

TAMING OF THE SHREW: THE RHETORIC OF MASCULINITY AND MACHISMO IN THE TELUGU FILM INDUSTRY

By
Vishnupriya Bhandaram

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Supervisors: Vlad Naumescu
Dorit Geva

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Abstract

Common phrases around the discussion of the Telugu Film Industry are that it is sexist and male-centric. This thesis expounds upon the making and meaning of masculinity in the Telugu Film Industry. This thesis identifies and examines the various intangible mechanisms, processes and ideologies that legitimise gender inequality in the industry. By extending the framework of the inequality regimes in the workplace (Acker 2006), gendered organisation theory (Williams et. al 2012) to an informal and creative industry, this thesis establishes the cyclical perpetuation (Bourdieu 2001) of a gender order. Specifically, this research identifies the various ideologies (such as caste and tradition), habituated audiences, and portrayals of ideal masculinity as part of a feedback loop that abet, reify and reproduce gender inequality.

Acknowledgements

“It is not that there is no difference between men and women; it is how much difference that difference makes, and how we choose to frame it.”

Siri Hustvedt, *The Summer Without Men*

At the outset, I would like to thank my friends old and new, who patiently listened to my rants, fulminations and insecurities; and for being agreeable towards the unreasonable demands that I made of them in the weeks running up to the completion of this document.

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Introduction

Growing up in a little town called Dehradun, I looked forward to visiting my grandfather and cousins in Hyderabad. It meant that I would be watching at least two films every week with my cousins in the movie theatre behind my grandfather's house. It was not the temptation of 'masala popcorn' that drew me, but that of the screen; the images themselves and of watching the heroes defeat the villains, sing songs, and serenade the women they loved. It was fantastical and delightful; a prize I felt I deserved after being sent to buy the movie tickets on hot sweltering afternoons. I was often sent with my oldest female cousin to buy movie tickets for the entire family for an evening show. It was a routine that worked, because the theatres were mostly empty during the afternoons and the lines for women would be relatively short; we were able to procure tickets in advance for a show.

Films and film watching have been a part of my life ever since I was little. Soon, I was writing film reviews for a national English daily, interviewing film actors, directors and producers; week after week, every Friday at 9 a.m. I went to movie screenings only to see similar stories in different packages; it was my sincere hope that I would chance upon films where the men showed emotion and the women showed strength. Sure, there were "hatke" (different) films that came by every once in a while, challenging the tropes but the box office was more or less filled with formulaic films that did little to challenge the status quo of male vs. female/masculine vs. feminine. The enthusiasm I bred towards films as a child tapered and gave way to scepticism.

In the last two decades, Telugu Films have increasingly followed a rough narrative of 'taming of the shrew'. Most films are made by men and cater to fantasies of masculine domination by representing highly sexualized female characters. By way of a film's narrative, these women need to be 'tamed' in order to make them 'acceptable'. It is not

just the way women are clothed in films, it also has much to do with how they are addressed, spoken of, and represented. More importantly, through a celebration of ideal masculinity and machismo via social codes and behaviour, femininity is usurped.

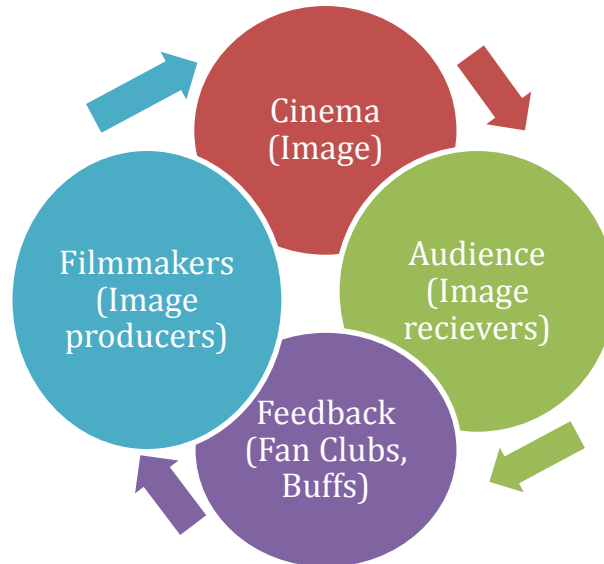


Figure 1. Cyclical Reproduction: No one can tell if the chicken came first or the egg. Similarly, there is no starting point for the causality.

This thesis situates the rhetoric of machismo and masculinity in the Telugu Film Industry within Pierre Bourdieu's concepts from *Masculine Domination* and Connell's ideations on 'emphasised femininities'. Tying in to the existing frameworks of gendered organization theory supported by models like 'inequality regimes' (Acker 2006), 'homosocial reproduction' (Bird 1996) and 'theory of gendered organisations' (Williams, Muller and Kilanski 2012), I propose that masculinity and ideas of machismo become the glue to maintaining the 'old boys' network' of the film industry. Through a careful observation and analysis of the practices and processes, I make the case for how the Telugu Film Industry becomes a gendered organization. I endeavor to answer three questions: 1) *What is the rhetoric of masculinity and machismo portrayed on screen?* 2) *Where is the ideology of masculinity situated in the film production process — how are certain tropes of masculinities, machismo and heroism formed?* 3) *How does feedback abet in reestablishing, reifying and reproducing a norm?*

Media, identity and gender form an essential component in the discipline of media studies. Bourdieu in, *Masculine Domination* specifically calls for an institutional analysis in order to understand the role of religion, state and schools in reproducing gender asymmetries; in the same vein, this research digs into the film industry as an institution that informs the discourse on gender roles and rules. This research is a humble contribution to the growing literature on the subject by locating masculine constructs of the Telugu Film Industry.

A guide

In Chapter I, I will contextualize the film industry, through a brief historical glimpse. Chapter II accounts for my theoretical approaches, justifying the use of the gendered organization theory and Bourdieu's androcentric principle. Chapter III enlists the methods I used in order to gather data for this thesis. Through an ethnographic account interspersed with nuggets from various interviews with filmmakers, producers, writers, film journalists and fan club members, I will provide empirical evidence in Chapter IV, V and VI. I will delineate the features of the film industry/organization and identify the various structures that men and women of the industry have to negotiate with. I will also provide an account of how these structures and conditions impact and produce masculinity and reproduce a gendered fabric of social life. I will provide description of on-going practices and discourse generated on gender, masculinity and machismo 'behind the scenes'. The empirical chapter also includes my analysis of information from secondary sources.

Chapter I

Context and a brief history

Cinema in India has trespassed the territory of being solely a form of entertainment and bled into the everyday rhetoric of life. It consistently guides social mores, codes, values and identities. Telugu cinema maintains a ubiquitous presence in the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana where almost every aspect of social life is saturated with cinema, its producers and its stars. The political arena is made up of popular actors and superstars from the industry (examples N.T. Rama Rao and Chiranjeevi who have shaped the political scene) and films are constantly referenced and spoken about in the political sphere. After the recent bifurcation of the State, current Chief Minister of Telangana, K. Chandrasekhar Rao¹ (KCR) spoke of how Telangana is shown in a bad light in Telugu films as a way to address the dissent of the Telangana people against Andhra Pradesh. Films and their contents define the political schema. Magazines, television and newspapers are entrenched in the discussion of cinema.

The Telugu Film Industry is a Telugu language film industry located in Hyderabad, Telangana (bifurcated² from Andhra Pradesh), a south Indian state. Telugu is one of the 22 scheduled languages³ of India. It is spoken mainly in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The total revenue for the South Indian Film industry was estimated at INR 2680Cr in 2013, a 12 percent increase over the previous year. According to financial experts the

¹ KCR in a press conference held on September 21, 2013 says, In the films made in the industry, the state of our language is such that, lead actors and actresses speak in Telugu, whereas the characters of jokers and vamps speak in Telangana. There are different ways that people speak in different zilas (districts), the way they dress and speak in fact is different. There is so much diversity in one region alone as far as language and the manner of speaking is concerned. Cinema is perpetrating a low and disgusting thought by stereotyping a culture (TV5, 2013)

² Telugu and Telangana are similar languages; Telangana is a dialect of Telugu and has influences from Urdu and Hindi. Telugu films use the coastal Andhra dialects (from the Godavari and Krishna regions) and have consistently 'othered' the Telangana dialect through poor and negative representation in films. Telangana language itself has become a center point of self-assertion and identity now and Telangana activists project the language as a statement of identity in the face of standardization and false homogeneity promoted by media, especially cinema. (Elavarthi, Vemireddy 2014)

³ The latest 2011 Census of India, recognizes 1635 mother tongues, but India has only 22 official languages.

revenue is expected to double, with the projected numbers closing in on INR 4220Cr by 2017. Tamil and Telugu films accounted for over 90% of this revenue (Deloitte, Ficci Reports 2013). With close to 3.3 billion film tickets (Gaikwad 2012) being sold in India in 2011, it is fair to claim that film going is an important activity for most families in India. According to the Film Federation of India statistics, a total of 1966 films were released between April 2013 and March 2014, of which, close to 18% or 349 of these films were in Telugu.

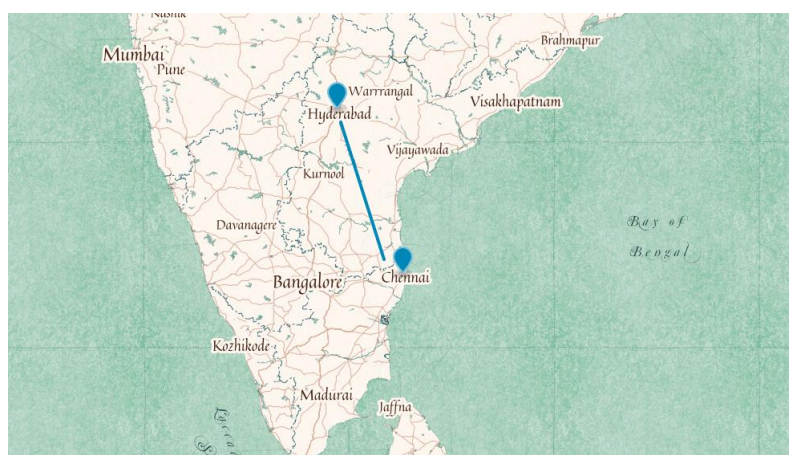


Figure 2. The film industry shifted from Chennai to Hyderabad.

The Telugu film industry since its inception in 1912 was born outside of the state and was situated in Madras (now, Chennai) in Tamil Nadu (Refer Fig.1). Many Telugu actors used to go to Madras, stay in lodges, complete the film and go back to their native towns in Andhra Pradesh. Most studios set up by prominent producers like Moola Narayana Swamy and B.N. Reddy (Vijaya Vauhini Studios) and L.V. Prasad (Prasad Studios) were in Madras. It was only in the 1990s that the industry completely shifted its based from Madras to Hyderabad (The Hindu 2010).

Over the years, TFI has produced waves of genres. Films up until 1940s followed religious themes, drawing in from mythological texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata and folklore. The popularity of film then allowed various filmmakers to produce films that

looked at social problems like dowry, untouchability and reflected the turmoil of a country wanting independence close to the 1950s like ‘Mala Pilla’ (Untouchable Girl) and ‘Raithu Bidda’ (Son of the farmer) — a film which was consequently banned under the British Raj for showcasing the peasant uprising against the Zamindars (land owners). ‘Pathala Bhairavi’ by director K.V. Reddy, which released in 1952 and was entered at the International Film Festival at Bombay, opened up the idea of Telugu films as a medium of entertainment (Humanantha Rao 1963). “In Telugu cinema, the rise of the social was accompanied by the decline of other film forms (mythological, historical, and folklore film) and the process by which the social became the predominant industrial genre can be said to have been completed only in the 1970s,” writes S.V. Srinivas (2009, 76). By the 1980s, the mass film⁴, which encompasses a variety of categories of cinema (rural dramas, action, romance, revenge etc.) but necessarily has a big budget and big stars, emerged.

Today, mass films are known as commercial films (these films are also often referred to as commercial blockbusters, irrespective of how they do on the box-office, big budget films, multi-crore projects). Commercial films are not meant to be realistic, are fantastical in nature but being set in contemporary times, they posit an idea of reality. The industry has however been battling with the idea of realism and art for many decades

Every scene is filmed and each character is created with the audience and the box office in mind without paying any attention to either how far it is realistic or to what extent it is sensible and logical....Thus the relationship between cinema and artificiality has become a vicious circle. (Krishna Patrika, (1962) as compiled in Telugu Cinema: History, Culture, Theory, 1999, 63)

⁴ The term mass film in film critiquing and journalism circles implies, something cheap, vulgar and tasteless meant for an audience without intellect for intelligent and classy films. However, the mass film has long withstood the judgement and has been referred to by film actors themselves to mean something of a big budget entertainer with superstars. S.V. Srinivas clarifies in his book, “Megastar: Chiranjeevi and Telugu cinema after N.T. Rama Rao” — “to the industry, the masses also connote a sum total of the market and consequently, the mass film is also used to describe a film for a populace in general, not specific segments of the populace. (Srinivas S.V., 2009, 75)”

From this journal article in *Krishna Patrika*, a Telugu magazine founded in 1902, it becomes clear that the problematic of a far-reaching cinema that is not realistic has pervaded the mind of the intellectuals for a while.

The problematic however is not that cinema must only make films that portray reality, you can have different genres, but commercial cinema that aims to be realistic indeed proves to be a grotesque flight of fantasy. Telugu films are widely dubbed for consumption in other states; in addition to this, a number of films from South India and especially Telugu films are re-made into Hindi films. Bollywood producers like Suniel Wadhwa have mentioned the ‘mass appeal’ of the films that cut across a wide array of tastes (Ramnath 2015). The mass film plays a prominent role in shaping attitudes in the industry.

