

CHAPTER II
CELLULOID AND ITS PAST

Every society has a cultural mechanism to mediate its inner social and political conflicts. While the material needs are fulfilled through economic and scientific development, cultural development is achieved through the cultivation of fine arts. Throughout history different art forms have effectively contributed for the fulfilment of both the secular-material and entertainment needs of people. Puppetry, *Yakshagana*, *Veedhi Bhagavatas*, i.e., street plays are some of the popular performing art forms in traditional Andhra. These folk forms are both preservers and propagators of traditional literature, folk history, religious precepts [epics], moral world order and social system. These are considered to be peoples' arts. The Ballad (*Burra Katha*) and *Jamukula Katha* are also important among the traditional communicative folk arts. The highest form of folklore communicator has been drama.

It is in this sense that the popular drama assumes an important social function in the society. The beginnings of the Telugu popular theatre can be traced back to 1880-81, when the drama troops from Dharwad used to visit Andhra to give performances taking themes from well known Indian epics and other mythologies.

(A) Political Theatre

Even during the 19th century, the theatre groups in Andhra were content with performing mythologicals with all the ingredients of escapist entertainment and traditional morality and world view. Despite colonial education and modernity, the stage

artistes were regarded as veritable outcasts and they kept themselves away from the mainstream of society. There, however, was a dramatic change with the emergence of Gandhian movements for national liberation particularly from the first decade of the present century. During this period, Guntur has emerged as headquarters of dramatic activity; writing and staging of politically inspired propaganda plays. The first major catalyst that triggered the politicization of popular theatre was the wave of anger that swept the country following the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in Punjab in 1919. The first play of this type was *Panchala Parabhavam* (The Insult Offered to Panchali) by Pundarikakshudu of Guntur.¹ This five act play dealt directly with the events that followed the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre. Another play that attracted lot of attention both from the public and the government was *Swarajya Swapnam* (The Dream of Self Rule) produced by Tilak Nataka Samajam, Guntur. The police, alarmed at the increasing popularity of the play,² banned its staging through out the presidency. The life of Tilak was a favourite theme among the Telugu playwrights of this period. Sripada Krishna Murthy's *Tilak Maharaja Naatakam* was banned before it could be produced on stage³

¹S.Theodore Baskaran, **The Message Beaxers: The Nationalist Politics and the Entertainment Media in South India, 1880-1945**, Madras, 1981, p.26.

²*Ibid.*, p.27.

³*Ibid.*, p.28.

Avatara Parivartanam, which depicted Tilak's life story though was staged in Guntur but was soon proscribed.⁴

The patriotic theatre movement that started in Guntur was fairly a well organized one. The drama actors formed into a Dramatic Association to carry on propaganda for the Congress and simultaneously raise money to sustain political agitations. The Association also, very ingeniously, put folk music, ballads, *hari kathas* and street dramas to effective use to gain deeper penetration into the rural areas. Modern Street Plays were educative with social themes of contemporary relevance.⁵ *Burrakathas* were very popular in Andhra.⁶ Nasser of Guntur, Kummari Master of Vizianagaram, were the famous Burrakatha artists. "*Battle of Bobbili*", "*Battle of Palnadu*", "*India's Freedom Struggle*", "*Cripp's Mission*", "*Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose*" and "*The Life History of Vivekananda*" were some of the few Burrakathas of the period. Sunkara Satyanarayana wrote *Alluri Seetharama Raju*. Nasser popularised *Kashta Jeevi* a Burrakatha written by Sunkara Satyanarayana with the ideology of socialism. The severe conditions

⁴**Ibid.**

S.G.D. Chandrasekhar, " Street Plays in Telugu," in **Telugu** [Monthly], Issue.9, Vol.5, September 1991, pp.17-20. Also see Ponangi Sri Rama Appa Rao, **Telugu Nataka Vikasam**, Hyderabad, 1967, pp.191-233 and Sri Srinivasa Chakravarthi, "*Andhra Nataka Kala Parinamamu*," in **Andhra Darshini** [Telugu], Hyderabad, 1959, p.582.

