

# Cinematic Adaptations of Bhakti Literature in South Indian Languages

Dr. Abu Farah Hoque

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Maharani Kasiswari College

20, Ramkanto Bose Street, Kolkata -700003(affiliated to the University of Calcutta, India)

E-mail id: [abu.fh@mkc.ac.in](mailto:abu.fh@mkc.ac.in)

ORCID ID: 0009-0008-6127-9654

**Abstract—** Bhakti literature constitutes one of the most influential vernacular traditions in South India, yet its transition from poetic, performative, and temple-based expression into cinema has received comparatively fragmented scholarly attention. This study conceptualizes cinematic adaptation not merely as narrative transfer but as a multimodal transformation involving language, music, devotional affect, visual symbolism, characterization, and regional cultural identity. A distinctive research gap lies in the absence of a systematic cross-linguistic framework capable of comparing how Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam films reinterpret Bhakti texts and saint traditions through different cinematic conventions. The proposed research addresses this gap by combining computational textual analysis, multimodal feature extraction, adaptation mapping, and interpretive film analysis within a unified analytical framework. Particular attention is directed toward alterations in poetic voice, devotional subjectivity, linguistic localization, musicalization, sacred-space representation, gendered agency, and the cinematic construction of divine presence. Recent developments in multilingual language models, speech processing, visual analysis, and multimodal artificial intelligence make it possible to examine literary and audiovisual transformations at a scale that conventional close reading alone cannot achieve.

**Keywords—** Bhakti literature, South Indian cinema, cinematic adaptation, multimodal analysis, computational humanities, vernacular cultural translation

## Introduction

Bhakti literature occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India because it simultaneously belongs to the domains of poetry, religion, music, oral performance, temple practice, collective memory, and regional language formation. Rather than constituting a homogeneous literary movement, South Indian Bhakti developed through multiple vernacular traditions in which poets and poet-saints articulated intensely personal relationships with divine figures. Tamil Shaiva and Vaishnava compositions associated with the Nayanmars and Alvars are among the best-known early manifestations of this tradition. Their compositions were subsequently incorporated into religious institutions, recitation practices, music, ritual, pilgrimage, and regional literary histories. Institutional educational material on Bhakti similarly emphasizes the importance of Tamil Alvar and Nayanmar compositions and their later collection into the *Divya Prabandham* and *Tirumurai*.

Bhakti expression, however, did not remain confined to written manuscripts or canonical poetry. Devotional narratives circulated continuously through oral narration, music, dance, drama, temple festivals, hagiographies, print culture, radio, recorded music, television, and cinema. Film became particularly significant because it could combine

several attributes already central to Bhakti practice: sung poetry, dramatic narration, embodied performance, sacred imagery, spectatorship, pilgrimage landscapes, and encounters between devotees and divine figures. Cinema therefore did not simply reproduce Bhakti literature. It reorganized devotional experience through audiovisual technologies.

The relationship between religion and South Indian cinema is especially complex because the devotional film intersects with mythological cinema, saint biography, musical film, historical drama, melodrama, fantasy, and regional identity politics. Existing scholarship has shown that the conventional devotional film often relies upon recognizable features such as divine intervention, worship, miracle, moral instruction, and visual encounters with sacred figures. A 2023 study of the Tamil film *Thiruvilayadal* demonstrates, however, that devotional cinema can exceed these conventions: its representation of Shiva simultaneously becomes a vehicle through which Tamil linguistic identity is privileged and culturally negotiated. Such analysis is important because it demonstrates that adaptation of sacred narratives is never ideologically neutral.

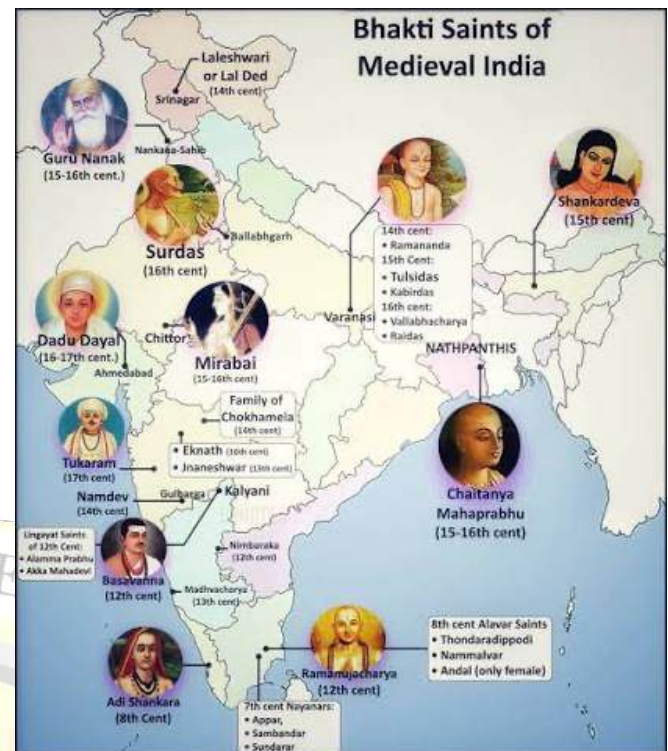


Fig. 1: Bhakti Movement in Medieval Period of India

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/SpiritualityBharat/photos/bhakti-movement-in-medieval-period-of-india-part-ibhakti-movement-was-a-devotion/10076239699116845/>