One of the key features of this research is to scrutinize the dynastical set-up⁵ of the film industry. I will be drawing upon these film families later in the empirical chapter to map the caste-ist construction and maintenance of gender hierarchies. The film industry comprises of actors (producers, filmmakers, writers etc.) embedded within a social structure/field, with rigid ‘rules of the game’ and the odds for which are not in favour of women. Caste ideologies legitimise certain dispositions of looking at women as wives, mothers, caregivers and upholders of tradition. This limits the creativity of filmmakers and expedites a gendered approach to making cinema. This will be further discussed in Chapter IV as a way to understand how family connections paint a picture of an industry entrenched in the social hierarchies and gender inequality.

⁵ For more information the dynastical set-up, refer to Appendix (A, A1) for a brief overview of the film families and a visual representation of family network and connections in the industry.

Chapter II

Literature Review and Framework

In the Indian context, one of the largest film industries is the Bombay Film Industry or popularly known as Bollywood. The academe have, at regular intervals studied the many aspects of this industry, be it songs or dances (Shresthova 2008), cinema and visual culture of Bollywood (Dwyer, Patel 2002) and the impact of globalisation on the industry among other significant literature. Among ethnographies on the film industry, Ganti's work, "Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry" published in 2012 is engaging and explores the changes in the film production from the 1990s until 2010 and argues that the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian State since 1991 altered the media landscape.

Most studies about the Indian film industry are on the stereotypical portrayal of women in films, or an analysis of gender stereotype (Tenhunen and Karttunen 2014) (Ghadially 2007), (Seeger 2003) or rigid content analysis. Not many studies have taken an intersectional approach to analyse the framings of the film industry in order to locate the gendered order. South Indian cinema has been studied well, but most studies tend to focus on Tamil cinema and there is excessive literature on the linkage of politics and cinema. Lakshmi Srinivasan, Steve Dene and Brinda Bose have written much that deals with spectatorship, the practices of film-going, social relations and on the experience of cinema.

Men and Masculinities as an academic field, only gained recognition in the last three decades. In the context of India, the field is fairly new, but is slowly gaining popularity as a field of exploration among scholars. Narrowing down to the literature being produced in my specific field i.e. The Telugu Film Industry, (which happens to be

the second largest film industry in the country) begs for more scholarship. Tejaswini Niranjana's piece on female spectatorship of Vijayasanthi Films uses a psychoanalytic approach to delve into the concept of masquerade. S.V. Srinivas' (2009) work on Telugu cinema and its relation to politics and on fan clubs is salient so is an investigation into the 'star comedians' and comedy films as indicative of political changes in the State (Christopher 2013). Uma Brughubanda to an extent has captured various segments on the Telugu cinema industry, such as on the genre of women's cinema and its linkages with devotion and horror.

The TFI has peculiar traits (by way of its organizational structure, members of the industry, dominance by film families and counter-cultures of the fans). In my opinion, there is a need to push the envelope towards interdisciplinary approaches to gain holistic insight. There is a need to become 'intersectionally aware' in the approach towards studying film, film industry and its consumers. This thesis will contribute to the growing pool of literature in an under-theorised field.

Theoretical Framework

I am studying the rhetoric of masculinity in the Telugu film industry by contextualizing it as an industry with practices and processes in place that have rendered the industry as gendered. My research deals with cinema and its producers who are situated in certain fields that shape their way of looking at life. This research has specific loci, such as, **production, representation, responses**.

To study this, it was imperative that I use an interdisciplinary approach. A mere content analysis informed by Sassure or Pierce (Macnamara 2005, 15) would have not have been helpful in identifying human interaction and thoughts that are caught in the web of a gender order. Nor is it, enough to take only spectatorship/audience approach. To elicit an answer for my research question, an anthropologically oriented query that

draws in from these aforementioned approaches was necessary. While Acker (2006) and Williams (2012) theories apply to specific organizations with workplace hierarchies in place, I believe that these theories can be extended to study an informal industry such as the Telugu Film Industry.

Cinema, as I evaluate for the purposes of this thesis, is a structuring structure — that it generates and organizes practices and representations that can be adapted to their outcomes without a conscious aiming to achieve the ends. When I look at texts, media and cinema as structuring structures, I must begin with Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the 'androcentric principle' and 'habitus'.

The production process can be understood through the lens of the 'androcentric principle'. I find Bourdieu's work to be compelling and relevant in terms of framing. In a way, for Bourdieu, the habitus is a begin-all and an end-all; individuals often unconsciously reproduce their social structural milieu. Habitus transforms to diverse areas of life and the outcome is a harmonization of socially conditioned dispositions. Through rich ethnographic work, Bourdieu analyses the Kabylia society arguing that the society is organized around the 'androcentric principle' — the inequality of the sexes is taken for granted and legitimized through objective structures which also cloud the agency of the members. But 'habitus' cannot be the explanation for everything; a conceptualization of the forms of masculinities (hegemonic/non-hegemonic) and femininities (pariah/emphasized) (Schipper 2007, 95) are needed to bring more conviction to arguments about gender hierarchies. So 'habitus' and 'emphasized femininity' become key concepts in order to understand embodiments of structures. It seeks to explain the biases that influence individuals to become who they are by way of including the 'ways of life' or the arrangements of habitation where "agents and groups of agents are defined by their relative positions within that space" (Bourdieu 1985, 724). Whereas using forms of femininities becomes an adequate measure of understanding complicities of individuals.

Since caste is link I am keen on exploring, Uma Chakravathy's conceptualisation of caste as a gendering element is key. Caste, as I understand is both habitual and a structure that reproduces inequality.

The outcome of this habitus is a network and structure in place that reifies aspects of social thought and relations. This is where I think Acker's positions become valuable. The Telugu film industry, though not an organization in the strict sense of the word, is an industry that mimics certain organizational aspects. This theory argues that gender inequality is at the helm of organizations that are characterized by long-term security, standardized career ladders and job descriptions. Employing the 'gendered organization theory' by Christine Williams (2012) as an extension of Joan Acker's original theories on inequality regimes in the workplace gives me a rich tapestry, within which I can comfortably situate my position. It is my argument that the film industry, though not a standard organization, it is a field with no defined ways towards growth and success, but has certain ideologies built into it, which define the path to one's success.

In my ethnographic journey, I have looked for these very intangible processes and mechanisms that define the rules of the game, one of which is caste; I found that caste in itself acts as a filtering structure. "Masculinity is what a culture expects of its men" (Craig, 1992, 3). Uma Chakravarti's position of gender as caste is noteworthy. Ching Kwan Lee's theory of 'familial hegemony' where control is observed by an "internalized discipline of subordinates" (1995, 386). For a historical perspective, I have studied K. Srinivasulu's work on Caste, Class and Social Articulation in Andhra Pradesh expounds upon caste in social relations, economy and politics in Andhra Pradesh; this paper served as a meaningful context to better understand the 'inequality regime of caste'.

To answer the question of representation, I will focus on the recurring types of roles that male actors are cast into and the storylines of the films. Diane Barthel, Donald Sabo and Sue Curry Jensen's works around the social construction of masculinity in the

advertising industry and images of men in sports media respectively offer key insights. So my approach blends the structuralism with the post-structuralism. In other words, films function as signs with meanings in a fixed system, and the audience interprets the signs within that same system.

Masculinities in and of themselves are a mix of roles and role-playing. These could either be innate, inherited or enactments that are learned, derived in congruence with political, social and economic environment that an individual belongs to. R.W. Connell will be the basic node of entry.

In the context of representation of masculinities, it is imperative that we realize that narratives of cinema tend to affirm and also interrogate established tropes of behaviour, making it difficult to interpret gender, rigidly, making masculinities plural and dynamic (Bose 2011). For the purposes of this research, I will adopt the term, ‘masculine subject’ to be able recognize that masculinity can be exhibited by both men and women and that it is essentially a way of being — to find out how it is represented in visual narratives is to look for the representations of relationships and intimacy.

The spectator/audience is above all a mind, a locus of representations who is also engaged in practices (Taylor 1992). Derne’s (2000) ethnography explores how men and women are concerned with the problem of ‘westernisation’ and representation of (Indian) women exhibiting traits of westernization (perhaps by way of attire, manner of speaking etc.) are understood in a negative light. But setting the stage for negative perception, a binary is created with Indian-ness being understood as positive and this very Indian-ness manifests into a masculinity that needs to be performed.

Negotiating through these structures, what remains is the situated human agency. Cinema is a meaning-making activity and is implicated within the on-going enunciation of the contemporary subject. Connell offers links to the agency of men and women being tied to a gendered order that is informed by intersections of power, labour and sexualities

(also, emotions). It is in the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduces structure. So in a way, moral codes, social codes and an established way of doing things tend to perpetrate when the actors regenerate them, but there is an ability to reproduce them differently or to ignore them. The subject is acting and deciding so as to facilitate decision-making, but he/she is not a free actor. The subject thus shapes his own subjectivity in a socially constructed autonomy (Beck, Bonss and Lau 2013).

A peculiar case that I would like to elaborate upon in my research is that of fandom, as a performance of masculinity. This fan activity is dominant in South Indian cinema (Telugu and Tamil cinema, especially). Fan activity, carried out in the name of the 'star' ranges from cinephilia to political protests. "Obsession with the cinema and its stars is acted out, quite literally, in the streets. The fan is a reactive viewer with an acute sense of entitlement" (Srinivas S.V. 2013, Frontline). Fandom influences the field itself.

The popular films, I argue are made by habituated filmmakers in Telugu Film Industry and are addressed to a habituated audience. 'Habituees' (Srinivas L. 2002) are insiders to the culture of commercial cinema, they are primarily audiences who have developed a relationship with the films based on a long acquaintance with film. The filmmakers too are aware of these expectations and engage in a filmmaking process that conducts a dialogue with such viewers. The film then emerges as a result of the creativity of the filmmaker that is influenced by his position in the field and audience interaction.

Steve Derne's findings in his ethnographic study of male film-goers in India fit well with this idea. Derne findings present that filmgoers do not model their behaviour on the messages in films and that men tend to reject the ideas of rebellion, but embrace ideals of individualism and romantic love (Derne 2000). It becomes clear that the audience/spectator is being reflexive about his choices and consciously performs a certain masculinity, which is perhaps informed to him through the frame, but his performance is dependent on his local contexts and his understandings of these contexts.

If we speak of 'Fandom' in this particular case as a testament to a place where masculinities might get formulated, we can look at it as a 'we' that Taylor could be referring to; human action happens when the agent understands and constitutes him or herself as an integral part of a 'we', where the individual places himself within the field of cinema and engages in a dialogue with it, this investment is a cause for entitlement towards what is displayed on screen. The representations can manifest a notion of entitlement into the perception, which is carried out through fandom towards the media and its contents. Srinivas also looks at fan response as a response to stardom (which I interpret as a rhetoric of masculinities, most fan-clubs are for male stars in South India) where the protagonist/hero on screen is usually a patriarchal figure who leads the masses (Srinivas 2009) The film industry is organised around these stars and the fans (members of the audience) engage in dialogue and keep this on-screen masculinity alive.

Chapter III

Methods

The fieldwork for this research was conducted between the months of January and March 2015. A specific focus of this research is on the commercial blockbuster films. No emphasis has been paid to other categories of cinema, such as alternate films, or films directed by female directors; focus on those films might have allowed for a larger scope.

The research touches upon the filmmaking process, players involved, onscreen narratives and spectatorship, but does not fully account for the political and economic landscapes as potential influences.

This thesis identifies the film industry as an organization steeped in particular socio-cultural norms of hegemonic quality. These norms find equal space in narrative structures portrayed on screen, leading to a social reproduction of the norms through habituated audiences. By locating the underlying power structures and ways of legitimizing mechanisms of the control, this research does more than being a mere criticism of a particular industry.

During the three months, I gathered data through a large number of semi-structured interviews with various people I categorised under three segments: 1) Behind the scenes 2) Knowledge Keepers 3) Audience and Fan Clubs. It was important to use the semi-structured method of interviewing, because while it allowed for a formal engagement (therefore, my interviewees respected my time). Considering that most interviewees were from the industry or those who wrote about it, I assumed that there was a high chance we might wander off topic. Having an interview guide helped me gain control of the process.

Behind the scenes includes a wide range of filmmakers, producers, directors, established actors, writers, aspiring actors. These interviews provided me with an insight

and perspective on what creates the gendered cinema and how are gendered ideologies reinforced for consumption.

Knowledge keepers includes film historians, cultural anthropologists, film journalists and critics. Lastly, the I classified audience members as avid movie-goers and fan clubs under the **audience and fan clubs** segment.

I also indulged in a film-going practice itself. I visited and observed ‘release day’ events and film screenings at various theatres on Fridays each week. Through this I was able to do participant observation. Immersing myself in the practice, I realised would be the best way to get a first hand experience of what actually goes on.

In addition to this, I analysed certain films and narrative structures in order to provide a better answer to the research questions. It was a way in which I could use the structuralist approach (content analysis) to benefit my research endeavour, for it allows the analysis of meanings within systems.

In this dissertation, pseudonyms have been used for certain interviewees who offered sensitive data and information. The pseudonyms are marked with a footnote in the first mention. Through the initial contacts I had cultivated during my time as a journalist in Hyderabad, I was easily able to identify potential interviewees. Through my first set of contacts, I gained access to more interviewees.

In the following chapters, I will analyse the results of a study on the film production scene in the context of the Telugu Film Industry, an industry second in size to Bollywood (Hindi Film Industry), and largely under theorized from the perspective of masculinities. I will explore three aspects of the film industry through three sub-chapters. The first segment will elaborate upon the gendered structure of the film industry. The second segment will explore the role of fan clubs and ideology of viewership. Through a thorough analysis of these vignettes, I argue that the TFI functions as an ‘old boys network’ and the obvious engagement with masculinity and machismo silences the female

voice and leads to a gendered social reproduction. The third segment will look at masculine identity as propagated by a popular cultural product: cinema.