Burrakatha [Bardic recitals] was the most popular item as it includes, a story, music, rhythmic movements of body, make up and also the satirical remarks that players make on contemporary Politics.

of the famine of Bengal of 1944 were thematized in "*Famine of Bengal*" and its performance was immortalised by Nasser. From 1946 to 1948 many Burrakathas were written on Nationalist leaders.⁷ The success of the patriotic theatre movement in Guntur stimulated similar groups in other centers like Bezawada. For example, a number of Zamindars patronized Mylavaram Drama Company. Similarly some landlords of Rajahmundry founded and financed the Rajahmundry Hindu Theatrical company.⁸ Stage luminaries like Idavilli Suryanarayana Rao and Kuppalur Sanjivi Rao were active supporters of this movement. But most active of them all was a lawyer, Bellary Raghavachari, who brought a new awakening to the stage during the 1920s. He was able to bring to the world of popular theatre, a better organization and improved theatrical techniques.⁹ This was the same person who later on was inducted into Telugu cinema, *Rythu Bidda*, as a hero.

As a matter of fact, most of the stalwarts of early mythological films had their training in popular theatre. Playwrights and litterateurs like P.V. Rajamannar, Bezawada Gopala fteddy, M.R. Appa Rao, Narla Venkateswara Rao, K.V. Gopala Swamy, Kopparapu Subba Rao and others evinced keen interest in the theatre

Sunkara Satyanarayana, *Ryot Vijayam*, Vijayawada, 1945. [Kondapalli Veera Venkaiah, Kalahasthi Thamma Rao of Rajahmundry were publishers of such Burrakathas].

⁸S.Theodore Baskaran, *Op.Cit.*, p.29.

⁹*Ibid.*, p.29.

and were instrumental in not only developing better staging techniques but scripting plays with modern themes in Andhra.¹⁰ In those days social dramas like *Edureeta*, *N.G.O.*, *Eva.ru Donga*, *Parivartana*, *Pallepaduchu*, *Kulamleni Pilla* and *Rickshavadu* were staged in places like Kakinada, Bezawada, Eluru, Guntur, Masulipatnam, Tenali, Palakollu, Rajahmundry and Gudivada by the Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad.¹¹ Many a film personality got their early training in the Andhra Nataka Parishad. Writers like **Atreya**, **Narasaraju**, **Piniseti**, **Ravuru Satyanarayana**, **Kondamudi Gopalaraya Sarma**, **Korrapati Gangadhara Rao**, **Bhamidipati Radhakrishna**, **Aniseti** and **Bollimunta Sivaramakrishna**; actors like **Akkineni Nageswara Rao**, **Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao**, **Kongara Jaggayya**, **Nagabhushanam**, **Chalam Raja Rao**, **Ramana Reddy**, **Mikkilineni**, **Allu Ramalingayya**, and actresses like **Savitri**, **Vanisri**, **Sarada** and **Nirmala**, all have migrated from theatre to cinema.¹²

Music Directors **Pendyala Nageswara Rao**, **B. Narasimha Rao**, **V.Nagaiah**, **Sthanam Narasimha Rao**, **Y.V.Rao**, **Chitrapu Narasimha Rao**, **Koppurapu Subba Rao** and **C.Ramachandra** had their experience in

¹⁰Prabhu, **Swarnayugam lo Annapurna**, Hyderabad, 1993, p.59.

¹¹**Ibid.** Nataka Kala Parishads were started in Vijayawada in 1929 for professionals only. Later on in 1944 in Gudivada amateurs also were taken into Parishads. Dharwad troupes [1880-86] were the fore runners to Parishads. M.R. Appa Row was the President of 1945 Parishad. Veteran film personalities like **Gudavalli Ramabrahmam** and **Bhanumathi** were honoured in Gudivada. **Dukkipati Madhusudana Rao** of Annapurna banner served Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad from 1944 to 1952. He linked up theatre movement with cine field.

¹²**Ibid.**, p.60.

theatre. Veteran directors like B.N.Reddy, C.Pulliah and others their apprenticeship in Telugu Theatre.¹³

When the Congress party came to power in 1937, Sri Rajagopalachari, the then Prime Minister of Madras Province, removed the ban on dramas and created the necessary freedom of action required for the growth of popular stage. The appearance of Talkie in 1930s, however, took over the social space earlier enjoyed by the popular theatre by virtue of its unprecedented reach into both urban and rural areas. Afterwards, though the theatre continued its existence along with cinema, it gradually got displaced by the talkie. It is the very nature of the film medium and its communicative skills which made the people throng at cinema halls.