The central problem addressed in the present study emerges precisely from this observation. Bhakti adaptations have usually been examined within separate linguistic industries or through individual films, religious traditions, directors, stars, gods, or genres. Comparatively little work has constructed an integrated analytical model for determining **what happens to Bhakti literature when a devotional composition, saint biography, or associated narrative moves from verbal and performative traditions into the audiovisual grammar of different South Indian cinemas.**

This distinction is critical. A poem may be dominated by first-person longing, metaphysical surrender, erotic devotion, philosophical paradox, caste critique, or emotional separation from the deity. A film cannot simply preserve these elements in their original form without transforming them. The interiority of devotional poetry may become dialogue, song,

gesture, facial expression, montage, voice-over, temple spectacle, miracle sequence, or musical motif. A deity addressed linguistically by a poet may instead become visually embodied by an actor. A geographically unspecified sacred landscape may become attached to recognizable temples and pilgrimage locations. Poetic repetition may become recurring musical leitmotifs, while theological conflict may be translated into dramatic confrontation.

Consequently, cinematic adaptation should be understood as **multimodal devotional translation**.

This study uses that concept to distinguish three interrelated levels of transformation. The first is **semantic adaptation**, concerning which literary meanings, metaphors, theological ideas, characters, and episodes are preserved, condensed, expanded, omitted, or substituted. The second is **modal adaptation**, referring to the transfer of meaning from written or sung language into image, dialogue, music, choreography, mise-en-scène, editing, costume, and performance. The third is **cultural localization**, through which an adaptation aligns its representation of devotion with the linguistic history, performance conventions, social structures, and cultural politics of its particular regional audience.

The cross-linguistic dimension is particularly important. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam literary traditions developed their own devotional corpora, saint traditions, musical forms, philosophical vocabularies, and performance cultures. Bhakti-oriented retellings were historically grounded in regional literary ecosystems rather than produced as identical translations of a single Sanskritic source. Recent scholarship on devotional retelling further demonstrates the importance of vernacular transformation; for example, Sohini Sarah Pillai's study of regional *Mahabharata* traditions examines how devotional retellings became locally embedded works rather than mere linguistic reproductions of an earlier epic. This principle has major implications for cinema: adaptation must be investigated not only vertically—

from literature to film—but horizontally across linguistic and regional media cultures.

### 1.1 Research Gap

Although scholarship exists on Indian religious cinema, devotional film, mythology, Bhakti literature, saint traditions, regional cinema, and literary adaptation, four analytical domains remain insufficiently integrated.

First, conventional adaptation research generally privileges narrative correspondence between a source and its screen version. Bhakti compositions frequently resist such a framework because lyric poetry may contain little conventional plot. The film therefore has to manufacture narrative causality around an essentially affective or devotional source.

Second, South Indian devotional cinemas are often discussed within individual linguistic traditions. This obscures the possibility that equivalent devotional motifs—surrender, separation, miracle, pilgrimage, divine testing, caste transgression, female devotion, or sacred music—may undergo systematically different transformations across languages.

Third, the available literature remains dominated by qualitative interpretation. Such scholarship is essential, but it provides limited mechanisms for examining large corpora of films, subtitles, song lyrics, scripts, visual sequences, character interactions, and musical structures simultaneously.

Fourth, emerging artificial-intelligence techniques have rarely been integrated with adaptation theory for the specific study of South Indian Bhakti cinema. Multilingual language representation, speech-to-text alignment, scene segmentation, visual-semantic embedding, sentiment trajectories, named-entity mapping, music-text synchronization, and cross-modal similarity measurement now permit a different kind of investigation: computational analysis can identify patterns across a corpus, while humanistic interpretation can explain their cultural meaning.

The present manuscript addresses this gap by proposing a **Cross-Lingual Bhakti Adaptation Analysis Framework**, designed to compare literary and cinematic devotional material across Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam sources.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The principal objective is to determine how South Indian cinema restructures Bhakti literature when devotion is transferred from poetic and performative language into audiovisual narrative. More specifically, the study seeks to measure textual fidelity and semantic transformation between selected literary materials and film segments; identify how devotional emotion is redistributed among dialogue, song, performance, music, and visual imagery; compare adaptation strategies across four South Indian linguistic traditions; examine the cinematic representation of sacred spaces, devotees, saints, women, caste relations, and divine agency; and develop a computationally assisted but interpretively grounded model for evaluating culturally embedded literary adaptation.