Chapter IV

Structuring Machismo: The industry as an ‘old boys network’

An informal ‘old boys network’ can be defined as a system with informal processes that favour a select group (in this context, other males). The TFI has many layers and processes in place which filter out women, this is not to say that the industry is deliberately conspiring against women, but there are long standing practices, social codes and expectations in place that make it harder for women to penetrate the upper echelons of the industry.

In the context of the TFI, it is not easy to ignore a caste-centric ideology firmly in place. According to Bourdieu, social position is relational; the relations are objective positions that persons occupy, that constrain perception and action. There are a few influential, rich caste communities that have monopoly over filmmaking, in addition to this, highly regarded, rich and elite networks/families — these ‘film families’ have dynastical control over filmmaking as well.

The Telugu film industry is framed around the concept of ‘mana vadu’ (our guy). Caste acts as the primary glue for bonding and growth. As Karthik Pasupulate, a noted film journalist explains in his interview, most relations in the industry emerge on the basis of shared castes or places of belonging; “Like a Kamma guy will have a kamma working for him or people from his village (sic),” says Pasupulate. This ideology is dominant in the industry; in addition to existing networks through blood relations, family ties or relation by law. (See Kinship Chart in the Appendix)

Krishna, NTR and Nageswara Rao launched their sons, who have gone on to become big stars in the film industry. Rama Naidu, one of the biggest producers in the industry launched his son, Venkatesh who in turn has brought his sister’s son Daggubati Rana into the industry. Prabhas got an entry point into the industry because of his uncle,

Krishnam Raju. Ravi Teja came into the industry on his own merit and followed the route of a struggling actor by doing smaller roles in the beginning. Ravi Teja, however also comes from the dominant caste of the Rajus and I am estimating that the shared feelings of ‘mana vadu’ worked in his favour.

Most public relations managers of these actors belong to the same caste as the actors. Sanjay⁶, a fan club member for the Nagarjuna Association shed light upon the prevalence of caste in defining the film industry. Chiranjeevi’s caste, Kapu is a dominant percentage of the populace has numerous sub-castes; owing to this allegiance, a number of the big stars get massive openings to their films. This idea is supported by Srinivas’s findings, “Caste too is an important factor in fan’s associations....”

“Indeed, these organizations have a history of being sites for caste-based assertions and mobilizations. This is strikingly evident in the career of Chiranjeevi. The star himself is Kapu by caste and stood out in a film industry dominated by Kamma stars. His fans’ associations in the 1990s became one of the sites for the formation of a broad anti-Kamma, anti-Telugu Desam Party alliance in parts of Andhra Pradesh including Vijayawada city” (Srinivas S.V. 2013, Frontline)

The Reddys and Kammas form the politically and economically dominant castes and communities. Kammas are prominent in the coastal regions of the state such as Krishna, Guntur and Prakasham districts. Control over the agrarian resources, such as fertile, high-yielding land and direct access to water for many generations has given them a tight reign over the economic and political realms. On the other hand, Kapus, Velmas and Rajus though small in number also have significant control over the political sphere (Srinivas K., 2002).

⁶ Pseudonym.

The Telugu Film Industry is fairly dynastical⁷ in nature; most current popular actors come from film families, where their fathers were directors, producers or actors in the industry. Currently, the big names in the industry with massive fan following are:



Table 1 (Top-Left, Clockwise) : Pawan Kalyan, Mahesh, Venkatesh, Naga Chaitanya, Ravi Teja, Rana Daggubati, Jr. NTR, Ram Charan, Nagarjuna, Prabhas | For more information on lineage, refer to the Appendix.

There are more actors in the industry who don't find mention in this table, primarily because they are up and coming and are not as popular in the industry. The biggest blockbusters and high grossing films come from these aforementioned actors. Also, high budget film scripts are circulated within this group. Together they form the elite of the film industry, and where are the women? Certainly not on the posters! The images displayed in Table 1 are posters from various films. One of the key elements in all the pictures is a single man in the centre of the poster — the main hero. All the images show fit men with a muscular body, some male bodies on these images also show six pack abs. A softer, yet masculine image is maintained with the scarf, denoting an urban young

⁷ Refer to the Appendix (A2)

male. In my opinion, the posters signify an industry that is tightly weaved around the fabric of 'androcentrism' (Bourdieu 2001), and a cyclical reproduction of gender inequality is legitimised through a consistent celebration of masculinity and machismo.

Caste becomes an important measure because a consistent concentration of wealth and power within specific pools of castes forms an 'inequality regime'.

All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations. (Acker 2006, 443)

Acker posits that all organizations have inequality regimes, when I look at the film industry as an organisation and the key players in the industry: who make decisions and call the shots; I can identify a network of such regimes based on caste and sex.

S.V. Srinivas claims that Telugu cinema is linked to the rise of the post Independence ruling class-caste. I agree with Srinivas and it is evident the popular actors who form the elite of the Telugu industry come from from Kamma, Kapu and Raju castes. According to Benbabali's research, the Kamma community is only about five percent of the population of Andhra Pradesh but about eighty percent of the people own fertile agricultural land in the Krishna Delta. Benbabali finds that they occupy key positions and in the politics and economy of the state and also dominate Telugu media and cinema. Benbabali claims that these attributes of dominance have a hegemonic character.

The Kapu castes are also powerful and in rural societies. Historically, the women in Kapu observed (some still do) purdah and seclusion. As noted by Beneria in her study of sexual division of labour in rural societies, there is mention of how Kapu women make lace instead of working in the fields like 'dalits/harijans', so seclusion and 'sitting at home' became a way of indicating the higher status of belonging to an upper class community. Kamma, Kapu and Reddy castes, even in an urban milieu maintain caste expectations that

extend to male and female bodies. The binary of men and women as two separate classes/types of people is a social construction (Butler 1990). This is apparent in the structuring of these castes. Gender is thus articulated through “bodies, behaviours, personality traits and desires” (Schippers 2007, 89) that align and match various categorisations.

Gender in the industry exists relationally, like Bourdieu says in *Masculine Domination*: “gender gets formed through ‘diacritical construction’” (23). A body gets differentiated from the opposite gender (culturally) through the male and female habitus. The social construction of the body takes place through an “agentless effect of physical and social order entirely organised in accordance with the androcentric principle” (Bourdieu 2001, 24).

Bringing the idea of respectability to the fore, Tejaswini Ganti in *Producing Bollywood* observes that Bollywood’s elite to belong to a higher income stratum than the middle class Indian society, their concerns over respectability divulge the power of middle class values that pervade the film industry’s social world.

Similarly, Kammas, Kapus and Reddys form a formidable elite, but their traditions and customs echo middle class values of respectabilities through strict control maintained over the women in the families. Connell’s conceptualisation of gender relations cannot be contested; it is evident in this case, labour, power and sexuality form a gender order which constantly controls/constrains the agency of men and women within those gender relations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Masculinity and femininity come to be understood as “complementary and hierarchical” and “provide a rationale for social organization from the self, to interaction, to institutional structures, to global relations of domination” (Schippers 2007, 91).

It is common practice to educate the girl child to post graduate studies, but a few are encouraged to work, although this trend is slowly changing. The film family

women are kept far away from the industry. This mitigation of respectability inwards towards the family is how men enforce tradition and are thus seen as upholders (Chakravarti 2003).

Take a look at the most significant film families; it is only the sons who have made any claim to fame in the industry. NTR has four daughters, none of whom are in the film industry, ANR's daughters are also absent from the scene. Chiranjeevi's daughters too did not take off in film careers. A classic example is that of Manjula Ghattamaneni, actor Krishna's daughter and Mahesh's sister who had a bumpy start to her career when, her father's fans opposed the idea of her joining films.

In Telugu film industry, only heroes sons get to take their fathers legacy ahead. Our heroes are not open-minded in allowing their daughters to take up acting career. That is not the case in Bollywood and in Tamil film industry. Our heroes are against this only because of the fans. They don't like to see their idols' daughters dancing in skimpy outfits and donning glamorous roles. But there is always a chance to play decent roles and pursue acting career without doing any damage to the father's image. For instance Krishna's fans didn't like Manjula to act as heroine. Although she did a couple of films, Manjula never took it serious (sic), as she didn't want to upset her father fans. (Gulte website 2012)

In the discussion above on a popular website for information on Telugu films; words such as 'father's image' and 'skimpy outfits' signify that the film industry is not a respectable place of work for women.

Lakshmi Manchu, daughter of Mohan Babu and sister of Manchu Vishnu and Manchu Manoj, has in the last few years made her presence felt in the industry. Lakshmi, however did not upset the status quo immediately, she did what 'good girls' should ideally do (getting married, living abroad⁸ with her husband). It is only after she observed the practices good women are expected to practice, that she launched herself in the industry. But Lakshmi has only done small roles in films so far and hosts game shows on regional

⁸ Lakshmi experimented with the entertainment industry in the USA by doing small roles in television shows and films in Hollywood.

television channels. She was not afforded the same luxury that sons of the stars are; she was not launched into the industry as an actress under a big production house.

The anomalies that have been successful in the industry, upon closer inspection are not anomalies at all, because they embody the traits of hegemonic masculinity. Lakshmi Manchu though took the long route to being represented in films, and yet her caste and class and family background are the structures that also propelled her. Women have access to gains and resources through the men and these are available to them only if they adhere to norm. It becomes clear that there is a gender hierarchy (Connell 1993) and in those rankings, femininity comes last. The culturally dominant ideology of masculinity (strength, paid work, heterosexuality) persists as an ideal; though not all men⁹ live up to this masculinity, they are able to take advantage.

Namrata Shirodkar was a popular actress in the Hindi film industry, she worked on a few films in the Telugu film industry and then married Mahesh, one of the biggest stars in the Telugu Film Industry. Namrata Shirodkar stopped working in films and disengaged from the film fraternity immediately after. Here is an excerpt of her interview in Times of India:

Q: Was he instrumental in your decision to give up acting?

A: They call it love (laughs). He was clear that he didn't want a working wife.

Q: So, will you never make a comeback?

A: Never. Moreover, I wouldn't be able to strike a balance between work and family. (Lalwani 2011, Times of India)

What you see here is how the pervasive 'family values' usurped the actress who comes from Mumbai; to maintain the status quo of belonging to a 'respectable' film family, the women are made to recede into the backdrop as wives and caregivers. The adherence to such oppressive structures is 'invisibilised' or as comes to be seen as

⁹ Lakshmi's brothers Manchu Vishnu and Manchu Manoj didn't prove to be successes on the box office, but this only goes to show that while their 'masculinity ideal' was not appealing, they still came on top owing to the legitimised gender hierarchy.

upholding traditions (Chakravarti 2003) and the women embody the tenets of emphasised femininity, where compliance is central (Schippers 2007).

Similarly, Pawan Kalyan's ex-wife, Renu Desai came into the industry from Mumbai as well, soon after she married Pawan Kalyan and put an end to her acting career. Krishna's wife, Vijaya Nirmala was one of the few female film directors, but she was already an established actress by the time she married Krishna. It is not to say that women are puppets and helpless, but to emphasise that while they experience a degree of freedom, a hegemonic domination (in this case: upholding traditional values, adhering to gender roles) achieves an internalised discipline (Lee 1995).

It is evident that the daughters from the dynastical film families are absent in the milieu. This appropriately signifies the patriarchal character of the industry's structure, reflecting from those who make up the industry. Socialisation is not the only possible explanation here; experiences of men within institutions and historical contexts are significant in facilitating conceptualisations of masculinities. In an interview with a prominent film producer, I was told that it was not expected of good family women to work in the industry; key phrases used to express this disapproval were "high risk", "demanding job", "better to avoid unnecessary advances, gossip and rumours".

Actors, directors and producers are eager to launch their sons into the film industry to maintain their legacy; daughters have been consistently and deliberately kept out of the loop. A past tends to extend into the future by way of recurrence in similarly structured practices (Bourdieu 1990). The pervading 'homosociality' (Lipman-Bluman 1976) has created clear distinctions between men and women through social segregation in the industry. Males launched into the industry create the new pecking order and prove their masculinity, box office collections become a common tool for measuring one's position and social worth.

Most actresses in the Telugu film industry are not from the region, but come from Mumbai or other states like Goa or Kerala. The strong bias against employing female actresses from Andhra Pradesh is palpable. A casting agent and film writer told me that Telugu girls are “open enough”; this is to say that Telugu girls are expected to be ‘chaste and pure’.

Caste is a gendered and androcentric structure. The inequality regime based on caste and the androcentric setup of the caste system is explained well by filmmaker Indraganti Mohan Krishna in his interview to me. He says that Telugu girls come from ‘semi-traditional’ families and often have anxieties about their eligibility for marriage in the future if they choose a career in films. It is interesting to note that filmmakers lament about not having Telugu speaking girls in films. Director Raghav Krishna¹⁰ made claims that no Telugu girl wants to act in films. I argue that it is because an inequality regime is firmly in place that comes to the fore through auditioning systems that are not transparent, along with objectifying images and text used in the narrative of the films.

The film industry has a reputation of taking advantage of female actors, the practices continue; while the media breaks some stories, other stories of casting couch remain buried. Gossip about industry practices pervades to the point of becoming commonplace. Female actors then expect to be taken advantage of and the gendered ideologies of casting agents, directors and producers keeps this mechanism in place. The moral judgement on the content of the gossip as ‘bad’ or ‘scandalous’ and ‘undesirable’ is what makes a hegemonic function (Schipper 2007).

Another regime in place is that of wanting the ‘fair-skinned, glamorous heroine’, Telugu girls lose out to their competition from other states because they fail in terms of physical prerequisites. Dominant members of the film industry, that is to say the key players (directors, producers and actors) set the standard for beauty. The supervisory

¹⁰ Pseudonym

process of auditioning actresses is shaped by gendered and sexualized attitudes and assumptions. This aligns with Shweder's (1991) idea that social psyche, culture and structure jointly, dialectically and dynamically influence one another. Derne too emphasises on this and posits that social institutions, cultural meanings and aspects of psyche "tend to develop a fit" and this he argues "militates against easy social change" (Derne, 2008, 58).