(B) CINEMA

(I) Film Medium And Mass Communication

Film is a continuous (jointed) strip of acetate based celluloid, with a unit length of one reel, i.e., 1000 feet, normally running for a duration of 10 minutes. Each reel is composed of several sequences. Each sequence is made up of several shots. Each shot is a varying multiple of frames. The film is an image sequence captured by the camera and regenerated by two

¹³K.N.T.Sastry [Ed.], **Telugu Cinema** (An anthology of articles), Hyderabad, 1986.

projectors, running one after the other at the end of each reel, providing continuous projection.¹⁴

Hence, film itself requires several types of medium: 'camera' for its configuration, 'projector' for decoding the message (images) locked in it, 'screen' for recovering the message, and 'microphone amplifier' for regenerating its 'aural content. The sound-track incorporated on it lengthwise in an unbroken manner (unlike the image) in the form of erratic lateral projections of a continuous streak which becomes reactivated when struck by a pencil of light.¹⁵

Film is a revolutionary communicative tool. The 'communication' is primarily the reception of and response to a stimulus, visual or aural or even telepathic. Essentially, it involves two of the five senses, namely, sight and sound. Through touch, taste, and smell also communicate, each in its own way, the experience of physical objects, i.e., the visual and aural perception thus acquires a primacy. Film, offering both sight and sound therefore, communicates much more effectively than the others.

¹⁴Hameeduddin Mahmood, **The Kaleidoscope of Indian Cinema**, New Delhi, 1974, p.1.

¹⁵**Ibid.**

When we argue that film is a revolutionary "mass" communicative tool, we have in our mind both a quantitative and qualitative expression associated with the term "mass". Quantitatively, it refers to a human group in physical proximity (as in the case of a film projection or a social gathering) or in a dispersed manner (as in the case of radio or TV audience). Qualitatively, it is a generalised reference to a concentration of men, women, and children, horizontally diversified and vertically variegated. Implicit in this is the difference in physical features, mental equipment, social background, cultural attributes, and psycho-sociological bearings.¹⁶

The affectivity in communicating with the masses, by using film as a medium, requires an innovative and creative integration of these factors as film medium and mass communication, whereby film itself becomes the medium and its communication becomes circumscribed to a group.¹⁷ No other medium appeals to eyes and ears as much as film. Hence no other medium is as effective and popular communicator as the cinema.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p.2.

¹⁷Ibid., pp.1-2.

¹⁸Ibid., p.8

In other words, cinema is the first mass medium in history through which virtually any kind of views and information could be conveyed to almost every member of society.¹⁹

(ii) Origin And Growth Of World Cinema

It is generally agreed that for all practical purposes Edison started the use of film in 1887. But it was not until samples of the first Eastman Kodak film with a nitrocellulose base were obtained by Edison in 1889 that the original cinema machine came into being. The actual cinema was born with the making of magic lantern for the projection of the film in 1895. The pioneers were Robert Paul in London and the Lumiere brothers in Paris.²⁰

Since then, passing many a hurdle the cinema was evolved into a motion picture. The first real attempt to tell a story by a moving picture was made in 1903. This event was achieved by Edwin S. Porter's sensational movie, **The Great Train Robbery**. In this 800 feet length film, with Marie Murray acted as the leading lady.²¹ With the arrival of the story, picture cinemas made tremendous

¹⁹Nicholas Pronay, "The Moving Picture and Historical Research", in **Journal of Contemporary History**, London, Vol.18, 1983, p.367.

²⁰Paul Rotha in collaboration with Richard Griffith, **The Film Till Now [A Survey of World Cinema]**, London, 2nd edition, 1951, pp.67-68. This book is acknowledge as the classical history of world cinema. The first edition was published from London in 1949.

²¹**Ibid.**, p.70.

progress in Hollywood **as** well as in Europe and this furthered the growth of the film studios.

From 1911 onwards the infra structural base of the film industry developed with astounding rapidity through out the world.²² The outstanding films from the west produced during this period were: **Queen Elizabeth** [1912], **Odyssey** [1912], **The fall of Troy** [1912], **Faust** [1912], **The Three Musketeers** [1912], **The Sack of Rome** [1912]; from Hollywood in USA, **The Ten Commandments** [1914], **Noah's Arc** [1914], **Metropolis** [1914], **Secrets of the East** [1914], **Casanova** [1914], **The Birth of a Nation** [1915], **Intolerance** [1916], **Robinhood** [1923], **Ben Hur** [1926], etc. With the outbreak of the First World War, the production of cinemas virtually came to a standstill in Europe. The disturbed conditions in Europe, however, smoothened the path of growth for movies in the U.S.A. Consequently throughout the whole war period the output of movies increased in the U.S.A. It was after 1914 that the USA could secure for herself the supreme commercial control over the world movie industry which she still holds on to.²³ Although Soviet Russia started to build up an industry at an early date she was not concerned with the commercial market outside its national **boundaries**. She made films

²²**Ibid.**, p.72.