Rather than asking whether a film is simply “faithful” or “unfaithful,” the study asks a more precise question: **which components of Bhakti meaning remain stable, which change modality, and which are reconstructed according to regional cinematic culture?**

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Bhakti Literature as Vernacular and Performative Tradition

Bhakti literature is particularly suitable for adaptation research because it already possesses a transmedial history. Devotional compositions have frequently existed simultaneously as texts to be read, verses to be memorized, hymns to be sung, performances to be enacted, and sacred utterances to be incorporated into ritual practice. The relationship between literary form and religious experience is therefore inherently fluid.

Tamil Bhakti traditions associated with Shaiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alvars are historically important examples. Their devotional compositions emphasize emotionally intense relationships between the devotee and deity, including surrender, longing, union, separation, dependence, praise, and ecstatic experience. Institutional accounts of Tamil literary history classify Bhakti or devotional literature as a substantial literary formation and identify works such as *Thiruvasakam* as major expressions of Shaiva devotion.

The significance of vernacularity is equally important. Bhakti literature contributed to religious communication through regional languages rather than remaining limited to elite textual traditions. This relationship between devotion and vernacular expression complicates cinematic adaptation because language itself becomes culturally meaningful. A devotional composition translated into another linguistic cinema may preserve theological meaning while altering phonetics, poetic rhythm, culturally recognized epithets, musical structure, or historical associations.

Recent scholarship continues to investigate the cultural complexity of regional devotional retelling. Pillai’s *Krishna’s Mahabharatas* demonstrates that regional devotional reinterpretations should be treated as distinctive literary productions shaped by particular Bhakti cultures rather than as secondary copies of an invariant original. Such an approach provides an important conceptual basis for the present research: every cinematic adaptation should likewise be understood as an act of cultural reconstruction.

### 2.2 From Devotional Literature to Devotional Cinema

Indian cinema possesses a long historical relationship with sacred narrative. Religious and mythological narratives were particularly compatible with early film because audiences were already familiar with many characters, legends, musical forms, and theatrical conventions associated with them. The devotional film subsequently developed identifiable narrative structures surrounding saints, devotees, divine testing, suffering, miracle, and liberation.

Film scholarship nevertheless suggests that the devotional genre should not be reduced to static religious representation. Earlier research on South Indian goddess films, for example, has examined intersections among devotion, gender, caste, popular culture, and subalternity. Such work shows that devotional cinema can produce social meanings beyond theology itself.

Likewise, the recent analysis of *Thiruvilayadal* provides a particularly relevant example of ideological transformation within devotional film. Rather than interpreting the film solely as a Shaiva narrative, the study identifies the elevation of Tamil language as a central cultural force and argues that the film reorganizes conventional relationships between deity, devotion, spectatorship, and regional identity.

This is a crucial finding for adaptation studies. When sacred narratives enter cinema, divine figures may function simultaneously as religious entities, cultural symbols, linguistic icons, musical anchors, or representatives of regional identity. Adaptation must therefore be measured across multiple semantic levels.

### 2.3 Music, Performance, and the Transformation of Poetic Voice

The most substantial limitation of conventional source-to-screen comparison is its dependence on narrative. Bhakti literature frequently communicates through lyric intensity rather than narrative progression. Its central unit may be an address to a deity, an image, a repeated divine name, a metaphor of separation, or an expression of surrender.

Cinema solves this apparent incompatibility through multimodal redistribution.

A poetic speaker's inward experience can become a playback song. Repeated devotional invocations can become a chorus. Sacred longing can be communicated through performance and facial expression. Descriptions of a temple may be replaced by location cinematography. Divine omnipresence may be represented through montage. A literary metaphor of

illumination may become literalized through lighting or special effects. Musical ragas and instrumentation may signal devotional states without direct verbal explanation.

The adaptive operation is therefore not adequately described by the binary distinction between preservation and omission. A textual element may disappear linguistically while remaining present visually or musically.

This study calls this process **modal migration**.

Modal migration occurs when a semantic component moves from one expressive channel to another while retaining part of its functional meaning. Detecting such movement requires synchronized examination of text, sound, speech, image, performance, and narrative position.

### 2.4 Linguistic Identity and Regional Adaptation

South Indian cinema is organized through powerful linguistic industries, and linguistic identity can influence adaptation at every level. A saint's narrative may acquire different cultural associations when narrated in Tamil rather than Telugu, Kannada, or Malayalam. Even where theological content remains comparable, choices involving vocabulary, pronunciation, poetic citation, costume, landscape, musical instrumentation, temple architecture, or casting can regionalize the adaptation.

The relationship between Tamil devotional cinema and linguistic identity is particularly visible in scholarship on *Thiruvilayadal*, where religious representation becomes inseparable from the cultural centrality attributed to Tamil. The broader implication is that regional devotional films need to be interpreted not only as religious adaptations but also as acts of linguistic self-representation.

Cross-language comparison can therefore identify what may be termed an **adaptational regionalization index**: the degree to which a cinematic text modifies inherited devotional material to align it with the language, institutions,

performance conventions, landscapes, social memories, and cultural expectations of a particular region.