Steve Derne's observations in globalisation and reconstitution of local gender arrangements are that the Indian identity relies on the rejection of the westernised woman. In his research, he found that Indian men coped with their ambivalence towards westernisation by celebrating women's religiosity, dressing and modesty (Derne 2002).

In a similar vein, in Telugu cinema, most heroines/actresses are imports from other states. 'Good Telugu girls' are not encouraged to join the film industry, the ideologies of the dominant castes in the industry contribute to the circulation of the perception that women who work in films are 'loose'. I posit that these 'women from the outside' fall into the thin gap between femininity and "pariah femininity" (Schippers 2007, 95). The non-Telugu actresses are willing to tread the path that 'good Telugu women' are culturally not expected to follow. They embody traits of hegemonic masculinity in this context: being money-minded, goal oriented and committed to their work, while they are not sanctioned for these qualities, they become subject to a stigma. This has been the case historically and pervaded the Mumbai Film Industry in its early stages as well, but in Andhra Pradesh, the underrepresentation of actresses from within the State points to it being a pervasive idea in the industry.

Neepa Majumdar in, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only* points to this dichotomy that exists in the Indian Film Industry all together. "Generalised gossip about cinema as a disreputable institution was tied to its class status and anxieties about female public performance" (Majumdar 2009, 61). In my interview with Praveen, a fan club president

for one of the stars said that it was better for “our state” that girls in the movies were not from here; “Our girls should not do what the girls on the screen do (sic), see these Bombay girls have no limits and it is good eye candy for us to see some exciting and adventurous songs.” By ‘exciting’ and ‘adventurous’, Praveen meant songs where heroines expose their bodies and dance in a titillating fashion.

In Acker’s theory of gendered organisations, she explains the ways in which organizations reproduce gender, one of which is ‘organisational logic’ that is to say that logical systems of work, such as rules, procedures and evaluations that are taken for granted, legitimize control over the workplace. The intersection of caste with gendered ideas about ‘girls from good families’ becomes a legitimizing expectation. Similarly, in the industry, auditioners legitimize expectations from aspiring female actresses to smooch and expose their bodies (Chowdhary 2014). The men within the network call the shots, but what about the women who have managed to reach the top? They propagate the same gendered structure that they had to climb through, because it is internalized as ‘normal business practice’, because there is simply is no other way.

Supriya¹¹ is a young aspiring actress; she has done only one film and is looking forward to acting in more films. In a deeply personal interview, she revealed that she has been struggling in the industry for the last two years. She has been propositioned for sex numerous times. When I asked her if this came as a surprise, Supriya laughed and said, “there must be something wrong with you if they don’t proposition you for sex!”

At first, Supriya claimed that she was taken aback and upset, but her friends in the industry who work as “extras” and other small insignificant roles put her to ease and said that it is common practice and that if she does not want to sleep with the producers, she shouldn’t be rude about it, but somehow escape the situation through tact. When I pressed upon these “tactful ways”, she said, “you should never say no directly, you flirt

¹¹Pseudonym

back, you smile and make sure that it never comes to that and if it does and if you really want to be in a film, you just do it.” Casting couch is a phenomenon broadly accepted in the industry. This sexual objectification is entwined in the interactions between female actresses (aspiring) and the decision makers; this sexualised method of providing work creates actors who are willing and compliant (Salzinger 2000).

Tejaswini Ganti sheds light on the aspect of respectability in the Hindi film industry:

“This concern with respectability which can be traced back to the early days of cinema in India, is a facet of the framework of disdain that characterises the film industry’s production culture.” (Ganti 2012, 121)

The film industry overall has been tainted with disrepute primarily due to financial concerns, most money as Karthik Pasupulate observed in his interview comes from illegal means, popularly known as ‘black money’, producers and directors have managed to mitigate this negative association with many donating to various causes, another cause for concern was with courtesans or women of disrepute who readily joined the film industry, historically, as Ganti also observes.

In the Telugu industry, Savitri was one of the most celebrated figures from cinema in the 1960s, but she is also gossiped about. Savitri was Gemini Ganesan’s (a Tamil superstar) third wife and her marriage to him was kept secret for many years. Savitri suffered from depression and alcoholism. It was commonplace for film journals to write articles with a moral superiority and judge women on their private lives.

Good families are defined by their upper caste status, middle class to upper class position, high levels of formal education, practice of modern professional education (medicine, engineering, law, journalism, civil service, teaching) and gendered norms of sexual modesty. (Ganti 2012, 121)

The film industry works around this disrepute by articulating the trope of a good family and a good girl. Historically, actresses have borne the burden of the film industry's moral reputation and to an extent still do (Majumdar 2009).

The Telugu Film Industry is parallel to a modern workplace, except that there is no bureaucratic hierarchy to the top. The industry is informal and thrives on trust, loyalty, favours and mutual understanding. Unspoken rules are of higher significance in this industry and are imperative for the conduction of business. Social organization and mobility of an individual in the industry depends on being able to communicate effectively. Like Hughes notes in *The Sociological Eye*, that in order for men to communicate freely, a sense of camaraderie must exist where players are able to take each other's sentiments for granted. Silences and utterances are equally important.

Dissent towards this structure is not met with a pleasant response. In an interview recently, Radhika Apte, an up and coming film actor who has worked in a number of films in the Telugu Film Industry (TFI) said that she found industry to be patriarchal and male chauvinist:

“The one industry that I have struggled the most with is Telugu. That industry is so patriarchal and so sort of male dominated and chauvinist.”

Soon after Radhika Apte made this statement in her interview, Twitter and other social media called for a ban¹² on the actress. Directors and producers made various remarks on how Radhika Apte crossed the line and that she shouldn't be complaining against an industry that gave her the privilege of becoming an actress.

Director Srimantha¹³'s studio mirrors the sexual division of labour, which is then executed in scripts and storylines as well. The penthouse on the posh part of Hyderabad in Banjara Hills situates writers and scriptwriters, all working for Srimantha. There is no sign of women, except the one woman who served me tea. The absence of women in the

¹² See more, Appendix B

¹³ Pseudonym

industry is mirrored at the director's working quarters. When I asked Srimantha if there were any women working with him, he told me that there were none at that time. Since I had an existing network of sources in the industry, it was a situation where 'everyone knew everyone', when I got the contact details of director Srimantha, my source kept addressing Srimantha as *Sir* and attributed greatly to his high status in the industry. I was constantly told that he is very busy and does not have time to spare for academic interviews. Before I set a date for the interview, my source lightly mentioned that I should probably attach the suffix 'garu' (a respectful way of addressing someone) or call him sir and that I should try to finish my interview soon because the director is very busy. I had sense that I might be intruding, but more than that, I felt that my enquiries were viewed as wasteful of their time.

Charles Taylor in his essay, 'To Follow a Rule' (1992) argues that we interpret rules within certain practices are incorporated into our bodies through habits, dispositions and tendencies. I was predisposed to a format of acceptable social behaviour, I had an understanding of the norm. At the time that I was being told these rules, I was already inclined towards understanding them. I felt an inherent need to appear serious¹⁴ and important to this director. I wanted to establish my position as a serious researcher, so I policed myself into wear traditional attire and polished my Telugu and tried to address him in Telugu.

Women who deviate and find success are immediately put under a masculine framework. Take for example, Vijayashanti, an actor (1980- late 1990s) in addition to playing traditionally feminine roles, stood out particularly with her 'action/crime' movies. While the actress played extremely feminine roles in films, she later began to be increasingly cast in films with strong female characters, except that these strong female

¹⁴ A certain kind of socialisation is reflected in my own thinking, where I responded to certain unspoken codes, expectations of behaviour codes by adjusting and policing my attire, adhering to the 'rules' of the very male-centric society I inhabit.

characters were stripped of femininity. Vijayashanti has been referred to as ‘Mr. Vijayshanti’ in magazine articles and it became norm to call her ‘magaraayadu’ (a term for women masquerading as men/manly). Vijayashanti was perhaps one of the only female actors who called the shots. Producers and directors lined up to make films with her because she was immensely popular as the heroine who turned into a hero (Niranjana 2014).

Nandini is a contemporary film director. She has made acclaimed and hugely popular movies like, ‘Ala Modalaindi’ (It started like that), ‘Jabardasth’ (Amazing!). She won the Nandi Award for the best directorial debut. Nandini has faced a lot of sexism in the industry. “Of course! It’s almost like how people talk about ‘female fighters’ or ‘lady pilots’. No one ever says, male pilots right? I always get referred to as a lady director. There is an element of distrust and there is an element of ‘how do we handle this person or what do we do with them’; more than the bias, I think there is confusion. But, I never viewed it as my problem, I viewed it as theirs,” said Nandini Reddy.

The industry exists within a flagrant bubble of a symbolic order. Men and women have come to accept their place within the symbolic order facilitating a ‘circular causality’ at play (Bourdieu 2001, 11).

Chapter V

Theatres and Fan Associations: Sites of social reproduction

As a part of my fieldwork, I visited popular film theatres in the city, on the days of film releases to explore the rituals of 'First Day First Show', I interviewed fan club presidents for answers to gauge what creates the gendered cinema, therefore reinforcing gendered ideologies for consumption. Observation, and the conversations I had with people, revealed to me that there is a deep patriarchal bias in the industry, that gets reinforced and reified by an array of directors and producers that make films and reflect their own socialization on screen.

Telugu films have a wide reception. According to the Film Federation of India's 2010 report, Andhra Pradesh (with its recently split state Telangana) has the highest number of single screen theatres in the entire country: 2609 screens. Single screen theatres are traditional theatres with one screen and can seat up to 600-1300 viewers in each show. These theatres haven't caught up to online bookings and face stiff competition from multiplexes which have been a recent emerging trend in the Indian film projection business.

In Hyderabad, most of the popular single screen theatres are spread about within a radius of 3 kilometers. The film theatre itself becomes a site of social reproduction and display of imbibed masculinities. A key aspect of film-watching is the 'First Day First Show'. A 'First Day First Show' is the first show on the day of the release of a film and is usually packed with fans that stand in line for tickets hours before the show. For this dissertation, I observed the various practices that go on at these events.

People who throng the theatres for the first show are mostly men, especially college students. For movies with big stars like Jr. NTR, Mahesh, Prabhas, Ravi Teja, and,

Ram Charan's movies there is often a need for police patrolling as fans go out of control and lot of pushing and shoving ensues.

At Sandhya Theatre 70mm, on the release day of the film, *Temper*, there was high energy all around me. Living in India has trained me into dressing for the occasion, from my previous experiences as a film reviewer, going to crowded movie theatres meant wearing traditional Indian clothing like a salwar kameez with a duppata (loose pants with a loose long shirt and a scarf on my chest). I drove to the premises of the already crowded theatre on my scooter and within seconds I had been catcalled thrice. There were hardly any women in sight. I saw two girls standing in a corner looking as perplexed and worried as I was. Ticket lines opened and there was a sound of heavy drumming from a group of men who brought in 'dumroos' and drums and were beating on them with exquisite passion; groups of men started dancing feverishly, a few took off their shirts and spun them in the air. Some men climbed on to parked cars and danced as well.



Figure 3. A scene at local theatre, 'Sandhya 70mm' on film release Friday. | For more images like this, refer the appendix.

In the background, along the periphery of the theatre were 30-foot cardboard cut-outs of Jr. NTR, about seven in number. I kept my eye on the women, they were handed tickets by two men, they didn't look like friends, the girls paid them money, but the men said that it was 'on the house' and said that they should have come for a later show. It was, however, obvious that the men did not belong to the management of the theatre or worked there. I assumed that they were members of the fan club. The women could not go to the ticket sales counter, because it was potentially risky to be around large groups of loud men who were dancing, but they still managed to get tickets from well meaning fans who noticed that these women are negotiating for space. The cut outs were covered in glitter confetti and huge garlands. My concern was to draw the least amount of attention to myself, so I stood close to the doors of the theatre, but that might have been a bad choice, as soon as they announced the opening, all the viewers leapt towards the door. Men and women have different places of entry because of the security check laws in place in lieu of the bomb blasts and being under constant threat of terrorist activity. I slunk into the theatre and found my assigned seat, all the while hoping against hope that those two women I saw would somehow sit beside me. In my bid to observe, I couldn't negate the feelings of not wanting to be observed.

What happens in theatres is even more interesting than what happens outside. Before the film starts, there were loud calls and chants about the actor. Viewers seated in various sections called out to each other. It seemed like a cricket match stadium, where suddenly strangers who are watching a game of cricket, mobilise themselves towards creating a spectacle together, like the 'mexican wave'¹⁵. The viewers were cheering, jeering and screaming even before the first frame had been projected.

¹⁵ A Mexican wave is phenomenon that occurs at sporting events with huge gatherings where members of the crowd stand up and/or raise their hands in turn, creating the appearance of a wave passing through the crowd. Other terms for this include audience wave or crowd wave.

Filmgoing from what I have observed is a group activity. Without this group camaraderie, the film-going construct is empty. Films are structured to cater to this group activity. Single screen theatres have different prices for different areas of the film screen. Balcony is the most expensive, dress circle is closer to the screen and at a lower level and the seats right in front of the screen are known as ‘Gandhi seats’ (Srinivas L. 2002, 163). On the first day first show, however, these price differences do not make or break a movie watching experience. The goal is to watch the movie on the first day and watch the first show, the price is not a concern, and it is about getting in and making it. Getting the first access to a film’s first screening is understood to be a feat and a minor accomplishment within the peer group. As the projection starts, the excitement reaches new heights, I will refer to the viewers as ‘habituees’ like Lakshmi Srinivas does in her ethnography on the experience of cinema in India.