²³**Ibid.**, p.73.

exclusively for her own people, as a part of building of Socialist society in the USSR.²⁴

The talking film medium stormed the cinema industry in every country, particularly after the First World War. The notable films produced in the USSR were: **Ten Days That Shook The World**, **Battleship Potempkin**, **The Strike**, **Mother**, **The End Of St .Petersberg**, etc.²⁵ On the whole the early history of cinema has thrown up classics such as: Eisensten's **Battle Ship Potempkin** [USSR/1925], Dreyer's **Passion of Joan of Arc** [France/1928], Orson Welles's **Citizen Kane** [USA/1941], Vittorie De Sica's **Bicycle Thieves** [Italy/1948], Alain Rosmais's **Hiroshima Mon Amour** [France/1957], and Satyajit Ray's **Pather Panchali** [India/1955]. These films continued to be seen by film lovers all over the world and also studied, discussed, talked about and written about.²⁶

(iii) Growth Of Indian Cinema.

From the first "all living, breathing, hundred per cent talking drama" (no background music, no sound effects or incidental sound) to the latest stereophonic block-busters to hit 70 mm screens, the Indian talkie industry has traveled a long way.²⁷ The

²⁴**Ibid.**, p.77.

²⁵**Ibid.**, p.221.

²⁶**News Brochure**, National Film Archive of India, Pune, June, 1995.

²⁷T.M. Ramachandran [Ed.], **50 Years Of Indian Talkies (1931-1981)**, Bombay, 1981, p.1.

history of Indian film industry had its beginning in 1913 in the release of Dada Saheb Phalke's **Raja Harishchandra**.

From 1913 to 1931 many pioneers worked for the development of Indian film industry and this was the era of the silent cinema. The beginning of the talkie era in 1931, made the cinema a very popular source of recreation for the masses. What is cinema for Indians? Cinema is the new urban folk culture, dominant forms of leisure and recreative activity, and the main channel of mass entertainment. It is also big business as hundreds of feature films were and are being made in most of the Indian languages every year (for data see Appendix I). Millions of people in thousands of theatres watch them. Film industry is one of the largest industries employing several thousands of people. Its annual box office receipts are around half a billion rupees or even more.²⁸ Cinema also had an all round influence on other media: AIR., TV centers, advertising and fashions shows and film magazines. In this section, a brief survey of the development of Indian films will be attempted keeping in view their mediating role in articulating artistic, cultural, educational and traditional value system.

The contours of Indian Cinema are discernible in the tradition of Sanskrit drama. The origins of Sanskrit drama goes back to the

²⁸Raghunath Raina, "The Context: A Social Cultural Anatomy," in Aruna Vasudev [Ed.], **Indian Cinema Superbazaar**, New Delhi, 1983, p.1.

God Brahma, the creator of the universe in Indian mythology. At the request of Lord Indra, the God of Heaven, for a form of divergence which will be audible as well as visible and be shared by all classes of people [the four Vedas were forbidden to the lower castes], God Brahma said to have created the *Natyaveda*, the holy book of **dramatology** by taking the four elements of speech, song, dance and mime from the *Vedas*. The great sage, Bharat Muni who taught this new *Veda* to the people, laid down that drama should be a representation of the various emotions essential for depicting different situations.²⁹

Both Sanskrit language and traditional drama were confined to the elite and extinguished from Indian culture for that reason. Like the Sanskrit language, which yielded place to Prakrit and *Apabhramsa* [the basis of modern Indian languages], Sanskrit drama was also supplanted by the polychromatic folk theatre. Rooted in spoken languages and popular culture, the polychromatic folk theatre and the two epics, being vibrantly alive, often changing in response to the dynamics of social conditions, imbued with the exuberance of song and dance, deeply embedded as they are in the collective consciousness of the Indian people, have become the direct source for the early Indian Cinema although they are still subliminal to it.³⁰ The roots of Indian cinema should be located

²⁹**Ibid.**, p.4.