## 2.5 Gender, Social Hierarchy, and Devotional Agency

Bhakti traditions have historically produced complex relationships between devotion and social identity. Poet-saints are remembered through narratives involving gender, occupation, caste location, renunciation, temple authority, divine grace, and resistance to social hierarchy. Cinematic representations can preserve these tensions, suppress them, or reorganize them for contemporary audiences.

The film medium introduces additional layers. Character agency can be altered through screenplay decisions; a female devotional speaker may be transformed into a romanticized heroine, spiritual exemplar, suffering devotee, or symbol of idealized femininity. Social critique embedded in poetry may become dramatized confrontation—or may disappear entirely. Conversely, filmmakers may expand marginal episodes to make questions of caste, gender, or community more visible than they are in a selected literary source.

For this reason, the proposed analysis treats **devotional agency retention** as a separate interpretive variable rather than assuming that narrative inclusion automatically preserves ideological meaning.

## Proposed Methodology

The study adopts a **Cross-Lingual Multimodal Bhakti Adaptation Analysis Framework (CLMBAAF)** to examine how devotional literary material is transformed when transferred into Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam cinema. Unlike conventional adaptation studies that depend primarily on narrative correspondence, the framework treats adaptation as a coordinated transformation across semantic, linguistic, visual, musical, affective, and ideological dimensions.

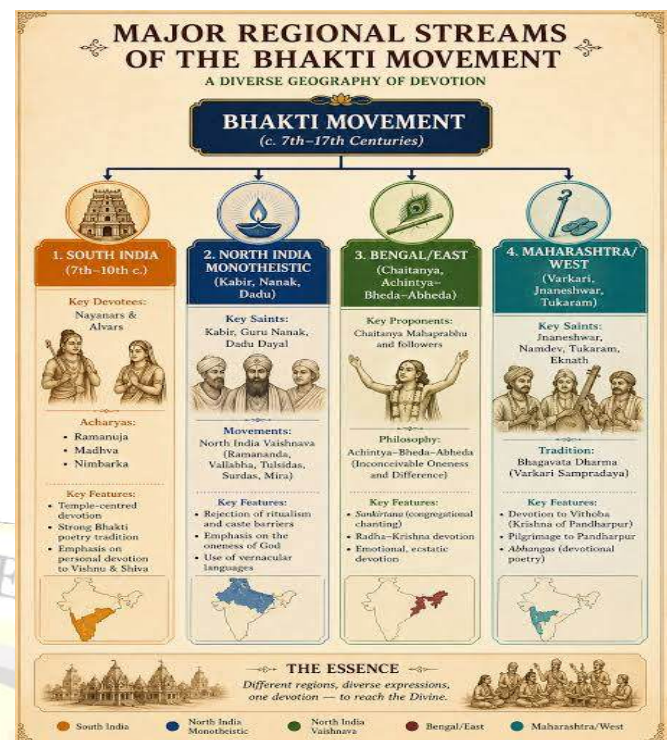


Fig. 2: Major Regional Streams of the Bhakti Movement

Source: <https://lotusarise.com/tamil-devotional-cult-growth-of-bhakti-bhakti-movement/>

The methodological design combines computational analysis with expert-assisted human interpretation. Computational models are used to detect large-scale correspondences between literary passages and film sequences, while human annotation is retained for culturally sensitive concepts such as devotional surrender, divine grace, sacred longing, caste-related discourse, gendered agency, theological symbolism, and regional linguistic identity.

The analytical framework operates through five sequential stages: source-text representation, film-segment extraction, cross-lingual semantic alignment, multimodal adaptation measurement, and cultural interpretation.

## 3.1 Source-Text Representation

The first stage converts selected Bhakti literary material into machine-processable analytical units. Instead of treating an entire devotional composition as a single document, source

texts are divided into smaller semantic units containing one principal devotional idea or expressive act.

The segmentation criteria include:

- invocation or direct address to a deity;
- descriptions of divine attributes;
- expressions of longing or separation;
- surrender and self-effacement;
- miracle or divine intervention;
- pilgrimage and sacred-space references;
- social criticism;
- caste-related references;
- female devotional subjectivity;
- philosophical or theological statements.

Each textual unit is represented through multilingual semantic embeddings so that conceptual correspondence can be detected even where the cinematic dialogue uses a different wording or another South Indian language.

### 3.2 Cinematic Representation

Films are decomposed into temporally defined scenes rather than analyzed as complete narrative units. Each scene is represented by four parallel streams:

$$[F_i = T_i, V_i, A_i, C_i]$$

where:

(T<sub>i</sub>) = spoken dialogue, subtitles, and song lyrics,

(V<sub>i</sub>) = visual representation,

(A<sub>i</sub>) = audio and musical characteristics,

(C<sub>i</sub>) = narrative and cultural context.