Habituees may be thought of as insiders to the culture of commercial cinema, audiences who have developed a relationship with the films based on long acquaintance with them. Film-makers, attentive to the expectations of habituees, construct the films as a dialogue with such viewers. The expectations habituees have of movies and the movie-going experience consequently shape the culture of movie-going. (Srinivas L. 2002, 157)

The first day first show movie watchers are habituees who have been engaging with cinema over the years, and this tradition of watching movies on the first day first show is something they appropriate from their peer group and family members. There is not much that can be understood from the dialogue on screen because the cheering and hooting drowns everything else. The fandom is organised to a large extent, laced with excesses and obsessive towards the stars and their image (Srinivas, 2013).

As the stars make their first appearance on screen, there are huge quantities of confetti being thrown towards the screen and in the dark theatre, the confetti looks beautiful floating in the gleam from the projector’s light. There is excessive engagement

with the on screen persona, during songs, viewers get atop their chairs and dance along with the actors on screen and those in close proximity to the screen get up and dance on the dais in front of the screen.

The spectators themselves recreate the visual spectacle they see on screen, except that they are not dancing with their girlfriends, but with their friends and strangers who share the same passion for the actors. The viewers mimic dialogues, act out what they see for approval from their peers. Fight sequences also draw whistles and hoots. What is most interesting is that the viewers aren't guaranteeing blind faith in a film or how it progresses. When they don't like something they see on screen, they make rude comments aimed at the filmmakers, long drawn fight sequences also elicit bored responses from the viewers. In all ways, it is an active and real engagement with what happens on screen. First day shows have an interactive and participatory style of viewing. In overly emotional scenes, fans mimic the sobbing in highly exaggerated fashion eliciting laughter from the others in the theatre. Loud expressions of love are met with comments like "Oh! My!". These interactions subvert the intentions of the filmmaker, and viewers reinterpret and make meaning out of what they see on screen.

Let's explore the arena of fan activity through a deep interview with a president of a fan association, Raghu ¹⁶ (of the Chiranjeevi/Pawan Kalyan/Ram Charan Fan Association). It became apparent that he had consciously devoted a considerable portion of his life towards the 'star'. Fan associations are also caste and family oriented, as I mentioned earlier. Fan activities are conducted in the name of the star, but not all of these are approved by the star himself. This is in agreement with S.V. Srinivas' scope on fan activities where he mentions that it is only a myth that fans are under the control of the stars or their offices. In fact, the star is merely a way in which the fan can conduct functions, ceremonies and a range of other activities that are merely a display of cinephilia.

¹⁶ Pseudonym

Raghu comes from the coastal city of Vishakhapatnam in the Andhra Pradesh region; he moved to Hyderabad after he finished his undergraduate course in engineering in early 2000s. “At that time, Chiranjeevi garu used to meet people who have donated their blood to his blood bank,” says Raghu as he explains his decision to move to Hyderabad. One of the primary motivations for Raghu to move from Vishakhapatnam to Hyderabad was to be located in a close proximity to the actor himself and to somehow inject himself into the actor’s life. He saw Chiranjeevi Charitable Foundation as the perfect place to be able to do so and hoped that he would one day be able to meet the actor himself. “We used have a bi-weekly and a monthly meeting with Chiranjeevi garu, where close to 400-500 people used to stand in lines to be able to meet him, I got spotted once and the first thing Chiranjeevi garu asked me was about what I was doing there (sic), so I said that I came here for a job, then immediately he called his people around him (sic) and said ‘look after this guy, if he needs any help take care of him’,” adds Raghu. Raghu’s eyes well up at his memory and then he told me that he got so emotional when that happened, he told Chiranjeevi that he was just as important as his parents.

So while the adulation and admiration begins from their relationship through the screen, it gets stronger through these modes of reaching out and establishing a steady method of gaining access to the star. Raghu in an overwhelmed state proclaimed, “I had been a fan for a long time, but this incident increased my fanism (sic) towards Chiranjeevi garu, the fact that he helped me out, when he did not have to.” The film therefore simultaneously performs two functions 1) to entertain the audience through its narrative 2) to connect with the audience and involve them in the films. Sara Dickey, a scholar who studied Cinema and South India extensively, also locates fan activity at the intersection of public service and a political realm (in this case, blood drives) (Dickey 2001).

What increases this hysteria and craze for the fans is also a larger than life image of the star on screen, which subtly informs the fans of their inability to access this persona.

The narratives, dialogues and songs become ways in which fans are able to maintain closeness with the stars and the film itself addresses the audience directly. If you watch films starring Chiranjeevi or Nagarjuna, inevitably, the films are shot in a way that there is at least one scene where the actors break the fourth wall and wink at the camera as if they are addressing the fan.

Film-going becomes a small part of the fan activity and the focus shifts to becoming an active member of the group, by doing things, hosting events, rather than just consuming cinema. Raghu now actively moderates the virtual group of fans who are spread across the world through Tollywood Information Discussion Board (TIDB). Through this platform, Raghu said that he has made it a point to help others in need through pooling of money from the members.

The combination of a physically strong male figure on screen and the act of being a compassionate and generous person in real life resonates strongly as the idea of the ideal male. The adulation for these stars comes out of the fact that they embody the values of the caste (which grounds them) and that of class (which gives them privilege they are expected to bestow upon others).

The star becomes a connecting point or the common element within the fan group and the group mobilises itself based on this mutual admiration towards a celebrity. Raghu said that the stars only give 'blessings' and these groups are completely autonomous and are not funded by the stars or their managers.

Once a fan identifies with a star, he also must partake in defending the image and life of the star. As S.V. Srinivas notes that fights between fans of competing stars have been in place since the 1970s. I asked Raghu about the logic behind such 'wars'; at the tip of his fingers he quoted seven statistics about recent box office collections of different actors and he ended the statement by praising Pawan Kalyan (Chiranjeevi's brother) and his collections, which remain unbeatable.

Raghu is unconnected to the film world, he has a day job as an engineer, he meets with the actors once in a while, but he and his fellow fans have no monetary gains coming in from Chiranjeevi or Pawan Kalyan's box office collections. Why then, does Raghu feel so strongly towards defending these numbers that have little to no meaning to his own life? "When you so associated towards a person or a cause, you tend to believe in their successes as your own," said Raghu. In my opinion, Raghu and his fellow fan club members feel protective towards the image they associate with. Qualitative measures of a celebrity, such as acting skills, song and dance skills become subjective and can easily find opposition and negation, but box office collections provide the perfect objective measurement of celebrity and his worth. So how the hero must defend his family, honour and women, the fan association must also defend the hero.

In saving the image of the hero and celebrating it, the fans are validating themselves by injecting themselves in situations they need not put themselves in. Here is an interview with an audience member done by Anweshi Research Centre on Women in Hyderabad:

"Anger is like that. How can we help it? Now suppose you are a Chiranjeevi fan and I am a Nagarjuna fan and films are made with both the heroes. Generally we are quite friendly to each other and we go to a movie. Chiranjeevi hits Nagarjuna 4 or 5 times. So, what do you say? Hey! Did you see that Chiranjeevi hit Nagarjuna? I say, since I am a Nagarjuna fan, maybe, let it go. That scene had to be there in the movie. But actually there is no hostility between them. But you say No! In real life too, Chiranjeevi hits Nagarjuna like that. Then won't I be mad? Then we hit each other." (compiled in *Telugu Cinema: History, Culture, Theory*, 1999, 113)

It is about one-upmanship, and I could apply a discursive model of power here; power is circulatory and exercised through the activities of having wars within this sub-culture to prove manliness/honour/virility that they appropriate from the screen. The 'First Day First Show' preparations are done weeks in advance according to Raghu, he elaborates:

“My preparation starts at least a week before the release. First thing is I’ll find out which is the main theatre, how to decorate the theatre. How many banners can I get? So I usually go to the theatre to do a survey to see how many walls need to be covered in flexi banners. Then we order papers and cut the papers into strips. We make sure that all this is ready at least one day before the release. The next thing we figure out is how to sneak these papers into the theatre, because no theatre owner is happy about doing the clean up after. We also try to buy our tickets in advance and monitor the Internet for responses for the first day responses. My phone is constantly ringing with news from different theatres. There was a time when I used to be annoyed when people didn’t like the film. Now I am older and try to ignore negative feedback. For funding these events, the money comes from my own pocket, or a few of us passionate people raise funds together. My wife does not know that I spend money on such things.”

For Raghu, this behaviour is reflective of his deep admiration for the star. There is often a binary formed in studies of fans and spectatorship that either breaks down the fan as a roguish figure or the devoted fan or the ‘rasika’ (connoisseur). Fan activity is complex, Raghu partakes in all the supposed “rowdy” aspects of the fan activity, but he is also organised and focussed and seems to think that he has an idea about films and filmmaking.

Raghu is not ‘a lazy film goer with nothing better to do’, he has a well paying job at a reputed international IT firm. Raghu’s heavy involvement in fandom is a reaction to the cinema he consumes that is structurally embedded within a framework that defines a certain male role of being a guardian. This abets the acute sense of entitlement (Srinivas 2013) that the fans have towards the star and his life — what he should or shouldn’t do. Srinivas enumerates upon this:

“Screen images are authenticated by drawing on (often fabricated) biographical. In stardom’s “hall of mirrors” (Dyer’s phrase) it is virtually impossible to distinguish object and reflection/illusion....Looking at the image trap from the perspective offered by fan activities, it is possible to suggest that the fan is willful in his insistence that the fiction is true. The game does not end with the creation of the image. The star has to live up to it.” (Srinivas, S.V. 2013, Frontline)

Raghu explains how he has countless times visited movie sets after hearing rumours and gossip in the media circles about how his favourite stars might not be doing signature dialogues. Raghu strongly believes that it is up to him to maintain the image of the star and he has been successful so far. Before *Gabbar Singh*¹⁷ became a hit, Raghu was so worried about the low collections from Pawan Kalyan's movies that he went to the sets and beseeched the director to make a film that would showcase his true potential. Raghu's 'fanism' is simultaneously personal and public.

Take the movie, 'Jalsa' (Celebration) it came out in 2008, and there is one specific scene which elicited a huge response from the audience, Pawan Kalyan in a "comedy scene" in the film says, (referring to the female protagonist, sleeping on the first floor) it is better to chase a girl and rape her than to rape a sleeping woman. The theatre broke into laughter and hysteria, cheering and whistling ensued. Raghu's response to this was it is not that the fans believe this to be true, but scenes like this elicit a positive response because these scenes represent an unspoken fantasy. Raghu says:

We all have such instinctual thoughts, and when we see them take place on screen, it is like fantasy briefly coming to life, let's take the scene from 'Idiot' where the hero tells the police commissioner that he is in love with his daughter, that scene got numerous applause because such a thing won't happen in real life, but there are those who watch the film and have these feelings inside them.

Anish Kuruvilla tells me that cinema is one of the cheapest and most accessible forms of entertainment; aspects of film can fan's someone's aspirations or provided misguided motivation on how to tackle things; like Kuruvilla explains:

For example their basic interaction with women. How a hero speaks to the female protagonist (sic), a lot of youngsters pick up from that, cinema definitely has an influence over such things.

One of the common points of debate about commercial cinema is on the element of non-realism. Many directors and producers in various interviews have claimed that

¹⁷ *Gabbar Singh* is a Telugu film starring Pawan Kalyan and was released in the year 2012.

people want to be entertained and by this they mean that the audience is often looking for a break from their own life, a flight of fantasy to be able to forget their own ordinary lives. Raghu was convinced that the objectification of women on the screen was justified, because it would never happen in real life. Probably because laws govern our real life, the courting they see on screen is tantamount to harassment in real life.

The role of the heroine is at once that of a Madonna and of a whore. She romances the hero, pays attention to his word, listens to him and succumbs to his taming. Raghu is accepting of the idea that he prefers seeing the unrealistic version of himself on screen, who can catcall women, beat up goons, sing and dance when he pleases. The hero becomes a projection of the ultimate machismo that the fan/viewer hopes to achieve, but is grounded enough to realize that real life is governed by physical and legalities. Indraganti tells me that in his interactions with fans and audience members found that many of them dislike the idea of a 'normal', 'well mannered' male, they found such characters boring. A certain shock value is expected in the protagonist. Like Nandakumar (2011, 59) says, "It has to be extraordinary but it must conform to the ordinary value system."

I posed a pertinent question to Raghu: Why are women absent from the fan activities and clubs, don't fans want cinema that engages women as well? Without hesitation, Raghu said, "If you take Telugu movies, it is dominated by heroes and to be honest, we fans don't care about heroines. We go and watch movies for our hero, it does not matter if the actress is a Samantha or an Illeana or whoever." Historically as well, none of the heroines (Soundarya, Savitri or Vijayashanti) had specific fan clubs in their names. Raghu pointed to the idea that women have their limitations and cannot speak to everyone and this low accessibility for the female stars has caused their absence in the public sphere of adulation and fan activity. Raghu also expressed that fan club activities are uniquely male, first day first shows and 100th day events generally draw out a male

crowd and that he and his fellow fans don't encourage women to be a part of the event because most men are drunk and it creates an unsafe atmosphere for the women.

Safety is often cited as an excuse for the exclusion of women, as is evident in Raghu's statement:

There are a lot of times that I have told people not to issue tickets to women. Nowadays a lot of women are coming and asking me for tickets and they are vehement about watching the films, it is fair but you can't control people who are drunk, not everyone has the sense and I don't want to take the risk of putting women in that situation. Personally, I don't like women coming to movies like this on the first day.

Women usually do not go to the movies alone and tend to go to the matinee shows. (Srinivas L. 2002) One of the primary aspects of social cathexis towards women is their safety; this becomes yet another inequality mechanism in place filtering out female involvement because the structure in place does not ensure safety for the women. The same is also reflected in the moral judgement of actresses who seen to voluntarily inserting themselves into a system which is known to be disadvantageous to them. Women are expected to not put themselves in indefensible positions; while there is no inquiry into the causes of precariousness of the position itself.

