, eds. *Legacies, Identities and Dilemmas: Understanding Contemporary India and South Africa*. New Delhi: Routledge, pp. 35 - 47.

Shah, S. S., Gandhi, P., Shinde, S., and Chaudhry, S., 2025. Unmasking the Notion of 'Supermom' in India: Success and Strain Amongst Earning Mothers. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), pp. 1 - 13.

[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Smith, B., 2024. *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom*. 25th Anniversary Edition ed. Newark: Rutgers University Press.

Sousa, R. d., 1987. Chapter 7: The Rationality of Emotion. In: *The Rationality of Emotion*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 171 - 204.

Spivak, G. C., 1996. Feminism and Critical Theory . In: D. Landry and G. MacLean, eds. *The Spivak Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 53 - 74.

Spivak, G. C., 2006. Can the Subaltern Speak? In: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 28 - 27.

Srinivas, T., 2006. 'As Mother Made It': The Cosmopolitan Indian Family, 'Authentic' Food, and the Construction of Cultural Utopia. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 32(2), pp. 191 - 221.

[Accessed 25 August 2024]

Stets, J. E. & Lee, J., 2021. The Mother Identity and Self-Esteem. In: *Identities in Action: Developments in Identity Theory*. Cham: Springer International Publishing , pp. 133 - 153.

Stewart, C. P., 2017. The Mule of the World: The Strong Black Woman and the Woes of Being 'Independent'. *Knots: An Undergraduate Journal of Disability Studies*, Volume

3, pp. 31 - 39.

[Accessed 15 Septmeber 2024]

Stott, A., 2014. *Comedy: The New Critical Idiom*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Syed, N. B., Hirani, S. P., and Ahmad, R., 2025. Superwoman Syndrome & Women's Health and Well-Being: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Psychology Research*, 2(2), pp. 86 - 103.

[Accessed 05 October 2025]

Thangevelo, D., 2023. *The Director and Cast of 'Kandasamys: The Baby' on the Mother of all Problems Plot in Fourth Film*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/sunday-tribune/entertainment/the-director-and-cast-of-kandasamys-the-baby-on-the-mother-of-all-problems-plot-in-fourth-film-b6370b0b-beaa-4e8f-87ef-6c1daaa47269>

[Accessed 15 October 2024].

The Curse of Highway Sheila. 2014. [Film] Directed by Kumaran Naidu. South Africa: Garuda Motion Pictures.

Trippin' with the Kandasamys. 2021. [Film] Directed by Jayan Moodley. South Africa: Urban Vision Productions.

Turner, G., 2008. Film and Cultural Studies. In: J. Donald & M. Renov, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 270 - 284.

Vera-Sanso, P., 1999. Dominant Daughters-in-Law and Submissive Mothers-in-Law? Co-operation and Conflict in South India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*,

5(4), pp. 577 - 593.

[Accessed 15 October 2025]

Wagner, K. A., 2011. 'Have Women a Sense of Humor?' Comedy and Femininity in Early Twentieth-Century Film. *The Velvet Light Trap*, pp. 35 - 46.

[Accessed 25 September 2024]

Wiesinger, R., 1965. The Parent-Daughter Relationship Among the Hindus. *Sociologus*, 15(2), pp. 143 - 161.

[Accessed 15 November 2025]

Wilkie, I., ed., 2020. *The Routledge Comedy Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge

Young, R. J. C., 2009. What is the Postcolonial? *Ariel : A Review of International English Literature*, Volume 40, pp. 13 - 25.

[Accessed 15 September 2024]