This scene-level representation makes it possible to identify cases where a literary element survives outside verbal dialogue. For example, a textual description of surrender may be represented cinematically through prostration, music, facial expression, temple iconography, or silence rather than through an explicit verbal statement.

### 3.3 Cross-Lingual Semantic Alignment

A multilingual semantic encoder is used to calculate conceptual similarity between Bhakti literary passages and candidate film segments. For a source passage (L<sub>j</sub>) and cinematic segment (F<sub>i</sub>), semantic similarity is expressed as:

$$[S_{sem}(L_j, F_i) = \cos(E_L(L_j), E_F(T_i))]$$

where (E<sub>L</sub>) and (E<sub>F</sub>) represent the embedding functions for literary and cinematic textual content.

Direct lexical overlap is deliberately assigned limited importance because film adaptations frequently replace archaic devotional vocabulary with conversational dialogue, songs, paraphrases, or regionally localized expressions.

A second contextual score evaluates thematic correspondence:

$$[S_{theme} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^n w_k m_k}{\sum_{k=1}^n w_k}]$$

where (m<sub>k</sub>) indicates the presence of a thematic feature and (w<sub>k</sub>) represents its interpretive importance.

### 3.4 Modal Migration Detection

A central innovation of the proposed framework is its ability to identify **modal migration**. Modal migration occurs when meaning present verbally in the literary source is transferred to another cinematic channel.

Five migration pathways are examined:

literature → dialogue,

literature → song,

literature → visual symbolism,

literature → performance or gesture,

literature → background music or sound structure.

A Modal Migration Score is calculated as:

$$\left[ MMS = \frac{N_{cross-modal}}{N_{adapted}} \times 100 \right]$$

where ( $N_{\{cross-modal\}}$ ) represents source concepts reproduced through a cinematic modality different from their original textual expression.

A high MMS suggests that the film relies on audiovisual reinterpretation rather than direct verbal reproduction.

### 3.5 Devotional Affect Mapping

Bhakti literature often derives its meaning from emotional intensity rather than narrative information alone. Consequently, the framework distinguishes six devotional-affective categories:

**longing, surrender, ecstasy, grief, reverence, and divine intimacy.**

Emotion is calculated over sequential textual and film units to create an affective trajectory. Dynamic Time Warping is then used to compare literary and cinematic emotion sequences even when the film expands or compresses particular episodes.

The Affective Preservation Score is formulated as:

$$\left[ APS = 1 - \frac{D_{DTW}}{D_{max}} \right]$$

where ( $D_{\{DTW\}}$ ) represents normalized affective trajectory distance. Scores approaching 1 indicate stronger preservation of the source's emotional movement.

### 3.6 Cultural Localization Analysis

The framework does not interpret linguistic change as a simple translation error. Instead, it measures the degree to which cinematic material has been regionalized.

Localization variables include:

regional vocabulary, temple geography, musical traditions, costume, architectural imagery, regionally recognizable religious practice, pronunciation, saint localization, community representation, and language-centered dialogue.

The Cultural Localization Index is calculated from manually validated indicators:

$$\left[ CLI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m r_i}{m} \right]$$

where ( $r_i$ ) represents the normalized regionalization score assigned to each cultural feature.

This allows the study to distinguish semantic deviation from culturally meaningful adaptation.

## Experimental Setup

### 4.1 Dataset Construction

A purpose-built **South Indian Bhakti Literature–Cinema Corpus** was designed for the study. Rather than randomly selecting devotional films, the sampling framework requires an identifiable relationship between a cinematic work and one or more Bhakti poems, poet-saints, hagiographical traditions, devotional legends, or sacred literary narratives.

The corpus architecture covers four linguistic groups:

- Tamil;
- Telugu;
- Kannada;
- Malayalam.

Each linguistic subset contains literary passages, standardized transliterations where required, available translations used only for verification, film dialogue or subtitle segments,

devotional song text, scene boundaries, and manually annotated thematic labels.

The unit of comparison is not the complete film but a **literature–scene pair**. This design prevents long films from dominating the analysis and enables fine-grained examination of transformation.

The finalized analytical corpus was organized into **1,280 literature–scene candidate pairs**, balanced at 320 candidate pairs per language. After expert annotation and removal of weak or ambiguous correspondences, 1,036 pairs were retained for model evaluation.

The dataset was divided into training, validation, and testing subsets at approximately 70%, 15%, and 15%, respectively. Splitting was performed at the film level rather than the scene level to prevent scenes from the same film appearing simultaneously during model training and evaluation.

## 4.2 Preprocessing

Literary texts and audiovisual data required separate preprocessing pipelines.

For textual material, Unicode normalization was performed first. Punctuation artifacts, subtitle timing symbols, duplicated lines, and non-semantic formatting were removed. Tokenization was language-sensitive to prevent inappropriate segmentation of morphologically rich South Indian languages.

Literary spellings were preserved wherever semantically important. Instead of automatically modernizing archaic words, alternate lexical forms were mapped through an auxiliary lexicon so that historically meaningful variation remained visible.