Fan associations are a masculine space; there are almost no fan clubs or association for female stars. Fan clubs that emerge for heroines are subsidiary clubs of existing male super stars. If an actress acts with one actor in many films and those films have gone on to become hits, the actress by default gets associated with the fan club of the main leading actor. One of the main aspects of fandom in the context of Telugu films is that of protecting the image of the star. So the feminine voice is absent in this context as well.

Chapter VI

Heroism: Structural narratives of the ideal man

It is only when directors produce enough hits that they go on to launch production houses of their own, primarily because they develop a market value of their own. But before this can happen, there is caste that acts as privilege. Where you belong to in the social order begins to matter. And economics have equal bearing on how commercial cinema is framed. S.V. Srinivas expands about this notion by highlighting the taxation laws in the State for cinema. After 1983, theatres were classified area-wise and with the size and amenities they offered so as to avoid the practice of under reporting ticket sales.

The slab system, introduced to discipline the industry, propped up the mass film, whose wide appeal and star presence was thought to ensure full houses. (Srinivas 2009, 81)

This ‘slab system’ also gave birth to a formulaic cinema and the industry began to display a fondness for action dramas.

As Hemanth Kumar, a film writer and journalist from the city explained to me in an interview, films needed to sell more and ‘action dramas’ became a recurring genre. This also coincided with the rise of films starring Chiranjeevi, which encompassed qualities of the machismo, do-gooder masculinities. Srimantha also mentioned that the formula is omnipresent and essential:

It is not just Telugu films that have formula, even Hollywood films do. See, right from the ancient times, it has been clear that men and women have different abilities. Our mind set is such that when we look at a man, we think hero. Hedonism is something we worship. Our thinking has been tuned right from International cinema to Indian cinema. The man must be the hero, at least the physicality of it.

Srimantha who has made films with strong female characters shies away from calling his films ‘women centric’. The connotation of the phrase ‘women centric’ in the industry is equivalent to ‘boring’ and ‘preachy’. In a number of my interviews, this became clear. Men and women spoke about ‘women oriented’ and ‘women centric’ cinema with considerable disdain. “No! No! My films are not women centric or feminist, they have strong female characters who are trying to find equality and balance,” said Srimantha. These words have negative impact and key players in the industry don’t take well to calling their films feminist, because they understand the word to be negative or “against men” as Srimantha proclaimed. Also, the industry itself is driven by the hero centrism, which means that the hero gets the central role because the industry’s profit or loss is determined by the male protagonist.

Another director also mentioned in an interview, “I don’t know what the problem with commercial cinema is, these days women are reading too much and making a big deal out of nothing. Some things are meant only for entertainment; they should be looked at as entertainment. Art cinema like women oriented films have messages, but they are boring, who will watch them?” The discourse around “meaningful” cinema is laden with spite. In an interview Shweta¹⁸, an aspiring actress in the industry also claimed that she wanted to become a commercial hit. “I don’t want to become typecast in those un-glamorous roles. I am looking for success and message oriented films and women oriented films are so boring,” she said. This slotting of films with strong female characters as being boring and preachy stems from a culture of filmmaking that celebrates machismo and masculinity. There is a clear divide between films — entertainers vs. women centric, but there is little to no thought being put into the idea that entertainers can also be made in ways that do not deprecate the female role.

¹⁸ Pseudonym

Contemporary Telugu commercial cinema typically has five key elements (with a slight degree of variation). The **hero** is primary to the storyline. He is strong, physically able, witty and able to express violence when the need arises. The stories have an antagonist that the hero must defeat/avenge.

A significant portion is allotted to **songs and dances**, usually set in foreign locales, which generally denote the romance between the lead actors. Specific songs perform a specific function — romance/melodic tunes to portray love, innuendo laden songs that signify a man's virility and sexual prowess and lyrics for the female profess commitment and a coy admission of lust towards the man. 'Item songs' are those which have poorly clothed women (not the lead female actors) who try to seduce the hero, the lyrics for these songs are filled with double meaning and explicitly showcase the 'item girls'" lust towards the hero who eventually does not pay attention to these 'loose women'. In family movies, there is also a song/ballad denoting the love between family members and usually shot to montages of the members of the family performing their roles.

A commercial film devotes significant screen time to elaborately shot **fight sequences** with the hero, with stray incidents with small time goons progressing into a huge climax at the end where the hero singlehandedly and violently beats men who are physically stronger than him.

Heroines or the hero's potential **love interest** form a significant portion of the narrative. Some films have two female leads for the same character and some have even three. Heroines are good-looking women who often find themselves through the hero. The formula/typified film, through its narrative, various gazes (male, female and of the camera) create a mechanism that creates a gendered audience (Mulvey 2009).

In recent times, the content of films have transformed to include a category of genres and there has been an upward trend in 'family entertainers'. Such films have a little something for everyone: action, drama, emotion, music and dance. While the industry has

been contemplative enough to think inclusively in terms of the audience, most storylines still revolve around the man. There are enough vignettes of emotions, music, romance and drama to appease various kinds of people, but they never take centre-stage. It is problematic because a singular view reproduces a particular way of looking at life and it limits the possibilities of making meaning through cinema.

Rural dramas have been a recent trend where stories of heroes wishing to go back to their roots are a major theme. There are significant threads of reuniting with families: sons with their mothers, fathers and sisters. The setting of the film also ends up contrasting the ‘untoward’ and ‘fast’ life of the city with that of the quiet, calm and loving setting of the village, where there is a place for men and women in the society and everyone in the village unquestioningly, but most importantly, obliviously adhere to gender norms and roles. Deviance of such norms is portrayed in jest and the films do not actually toe the line of actual role reversals. Therefore, representation becomes both: a process and a product in which meanings of gender are constructed (De Lauretis 1987).

Take the movie, ‘Seethamma Vaakitlo Sirimalle Chettu’ (The jasmine tree in Sitamma’s courtyard) for example. The title itself is reminiscent of what is lost in a fast paced city life, for working class or middle class inhabitants of the city who live in matchbox apartments, a courtyard is a distant dream, but also a memory of their past. For example, time spent at their grandparents or parents houses in smaller towns and villages. Rural life is actively romanticised and a strong sense of nostalgia surrounds the portrayal. The image itself is feminised to express a quiet contained life that a very ‘masculine’ city cannot provide. The film was directed by Srikanth Addala and in various interviews he has claimed that the ‘Sita’¹⁹ he refers to in the film refers to the character from Ramayana, who he believes to be missing in the contemporary context (see footnote). ‘Vakiti’ (the

¹⁹ Sita is the primary female protagonist from the Ramayana, a hindu mythological tale about King Rama. Sita is King Rama’s wife who is abducted by Ravana, but remains chaste for the King and is questioned by the King about her faithfulness and proves to be so. Sita is often referred to as the ‘perfect woman’ because she is virtuous, faithful and remains faithful even after her husband exiles her to the forest.

courtyard), according to Addala is the country and ‘Sirimalle Chettu’ (Jasmine tree) symbolises the family. Srikanth Addala comes from the East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh, a coastal and fertile region from the state. Like Nandakumar rightly notes:

What roles women play onscreen is more often than not, the male director’s notion of what roles women ought to be playing. This notion is based on the director’s beliefs, attitudes and values, combined with what the director thinks viewers want to see. What viewers want to watch is something that conforms to their beliefs, attitudes and values, which come from the social framework within which they live, which is the same social framework in which directors, live. There has to be a consistency in the beliefs, attitudes and values of all those involved (Nandakumar 2011, 2).

Srikanth Addala, brought his own socialization to life through the medium of film. Nandakumar’s statements and my observations with Srikanth Addala’s film support Milton Rokeach’s (1968) theory on beliefs, attitudes and values.

In the following section, I will analyse scenes and themes from popular cinema and how it reifies hegemonic masculinity through the moving image.

The scene: A ruffian (protagonist) chances upon a betrothal ceremony of the female protagonist, with just one look, he decides that he is in love with her. He approaches her and says, ‘I love you’; however she is about to be engaged to the villain of the narrative. The villain treats the girl with contempt and is tangibly dominating towards her. She is only marrying him, because he helped her family through tough times. Tempers flare, egos get bruised and after a verbal combat of who is the most macho of them all, the protagonist says: “If anyone sits in the chair that I throw my kerchief on, I’ll rip his skin...” and then proceeds to heroically throw the kerchief towards the female protagonist and it lands on her shoulder and heart and continues to say, “...and if anyone dares to covet the girl I have lost my heart to, I’ll blow their heads off!” the scene ends with the villain’s men trying to beat up the protagonist, who in a massive show of heroism escapes unharmed and manages to beat all the goons. (Daruvu 2012)

Daruvu (translates to a strong musical beat), the protagonist (portrayed by Ravi Teja) woos the female protagonist (portrayed by Tapsee Pannu) by throwing a handkerchief towards her that lands on her shoulders.

There might be a question about why it constitutes as wooing and what does the act signify: while I cannot answer the first question, the connotation of throwing a

handkerchief refers to the public act of throwing handkerchiefs through windows of city and state transport buses to claim a seat. (Tadinada 2012) The act of thus throwing a handkerchief on a woman also then means to claim her for oneself, like the seat of a bus, the requisite of consent is ignored and this act of throwing a kerchief is represented as the ideal working class masculinity. Masculinity takes form in the image of a brazen man claiming his right over the woman from a higher social class engaged to a corrupt, goon.

The consent is not important here, because the woman is shown to not love the man she is marrying. Consent is blatantly absent and this very absence is also the defining point of the protagonist's machismo. The woman in this film is catering to a certain male fantasy of getting what he wants. Her having no say in what is transpiring around her, inflates the machismo being portrayed in the film.

I argue that masculinity and machismo is over emphasized and oozes in excess in the films at the cost of reducing the female voice and narrative. In an interview with Times of India, Tapsee Pannu said, "The objectification and sexualisation is not restricted to clothes alone. The manner in which a female character is addressed in some of the dialogues and songs, clearly suggest references to her sexuality and how the man is going to exploit it. It's akin to raping a woman with words." (Kumar 2014, Times of India)

The scene: The male protagonist (Mahesh Babu) finds the female protagonist (Kajal Agarwal) taking a break during her daily run by the beach. He looks at her and says, "Hey (rudely) how many times do I have to tell you to stop chasing me?..." she is taken aback (because she has never met him before) and she tries to clear the misunderstanding (through small utterances and non-verbal body language) but he rudely shuts her up again. "If I open Facebook, I see that you've sent about a 100 messages! I am afraid to open Twitter! And what are those dirty things you're writing (implying that sexually explicit messages were being sent), are you even a girl? As a man, even I am embarrassed to read them! The female protagonist tries to clear the obvious misunderstanding again, but he yells at her, "Shut up!" and she starts crying. He then says, "I am in Mumbai for ten more days, if I see you near this beach again or if you try to meet me at my Hotel, I will bury you then and there! Bloody prostitute! Widow! (Businessman 2012)

Businessman was a hugely popular film, starring Mahesh Babu who was colloquially referred to as 'Prince Mahesh Babu' and is now called Superstar Mahesh. In the limited repository of popular actors in the Telugu Film Industry, Mahesh is considered to be a 'beautiful man'. In most films, he is portrayed as the hero who is coveted by many women. The scene mentioned above is an introductory scene for the two lead protagonists, a misunderstanding that has a comedic undertone and over exaggerated emotions. The entire scene serves one purpose: to show that the male protagonist is indeed highly coveted and wanted by women, he can't help his good looks, but he belongs to a higher ground because he does not pay attention to these women of obvious low morals who chase him. Women who chase men are not 'good girls' and men who don't get tempted by these women are to be revered because they aren't giving in to their 'male instincts' and 'male nature' which creates an acceptable bubble for men to do as they please.

The scene signals the protagonists 'pure intent' unharmed by the 'eves' that chase him or titillate him with sexual messages; the protagonist is strongly objecting to the actions of the woman who is sending him these messages, he is also condemning those actions. He accuses the female protagonist that such messages shouldn't be sent by women, even as a man (who is allowed, socially to be lewd, crass and loud), he still finds the messages unsavoury.

He leaves after he calls her a prostitute-widow (the Telugu word for this is *Lanja munda*) and in the cultural context, the word signifies a widow devoid of any boundaries, as in, a widow who needs to satisfy her sexual (depraved) passions and lures other married men and thus turns into a whore. The female voice, here too is unheard figuratively and literally as he cuts her off before she can explain herself, yells at her and stomps off.

This kind of gender formation creates an idea of power and privilege. I am in agreement with Halberstam when she presents the idea that subordinating other

masculinities and femininities forms 'heroic masculinities'; "masculinity extends outwards into patriarchy and inwards into the family" (Halberstam 1998, 2). The way films are structured and narrated build on the essentialist differences between man and woman, a popular motif of comic relief in many films (cutting across various film industries) in India is an argument about what makes men superior, the scenes display a series of acts which both men and women can do and inevitably, the men in the scene as one last display of masculinity take their shirts off and look at the women with a winning smirk that asserts that obviously you are women, you can't take your shirt off in public. By way of shaming women through their bodies, the heroic masculinity stands out. A hierarchy is constructed by taking indisputable differences into account in order to evaluate one's humanity.

The narrative itself is gendered, Mohan Krishna Indraganti, an acclaimed director in Telugu industry tells me in an interview that the industry as a whole is still under the influence of mythology and epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Indraganti says:

Our narratives are hero-centric. Probably, I feel that there still a lot of influence from mythology and our epics. Where exaggeration is a part of narrative style. Heroism like in many cultures is associated with physical prowess, and performing violent activities. And sexual virility which is underlined by having one or two heroines in a film. So the hero on the one hand has to physically beat people who look stronger than him, so these exaggerated fight sequences showcase his masculinity and there are these obligatory two or three heroine setups where they are shown to be falling all over him saying, "Okay you 'satisfy' us". So this is an absolutely dominating storytelling approach in Telugu films.