³⁰**Ibid.**

within the above mentioned cultural roots, particularly the popular cultural traditions, performing folk arts and the two epics, *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata*.

THE BEGINNING

Film history began in India on 7 July 1896, when an advertisement in the *Times of India* invited Bombay residents to witness "the marvel of the century, the wonder of the world" at Watson's Hotel. This demonstration of "Cinematography" in the hotel was described as "living photographic pictures in life-sized reproductions by Messrs Lumiere Brothers."³¹ It was new, having been unveiled by the **Lumieres** at a Paris cafe only a few months earlier, i.e., on 28 December 1895. The first shows of these "films" were held in Russia and India on the same day.³² These first moving pictures recorded the actual happenings like the steering in of a railway engine into a station, a gardener watering the garden with a hose, a child having breakfast and the like. It was regarded as a magic medium because it captured life in all the glory of movement on the screen. Later, the cinema started being used as a vehicle for story telling.

³¹Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, **Indian Film**, New York, Second edition 1980, p.1 [first pub., Oxford, 1936].

³²K.V. Subbanna, "Cinema For The Villages," in **Symposium On Cinema In Developing Countries**, New Delhi, 1979, p.84.

Dada Saheb Phalke was first among the Indians to be inspired by this new medium. He got inspired after seeing, in 1910, a film on **The Life of Christ**.³³ Though he originally intended to make a film on the most popular of the Indian gods, Lord Krishna, Dada Saheb's first film was turned out to be **Raja Harishchandra**. Now it has come to light that another film had been made earlier³⁴ than **Raja Harishchandra** (1912) of Dada Sahib." Whether his film was first or not, Dada Sahib Phalke is accepted as the father of the Indian Cinema.³⁶ Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (better known by the respectful title "Dada Saheb") [1870-1944], no doubt, faced all the problems of a pioneer, but succeeded in getting popular viewership for his films. The countrywide success of his films in fact, gave an impetus to many capitalists in Bombay to rush to this industry. Importers of liquor, manufacturers of wooden buckets, hair oil producers, textile manufacturers and cotton merchants took to producing films.³⁷ Another important contemporary change which had

³³N.V.K. Murthy, **Cinema and Society**, Bangalore, 1980, p.12.

³⁴R.G. Torn filmed **Bhakta Pundalik**. It was a stage play and was filmed when it was being staged. See Jagmohan, "The Pioneers of Indian Cinema," in **Yojana**, August 1995. However, this film is not traced.

³⁵**Raja Harishchandra**, completed in 1912, was opened at the Coronation Cinema theatre in Bombay in early 1913 and it was a overwhelming success. It was launched with a capital of only Rs.15,000, as mentioned by Erik Barnouw and S. Krishna Swamy/**Indian Film, Op.Cit.**, p.22.

³⁶N.V.K. Murthy, **Cinema and Society, op.cit.**, p.12.

³⁷Raghunath Raina, "The Context: A Social Cultural Anatomy," **Op.cit.**, p.5.

a bearing on the fortunes of the film industry was the rise of new urban business class. This new class profiting from War time shortages and the rise of speculation and black marketing, had started looking for profitable areas of investment. The film making held out the promise of quick and rich returns. The new entrepreneurs built well equipped studios and laboratories, hand-picked their crew of technicians and kept stables of actors, writers and directors on their pay roll, a la Hollywood.³⁸ As we have pointed earlier that as a result of First World War, since film production in Britain, France, Italy and Germany had been paralysed, the Hollywood could unprecedentedly expand and capture world film market. By 1927, almost 85 percent of all cinema houses in India were showing only American films.³⁹ The dominance of the Hollywood film affected all departments of Indian cinema industry. The American film became, and still remains, the model, leading Indian producers to plagiarise plots, situations, styles and even to produce remakes of box office hits.

CINEMA IN CHANGED POLITICAL SCENARIO

The First World War had denuded India of its resources. Repressive laws were enacted, hundreds of people were massacred in Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar. A growing resistance to the punitive measures and humiliation orders grew throughout the

³⁸Ibid., p.6.