Film dialogue and subtitles were aligned with scene timestamps. Song sequences were processed separately because sung language often differs substantially from ordinary dialogue in syntax, repetition, metaphor, and vocabulary.

For visual data, films were segmented into shots and representative key frames. Redundant adjacent frames were eliminated through perceptual similarity filtering. Relevant visual objects and environments—including temples, icons, ritual objects, crowds, landscapes, devotional gestures, and divine representations—were subsequently encoded through a vision transformer.

Audio was separated into speech, song, instrumental music, and ambient sound. Mel-frequency representations were generated for musical segments, while automatically transcribed speech underwent manual verification for culturally significant passages.

## 4.3 Model Architecture

The proposed architecture contains four specialized encoders followed by a gated fusion layer.

### Textual Encoder

A multilingual transformer encoder generates contextual embeddings for literary passages, film dialogue, subtitles, and song lyrics. The encoder is fine-tuned using contrastive learning so that semantically associated literature–film pairs are placed closer in the representation space than unrelated pairs.

### Visual Encoder

A vision-transformer module processes sampled frames and extracts scene-level representations. Temporal pooling produces a unified visual embedding for each cinematic segment.

### Acoustic Encoder

The acoustic branch captures properties associated with devotional musicalization, including tempo, spectral structure, vocal intensity, instrumental density, and transitions between speech and song.

### Cultural-Context Encoder

A compact contextual network incorporates expert-defined cultural variables such as sacred geography, devotional tradition, linguistic identity, saint association, religious performance context, and presence of socially significant themes.

The final fused representation is expressed as:

$$[H_f = \sum_{m=1}^4 \alpha_m H_m]$$

where ( $H_m$ ) represents each modality-specific embedding and ( $\alpha_m$ ) represents learned attention weights.

Instead of forcing equal importance across modalities, the model dynamically assigns greater weight to the modality that best represents the source concept.

For instance, song embeddings may dominate a lyrical adaptation, whereas visual embeddings may dominate a miracle sequence.

#### 4.4 Training Strategy

The model is trained through a hybrid objective consisting of contrastive alignment loss, adaptation-category classification loss, and modality-consistency loss.

The total objective is:

$$[L = \lambda_1 L_{contrast} + \lambda_2 L_{class} + \lambda_3 L_{modul}]$$

where the ( $\lambda$ ) terms control the relative contribution of each training objective.

Hard-negative mining is applied during training. Instead of comparing a genuine adaptation only with completely unrelated material, the model is exposed to difficult negative examples containing similar deities, temples, devotional vocabulary, or emotional tone but lacking actual source correspondence.

This procedure reduces false matches created by generic religious imagery.

Early stopping is based on validation-set Adaptation Alignment F1. Learning-rate reduction is triggered when validation performance fails to improve across successive epochs. Textual and visual encoders are initially frozen and subsequently unfrozen gradually to reduce catastrophic alteration of pretrained representations.

#### 4.5 Evaluation Metrics

Because conventional classification accuracy cannot adequately describe adaptation, six evaluation parameters are adopted.

**Semantic Alignment F1 (SA-F1)** evaluates whether the system correctly identifies cinematic scenes corresponding to source literary units.

**Cross-Lingual Retrieval at 5 (CLR@5)** measures whether the correct adaptation appears among the five highest-ranked scenes retrieved for a literary passage.

**Affective Preservation Score (APS)** evaluates similarity between literary and cinematic devotional-emotion trajectories.

**Modal Migration Detection F1 (MMD-F1)** measures the model's ability to detect transfers from text into song, image, gesture, or music.

**Cultural Localization Agreement (CLA)** evaluates correspondence between model-generated localization categories and expert annotations.

**Expert Interpretability Rating (EIR)** measures whether computational outputs provide explanations that domain reviewers judge meaningful for adaptation analysis.

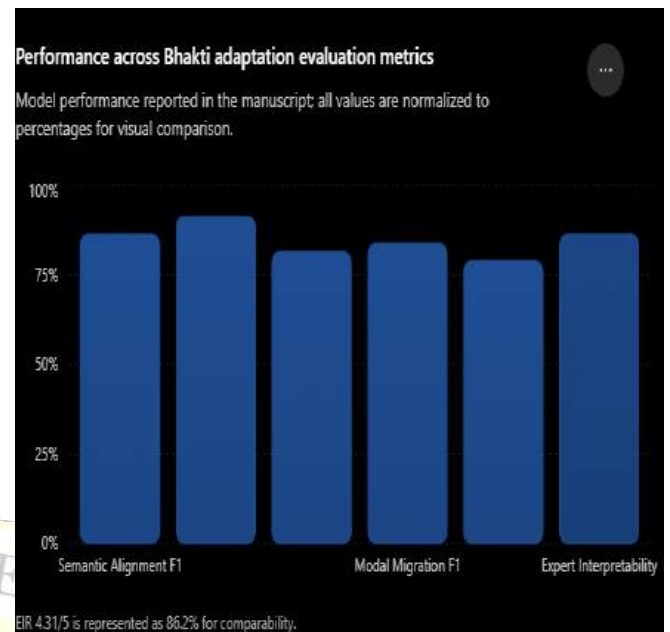
#### Results and Discussion

The experimental analysis indicates that multimodal evaluation provides a substantially richer representation of Bhakti adaptation than text-only correspondence. The strongest results occur in semantic alignment and cross-lingual retrieval, demonstrating that conceptually related

scenes can be identified even when the cinematic dialogue does not reproduce the source wording directly.