Archetypes from the mythological epics are adapted in ways to suit contemporary times. A new stereotype emerges that still caters to a particular male fantasy located in a particular socialization. Introductory scenes for the heroes are often greatly exaggerated, employing imageries of thunder and lightening or the earth shaking to signify the hero's physical prowess; highlighting an essentially masculine essence that is greater than life. The visual effects, photographic and cinematographic elements celebrate strength and virility

through the body of the man — the hero. At the outset, the films depict a fictitious world drawing upon elements from reality, it is problematic when the narrative only has an appearance of being real or verisimilitude.

Anish Kuruvilla mentioned in an interview with me that the process of story generation for a film begins with the vision of the hero:

In terms of storytelling, we are doing what we did ten years ago...Most often, what happens is that a certain director or an actor decide to work with each other. Usually a hero comes on board and a story is then designed for him instead of a story being created and then you go and cast an actor (sic). So let's say we have X, Y and Z actors, and if we have X's dates available and X is willing to work with us, let's figure out what will work for him.

So, the narrative is designed to fit the actor, the story does not drive the casting. The industry, Anish claims has an “alpha male complex”; “men cannot look beyond themselves, being the decision makers, being the warriors, being everything they can be but at the end of the day, he is a good guy (sic),” he added. This does not imply that filmmakers sit around a round table discussing how to construct masculinity, but viewers and their own backgrounds inform these constructions (Rajan 2006).

The approach to characterisation and depiction of relationships, especially between the hero vs. heroine or masculinity vs. femininity; masculinity is portrayed as dominant. There are certain notions about women that are perceived and propagated as essential to them. Indraganti tells me that such notions could be that women are sentimental, emotional, or that women are irrational whereas men should be strong and if need be, fully capable of violence — “strange rituals of courting which border on harassment which the woman seems to take; the narratives sanction that power.” Like Mulvey argues, the image causes a masculine subject to emerge. The masculine subject identifies with the male characters and objectifies the female characters. According to Indraganti, there has been a definite shift in the portrayal of heroes after the 90s and that the heroes are more

aggressive, insulting and brash now and he directs me towards the conceptualisation of the 'urban woman'.

"The hero sees through the hypocrisy of the urban woman and peels it off by showing her that she is as sexually vulgar as the hero is but you are putting up a façade of chastity. The hero calls her out on this and the heroine realises and falls at his feet and professes her love to the hero. This kind of narrative has taken centre-stage," says Indraganti. This is the formulaic narrative adopted by most filmmakers in the industry. There are also increased anxieties in the industry about the cultural degeneration of the urban woman who is financially independent and lives a certain luxurious life and is now exploiting men. For example, Maruti's "Ee Rojullo" (In these days), a complaining dialogue is aimed as warning for men to not trust women. So you also have a middle class masculinity, which doubts the sincerity of urban women with dialogues such as, "boyfriends are like ATMs, any time money".

The small town masculinity/also brazen masculinity as seen in Ravi Teja movies is the aggressive sort who puts women in their place and later thanked for it by the women themselves. These are the predominant tropes of masculinity which exist in the films.

The point, however, is that although individual conceptualizations of masculinity depart from the hegemonic norm, non-hegemonic meanings are suppressed due to perceptions of "appropriate" masculinity. Even in a community where notions of the "new man" are common and where antisexist attitudes are often expected, hegemonic patterns of masculinity prevail. One whose masculinity conceptualization is non-hegemonic still understands himself as "not what 'real' men are supposed to be. (Bird 1996, 127)

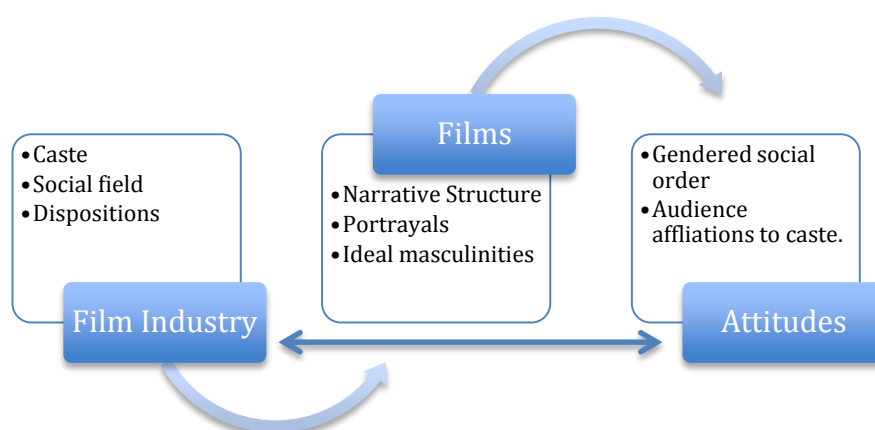
Thus, the "appropriate" hero through depictions in film, typically must upset standards of civility in order to be gain a cult or heroic status and with all the anxieties directed towards the woman, there is a eulogising of the "chaste Indian woman".

“There is an anxiety amongst filmmakers that whatever they show in the films, however deviant, however ‘un-Indian’, we must uphold the identity of the Indian woman, which is highly masculinised and overtly patriarchal and this idea of the ‘good Indian woman’ is also a creation of the man!” says Indraganti’s who’s latest film, “Bandipotu’s” first draft of the script had the protagonist in the role of a garbage collector with subtle humour. Indraganti told me that he was faced with tremendous pressure of whether the audience would accept this or not, “I was afraid that people might say that the protagonist is not heroic enough,” said Indraganti. Because there has been a long standing idea of what heroism should look like and sound like, the doors of mainstream cinema are shut for different narratives.

When women and men are portrayed in roles that conform to norm, it becomes difficult to conduct any separation between the framework and the representation. Social practices organize relations of social life, as Schippers (2007, 92) writes — “Practice, then, is not masculinity and femininity as Connell suggests; social practice, in all its forms, from embodied interaction to child raising, sexual activity, developing and executing policy, passing legislation, producing television programming, and invading countries, is the mechanism by which masculinities and femininities, as part of a vast network of gender meanings, come to organize social life”

Reflections

Through my research on the field, I discovered that there is a lot more to what meets the eye. Statements such as ‘the industry is sexist’ or ‘that’s how it works’ are commonplace. Sure, the films are gendered in the way they are treated and presented to the audience but the most important answer lies in the *why/how* and not the *what*. Through persistent questioning and un-layering the industry, it becomes clear that there are mechanisms in place that legitimise the gendered structures. It became key to understand the ‘invisible’ forces that encourage masculine dominance. Through an interdisciplinary approach, that uses ethnographic vignettes, participant observation, interviews that describe practices and thoughts, and content analysis, I have been able to find answers as to what perpetrates the gender hierarchy.



Hegemonic masculinity is located in the ‘old boys network’/gendered structure of the industry made of men, and the films are made by men/for men. The influx or ejection of women from the industry does not cause a major financial upheaval. While women have made strides in the country, it is not easy to dismiss the distinct lack of women behind the scenes. Considering that the Telugu film industry is close-knit in terms of caste inclinations which inform the familial hegemony in place that relies on complicity from women. If you notice, the men occupy the fixed slots, their careers typically span over twenty years. NTR’s film career lasted 44 years, ANR’s career spanned many decades too.

Balakrishna's and Nagarjuna's careers have spanned about 40 years and they are still going strong. Meanwhile, the actresses they worked with and romanced on screen have faded into oblivion or resort to playing the roles of mothers on screen. The feminine is othered; women in the industry are disposable, therefore vulnerable.

A habituated audience insulates this network. The audience is exposed to other media (such as television, commercials, books, novels, new media, news), which might also reinforce certain ideology. Film narratives are written to glorify and celebrate machismo. The stories are written to entertain the audience, a large portion of which is male. As Anish says, "People behind the scenes and those who consume cinema are mostly men. So there is a one-sided view and there is an over projection of what we can call, the 'alpha male'."

The scope for this particular field is extensive; this research is limited in its capacity as it only looks a few aspects of the industry. As a follow up to this research, I envision two ethnographically oriented inquiries; firstly into the lives of the women from the film families. This research points to their absence, it does not necessarily address their side of the story (partly due to the limitations of time, access and the capacity of this social inquiry). Secondly an inquiry that focuses on the experiences of female members (in all capacities, make-up artists, assistant directors, producers, scriptwriters, storyboard artists, cinematographers) of the film fraternity. I am confident that a 'gendered organization theory' could be extended to this inquiry as well. This thesis can be expanded upon in a number of ways using various lenses. As an industry located in an increasingly globalizing country, there is immense scope to study how the industry is affected by changing global-scapes, neoliberal ideologies that are leaving an indelible mark on how the industry functions.

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Appendix (A)

Film Families

1. (Late) N.T. Rama Rao

N.T. Rama Rao or NTR as he is popularly referred to, was a famous and celebrated actor in his days. He went on to become the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh (1983-1995) owing to his on screen popularity. N.T.R has four daughters and twelve sons. Of the twelve sons, Balakrishna pursued a career in acting and became quite popular. Another son, Harikrishna turned politician but has also acted in films. Harikrishna's son, Jr. NTR is now a reigning superstar in the industry; his brother Kalyan Ram is also a well known actor. None of the daughters from this family are in the film industry in any capacity.

2. Krishna

Krishna was known as 'Superstar Krishna' in his days. He was also elected as a member of the parliament for the Congress Party in 1989. Krishna has two sons and three daughters. Of the sons, Mahesh or 'Prince' Mahesh as he is popularly referred to is another iconic film star in the industry currently reigning the box office numbers. His other son, Ramesh Babu acted in a few films and has now turned producer. One of the daughters, Manjula Ghattamaneni acted in and produced a National Award winning film, 'Show' in 2002. Krishna's second wife, Vijaya Nirmala is an actress, producer and film director. Vijaya Nirmala was one the first female directors and she directed over 44 films. Vijaya Nirmala's son, Naresh (from her first marriage) is also an actor.

3. Late Akkineni Nageswara Rao

ANR as he was popularly known was a huge celebrity. He was an actor and a producer. He has three daughters and two sons. One of the sons is Akkineni Nagarjuna who is an extremely popular actor in the industry. Nagarjuna's son, Naga Chaitanya (from his marriage to Lakshmi Daggubati, Ramanaidu's daughter) is also fairly popular and Nagarjuna will soon be introducing his youngest, Akhil (from his marriage to Amala, a former actress) to the industry as well. Amala quit the film industry after her marriage to Nagarjuna in 1992; she recently made a comeback into the industry a small supporting role.

4. Chiranjeevi

Chiranjeevi is a phenomenon to the industry. The actor is immensely popular in the industry. He recently turned politician, his success is also owed to his popularity as a film star. Chiranjeevi has two daughters and a son. Ram Charan Tej, his son is also one of the biggest stars in the film industry currently. Chiranjeevi's wife, Surekha is Allu Aravind's (producer and media owner) sister. Chiranjeevi's brother, Pawan Kalyan (also known as 'Power Star') is extremely popular; another brother Nagababu, acts in some films and is into production.

5. Allu Aravind

He is the son of the famous and well-respected actor, Allu Rama Lingaiah. Allu Aravind is a producer and film distributor in the industry. He also owns Geetha Arts (a production company) along with his brother-in-law Chiranjeevi. He is also the

director of MAA TV, a popular Telugu television network. Allu Aravind has three sons, of whom, Allu Arjun and Allu Sirish are well known and popular actors.

6. Late D. Ramanaidu

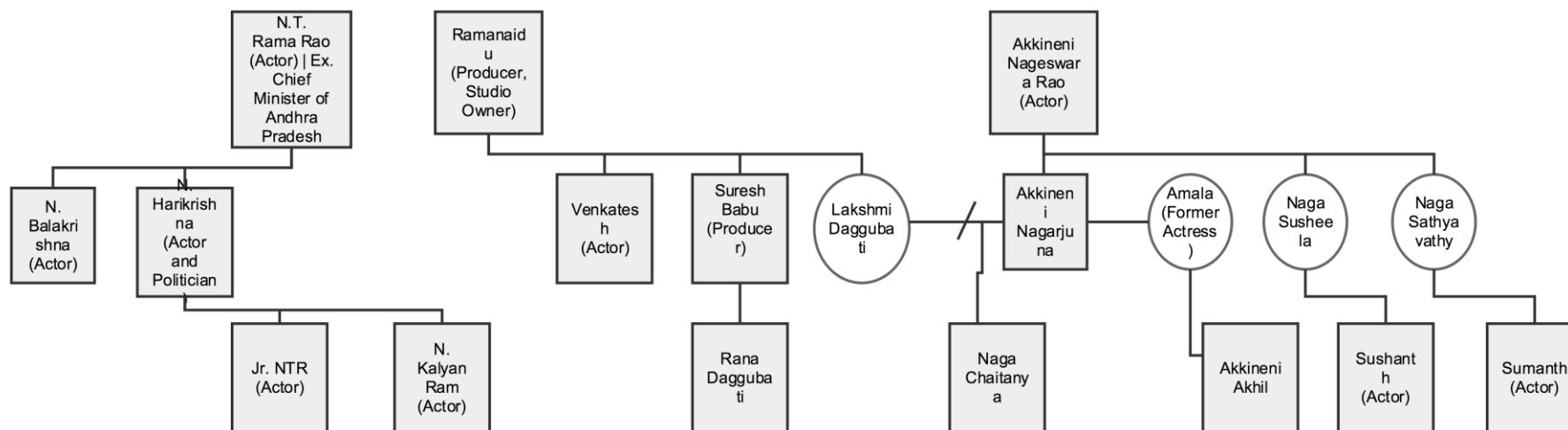
He was one the biggest film producers in the country and the founder of Suresh Productions. He has two sons and a daughter. Daggubati Suresh Babu is a producer and the managing director of Suresh Productions; Daggubati Venkatesh, also known as 'Victory' Venkatesh is a hugely popular actor. Venkatesh has three daughters and a son, who is yet to be launched into the industry. Suresh Babu's son, Rana Daggubati is a popular actor now. Ramanaidu's daughter, Lakshmi was married to Akkineni Nagarjuna and is the mother of Naga Chaitanya, the actor.