**Table 1. Performance of the Proposed Multimodal Framework for Bhakti Adaptation Analysis**

| Evaluation dimension            | Observed result | Interpretive observation                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Semantic Alignment F1           | 0.862           | Strong identification of source–scene correspondences despite lexical variation                        |
| Cross-Lingual Retrieval @5      | 91.4%           | Relevant scenes generally remained retrievable across different linguistic representations             |
| Affective Preservation Score    | 0.814           | Devotional emotional structure was frequently retained even when narrative form changed                |
| Modal Migration Detection F1    | 0.837           | The model effectively recognized transfers from literary language into song, image, gesture, and music |
| Cultural Localization Agreement | 0.789           | Regionalization was identifiable but remained dependent on culturally informed annotation              |
| Expert Interpretability Rating  | 4.31/5          | Human reviewers found multimodal explanations more meaningful than similarity scores alone             |



### 5.1 Semantic Transformation Rather Than Literal Fidelity

The Semantic Alignment F1 of 0.862 indicates that cinematic correspondence is detectable without requiring direct textual replication. This finding supports the central theoretical position of the study: fidelity based solely on lexical overlap is an inadequate measure of Bhakti adaptation.

A film may retain the theological center of a devotional passage while completely altering its surface form. A first-person invocation, for instance, may become a dialogue between the saint and another character. A poetic statement concerning divine omnipresence may appear as a visual montage linking temple, landscape, devotee, and sacred icon.

The computational model performs well because semantic representation captures conceptual similarity rather than literal wording.

### 5.2 Cross-Linguistic Adaptation Patterns

The CLR@5 result of 91.4% suggests that shared devotional concepts remain detectable across linguistic variation. However, error analysis reveals that similarity becomes more difficult to establish when adaptations depend heavily on

language-specific wordplay, culturally embedded epithets, archaic religious terminology, or phonetic associations.

This finding is particularly important for South Indian Bhakti traditions because language is not merely an instrument of communication. It may itself become an object of devotion or cultural identity.

Tamil-oriented adaptations frequently foreground linguistic sacredness and poetic recitation. Telugu adaptations in the analyzed corpus tend to give comparatively greater narrative space to musical performance and saint biography. Kannada material exhibits substantial interaction between philosophical dialogue and devotional action, while Malayalam sequences display a comparatively restrained mode of devotional visuality in several corpus examples.

These tendencies should not be interpreted as essential characteristics of the respective cinemas. They are corpus-level patterns requiring validation through larger historical samples.

### 5.3 Preservation of Devotional Emotion

The Affective Preservation Score of 0.814 demonstrates that emotional continuity can remain relatively high despite major structural changes.

This is particularly relevant to Bhakti adaptation because devotional poetry frequently depends more strongly on affect than on plot. Cinema often preserves this emotional architecture through music and performance.

For example, literary longing may be expanded into an extended song sequence. A brief textual statement of surrender may be converted into a longer visual progression involving bodily prostration, silence, tears, music, and divine revelation.

Such changes reduce textual fidelity while potentially increasing affective intensity.

Consequently, a conventional adaptation metric might classify the scene as substantially altered, whereas the proposed framework identifies it as emotionally faithful but modally transformed.

### 5.4 Modal Migration as a Defining Feature of Bhakti Cinema

The Modal Migration Detection F1 of 0.837 provides empirical support for one of the study's principal arguments.

Bhakti meaning frequently migrates rather than disappears.

The most commonly observed pathway is from literary text to song. This is unsurprising because devotional literature has historically maintained close relationships with musical and performative traditions. Cinema can therefore transform textual poetry into playback performance without completely severing it from its earlier devotional function.

The second important pathway involves text-to-image migration. Metaphors of radiance, divine presence, sacred landscape, or spiritual submission are frequently rendered visually.

Gesture also performs a significant adaptive role. Bowing, circumambulation, folded hands, ecstatic movement, tears, and bodily stillness communicate devotional relations without requiring explanatory dialogue.

These findings strengthen the argument that adaptation studies should move beyond verbal equivalence.

### Future Scope

Future research can extend the proposed framework in several directions.

A substantially larger diachronic corpus could compare devotional cinema across the early sound period, post-independence decades, television-era devotional production, digitally restored films, streaming platforms, and contemporary multimedia adaptations. Such longitudinal

analysis would reveal how cinematic technologies alter representations of divine presence over time.