7. Krishnam Raju

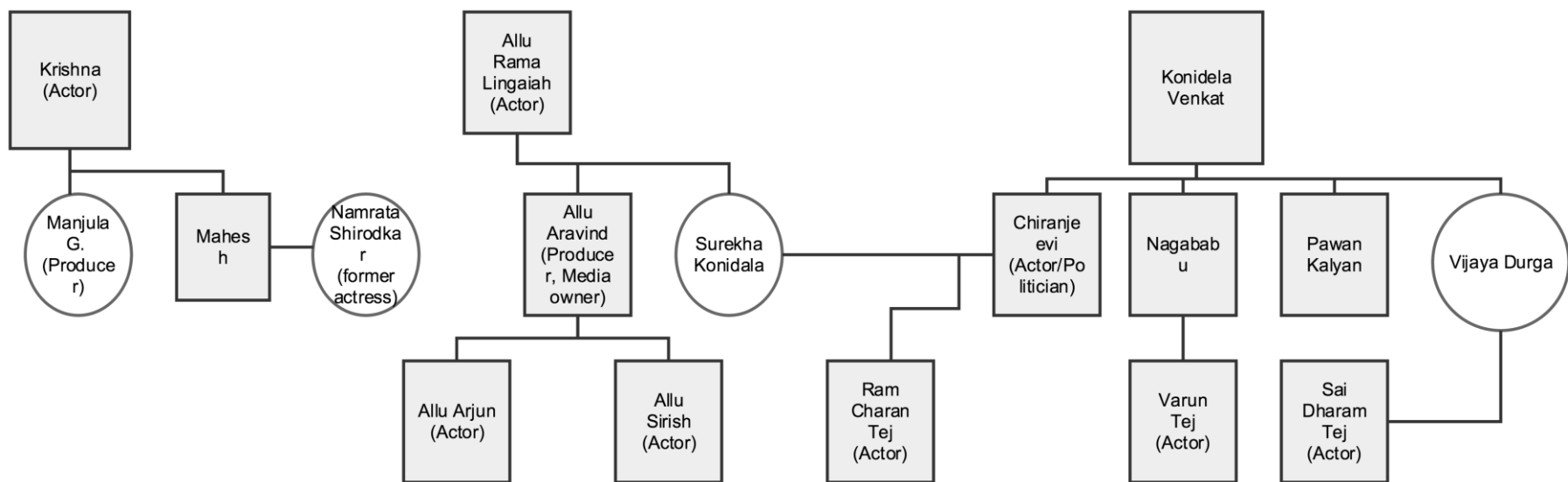
He was known as the 'Rebel Star' during his days of popularity. His brother's son, Prabhas is now conferred the same title and is a huge star in the industry.

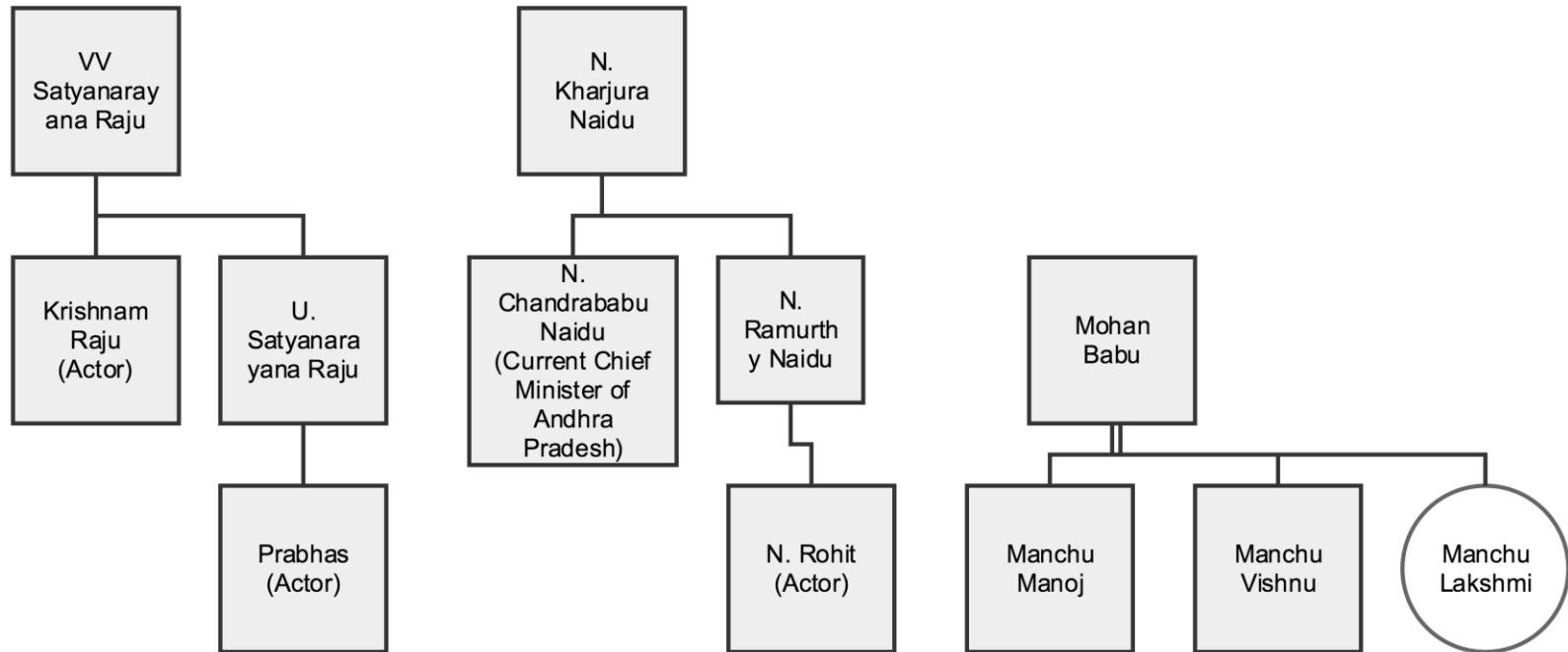
Appendix (A1)

(Kinship Chart/Family Tree)



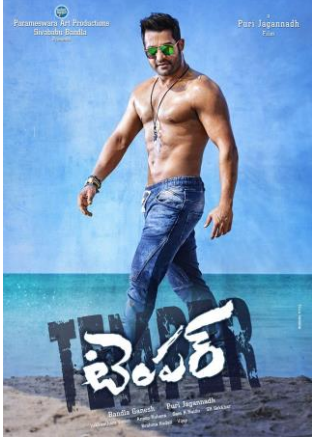


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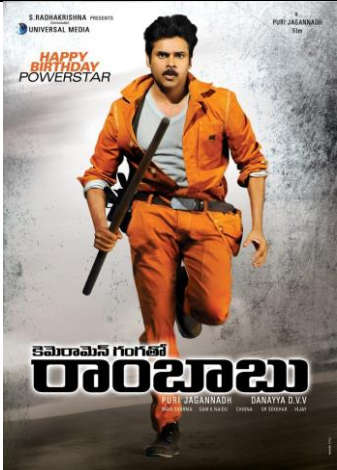
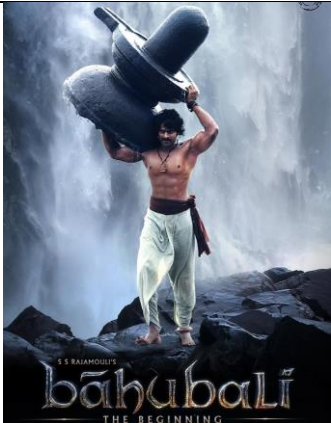
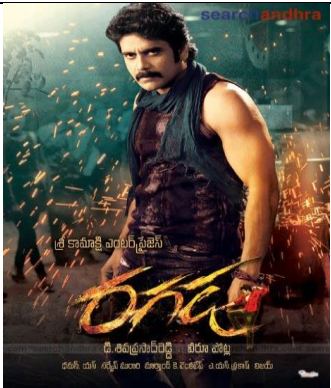


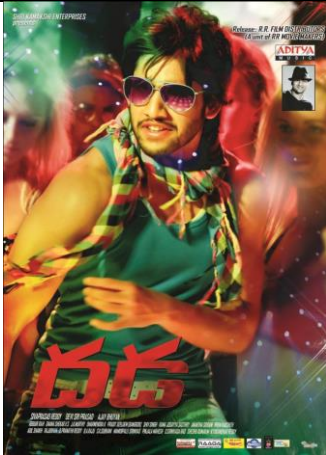
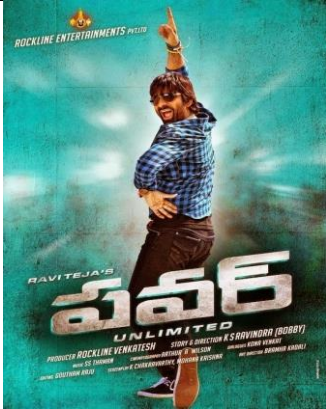


Appendix (A2)

Current Stars ruling the Box Office

	Actor	Picture	Roots in the Industry
1.	Jr. NTR	 <p>Figure 4. Jr. NTR in the film, 'Temper'</p>	Son of N.T. Rama Rao, worked in the film industry between 1949-1993. He served as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh between 1983 – 1995 (owing to his ‘star’ status), belongs to the Kamma/Chowdhary caste
2.	Mahesh Babu	 <p>Figure 5. Mahesh in ‘Businessman’</p>	Son of Krishna or popularly known as ‘Superstar Krishna’ made films between 1962-1995 and has a huge fan base. The same fan base has taken his son under their wing. Krishna has a daughter, Manjula who is now a film producer. They belong to the Kamma caste.
3.	Ram Charan Tej	 <p>Figure 6. Ram Charan Tej</p>	He is the son of Chiranjeevi (popularly known as ‘Megastar’) worked in the industry between 1978-present. He was the Minister of Tourism (Independent Charge) and is currently a Rajya Sabha (Upper House) member of the Parliament. They belong to the Kapu Caste.

		in 'Yevadu'	
4.	Pawan Kalyan	 <p>Figure 7. Pawan Kalyan in 'Attaru Intiki Daaredhi'</p>	Chiranjeevi's younger brother; Pawan Kalyan is often referred to as the 'Power Star'
5.	Prabhas	 <p>Figure 8. Prabhas in his new film 'Bahubali'</p>	He is the nephew of Uppalapati Krishnam Raju, an actor who worked in the industry between 1966-1994. Krishnam Raju was known as the 'Rebel Star' and his nephew has inherited the same name. They belong to the Raju caste (Kshatriyas).
6.	Nagarjuna	 <p>Figure 9. Nagarjuna in 'Ragada'</p>	Son of Akkineni Nageswara Rao who worked in the industry between 1941-2011. ANR as he is referred too was extremely popular and was considered to be a 'heartthrob'. They belong to the Kamma Caste

7.	Naga Chaitanya	 <p>Figure 10. Naga Chaitanya in 'Dhada'</p>	Son of Nagarjuna and grandson of Akkineni Nageswara Rao.
8.	Ravi Teja	 <p>Figure 11. Ravi Teja in 'Power'</p>	One of the only actors in the industry who does not have outright connections to any 'film families', he is a self-made actor. He belongs to the Raju caste.

Appendix (B)

Fan Culture: A visual representation



Source: Frontline Magazine, Rajnikanth (Tamil Superstar) being bathed in Milk
Photo: Ashok R.



Source: iTolly.com, Fans throng Rana Daggubati and Venkatesh with garlands.



Source: SBDB Forum (a Telugu cinema discussion board on the internet), In this photo, a cut of Sai Dharam Tej at Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad.



Source: www.filmytelugu.com | A cut out of Mahesh from the movie 'Aagadu'.

This picture accompanies this text:

“Prince Mahesh Babu's Aagadu is slated for release on 19th September, huge arrangements for decorating the theaters and erecting cutouts. Municipal Officials have foiled the plans of Superstar Fans to arrange a 90 feet Mahesh Babu cutout at Lenin Center in Vijayawada prior to the release of 'Aagadu' citing safety measures. A heated argument took place between the officials and fans regarding this issue. Meanwhile, A fan of Mahesh Babu jumped into the canal at nearby distance protesting this move. Luckily, Fans who were present in big numbers succeeded in bring him back to the shores. Mahesh Fans launched a protest soon after the cutout was removed and shifted to police station. They are willing to remove the cutout themselves from the location post the release of 'Aagadu' if Municipal Officials issue the permission.” (<http://www.filmytelugu.com/twt-aagadu-cutout-controversy-in-vijayawada-43436.htm>)



Source: Raghu (my contact in the fan clubs). First day first show screening of 'Gabbar Singh' starring Pawan Kalyan. (Top) Fans dancing in front of the screen in the opening scene. (Bottom) Confetti and strips of paper being thrown in the air to mark punch dialogues.



Source: Bollywoodlife.com | This poster was in the news because Samantha (the woman in the poster) tweeted, “Samantha tweeted saying "Saw a poster of a yet to be released Telugu film. Not only is it deeply regressive, but it's point is actually that it is deeply regressive”.

To this, the actor in the poster (Mahesh) apologised, but it sounded more like an excuse. “That poster is not controversial. But there is a lyric in that song ‘Oka ganta fish Padadhaama’ (Let’s fish for an hour), and to match the lyric, they composed it that way. It might look regressive and offensive in poster, but everything would be normal when we see the song on screen. It was not intentional to hurt anyone, but its a mistake..my apologies for that” Mahesh’s fans however retaliated against Samantha on the Internet and protested her statements.