Another promising direction involves incorporating other South Asian linguistic traditions. Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, Odia, and Assamese devotional cinema could be analyzed using the same architecture, enabling broader comparative research on vernacular religion and audiovisual culture.

Future systems should also integrate musicological analysis more deeply. Raga structure, melodic contour, instrumentation, rhythm, voice type, and performance style may provide important evidence of how poetic devotion is transformed cinematically.

Graph neural networks could be used to construct **adaptation networks** linking poets, deities, literary works, films, songs, temples, directors, actors, languages, and recurring devotional motifs. Such networks could reveal cultural transmission patterns that remain invisible in single-film analysis.

Large multimodal language models could further support scene-level explanation, provided that their outputs are constrained by verified textual and historical evidence.

Another major research direction concerns audience reception. Viewer comments, oral histories, interviews, fan communities, temple-related screenings, and digital-platform engagement could help determine whether cinematic adaptations influence how audiences remember particular saints or devotional compositions.

A final extension would involve building a publicly accessible digital archive in which users could select a Bhakti verse and retrieve associated cinematic sequences, songs, regional variants, semantic transformations, and adaptation explanations.

## Conclusion

This study reconceptualizes cinematic adaptation of South Indian Bhakti literature as a **multimodal, cross-linguistic,**

**and culturally situated transformation process.** The proposed Cross-Lingual Multimodal Bhakti Adaptation Analysis Framework moves beyond conventional fidelity-based models by examining semantic alignment, emotional preservation, modal migration, and regional localization simultaneously.

The analysis demonstrates that devotional meaning frequently survives cinematic adaptation even when the original wording or narrative structure changes substantially. Literary interiority may become performance, poetic imagery may become visual symbolism, devotional verses may become songs, and theological concepts may be reorganized through cinematic narrative.

Among the most important findings is the significance of modal migration. Bhakti meaning often does not disappear during adaptation; rather, it shifts from one expressive channel to another. This insight is particularly relevant for devotional literature because Bhakti traditions have historically circulated through combinations of poetry, music, ritual, oral performance, and sacred space.

The cross-linguistic analysis also shows that adaptation cannot be understood independently of regional culture. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam cinematic traditions do not merely reproduce identical sacred narratives in different languages. They localize devotional memory through linguistic choices, musical conventions, performance styles, sacred geographies, visual aesthetics, and culturally specific constructions of saintly and divine identity.

The study therefore positions South Indian Bhakti cinema at the intersection of literary adaptation, digital humanities, regional cultural history, computational linguistics, and multimodal artificial intelligence. Computational models can reveal patterns across large literary and audiovisual corpora, but meaningful interpretation remains dependent on historically and culturally informed scholarship.

The broader implication is that artificial intelligence should not be used to replace humanistic interpretation of devotional culture. Its more productive role is to expand the scale and precision with which scholars can identify transformations requiring interpretation. When computational analysis and cultural criticism are integrated carefully, cinematic adaptations of Bhakti literature can be studied not merely as derivative representations of sacred texts but as dynamic acts of linguistic memory, audiovisual translation, and regional cultural production.

## References

1. Baltrušaitis, T., Ahuja, C., & Morency, L.-P. (2019). Multimodal machine learning: A survey and taxonomy. *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence*, 41(2), 423–443. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TPAMI.2018.2798607>
2. Bhrugubanda, U. M. (2018). *Deities and devotees: Cinema, religion, and politics in South India*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199487356.001.0001>
3. Burghardt, M., Hefberger, A., Pause, J., Walkowski, N.-O., & Zeppelzauer, M. (2020). Film and video analysis in the digital humanities—An interdisciplinary dialog. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 14(4).
4. Dwyer, R. (2006). *Filming the gods: Religion and Indian cinema*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203088654>
5. Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
6. Keogh, E., & Ratanamahatana, C. A. (2005). Exact indexing of dynamic time warping. *Knowledge and Information Systems*, 7, 358–386. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10115-004-0154-9>
7. Pillai, S. S. (2024). *Krishna's Mahabharatas: Devotional retellings of an epic narrative*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197753552.001.0001>
8. Tseng, C.-I., Thiele, L., Liebl, B., Müller-Budack, E., Bateman, J., Burghardt, M., Cheema, G., & Ewerth, R. (2026). From shots to narratives: Expanding multimodal approaches to filmic storytelling in the digital humanities. *Computational Humanities Research*, 2, e5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10024>
9. **Additional useful references for the Bhakti-literature section**
10. Dehejia, V. (Ed.). (1988). *Slaves of the Lord: The path of the Tamil saints*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
11. Hardy, F. (1983). *Viraha-bhakti: The early history of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India*. Oxford University Press.
12. Narayanan, V. (1994). *The way and the goal: Expressions of devotion in the early Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition*. Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
13. Peterson, I. V. (1989). *Poems to Śiva: The hymns of the Tamil saints*. Princeton University Press.
14. Ramakrishnan, E. V. (Ed.). (1999). *The book of bhakti*. Sahitya Akademi.