³⁹Ibid.

country under Mahatma Gandhi. India had reached a stage when she wanted to make terms with the modern world in her own way and in her own right. The first response of Gandhian leadership was the launching of the Non-cooperation movement in 1920. The programme of the movement included mass resignations of jobs, withdrawal of students from schools and colleges, and boycott of proposed elections. The movement gained an unprecedented all India character. These events formed a psychological watershed in the development of modern India.⁴⁰

This self confidence as expressed in the Gandhian movements during 1920-22 changed the entire scene of artistic expression. In cinema, this trend was reflected in films like D.G. Ganguly's **England Returned** (1921) which mocked the educated Indian who aped the West.⁴¹ Marathi film maker Baburao Painter's **Sairandhri** was a film which camouflaged political comments in allegory.⁴² In another film **Savkari Pash** (1925) exposed the evils of money-lending.⁴³ Social films dealing with contemporary themes rose in importance. The film, **Gun Sundari** (why husbands go astray) (1925) was a milestone in the rise of the Indian Social films. It was produced

⁴⁰For a general history, see Bipan Chandra, et.al., **India's Struggle For Independence**, New Delhi, 1988; Sumit Sarkar, **Modern India, 1885-1947**, Delhi, 1983.

⁴¹Erik Barnouw and S. Krishna Swamy, **Indian Film**, p. 33.

⁴²**Ibid.**

⁴³**Ibid.**

by Cahndulal J. Shah. Miss Gohar was the heroine.⁴⁴ **Typist Girl** and **Educated Wife** were some of the other **socials**.

Coming of Sound

The world's first partial sound film **The Jazz Singer**, was premiered in New York on 6 October 1927. Its premier signaled the end of an era, the era of silent films.⁴⁵ It, however, took two years for the hundred per cent talkie from USA, **Light of New York** to come into existence and another two years for the birth of first Indian talkie feature, **Alam Ara** (14 March 1931), directed by Ardeshir M. Irani.⁴⁶ In any case, **The Melody of Love**, a Universal Pictures Production became the first sound feature to be shown in India, in Calcutta, in 1929 signaling the birth of the era of sound films.⁴⁷ With the coming of sound, music and themes got closely integrated into the **movies**.

Thematically, the first decade of the Indian Talkie till 1931 started with films based on mythology. In the era of silent movies the predominant position of mythologies could be understandable given the nature of nationalist intellectual **concern** with the

"Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.58.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷**Alam Ara** means 'Beauty of the World', was made by Ardeshir M. Irani. Its star was Zubeida as heroine; Mehaboob as hero and the singer W.M.Khan, with his song: "*De de khuda ke nam par pyar.*"

reassertion of traditional Hindu morality, value system and religious precepts or what is generally called the cultural and intellectual reassertion of Indian civilization in a colonial context. The mythologies were also used for an effective communication of the nationalist ideology and political programme to the people, as illiterate majority of them for centuries have been drawing their cultural resource from the mythologies, in particular **Mahabharat** and **Ramayan**. The sympathetic popular response to movies like **Bhakta Vidur** was, therefore, at both cultural-moral and religious and political levels.

The Gujarathi silent film, **Bhakta Vidur**, produced in 1921 by **Dwarakadas Narayanadas Sampat** was the first film to use Indian mythology as a powerful allegory to critique colonialism and propagate nationalist/Gandhian ideas.⁴⁸ In the film, the main character Vidur sporting a Gandhian Cap and clad in *khaddar* was shown sitting besides a *Charka* to spin yarn, like a true contemporary Gandhian nationalist. The film made a mention of the villagers not paying taxes in Khaira district in 1918 and the evacuation of Chirala-Perala town in 1921 as part of Non-cooperation movement in Andhra. Officials in the Court of **Drutarashtra** were shown being awarded the titles of "Danki Bahadur" an allegory to British Government's award of "Diwan Bahadur".

⁴⁸**Ibid.**, p. 58.

The mediation of mythological films in the nationalist cultural and political struggles was such that the Cinematography Act of 1918 was being applied at regional levels to control the movies, like other acts enacted to curb the 'seditious' literature and dramas. The original intent of the Cinematography Act was to curb the negative influence of American Hollywood films in India, but that Act was now being applied basically to control the 'seditious' films at regional level. The first movie to get targeted under the Cinematography Act was **Bhakta Vidur**⁴⁹. Wherever the film was released it led to public disorder, police cane charging and finally a ban on its screening.

During 1930-34, the Civil Disobedience movements not only brought the demand for total independence into fore but also the deeper social and cultural problems in Indian society. Particular were the removal of 'untouchability' and the communal harmony, essential for the success of Gandhian mass united struggles against the British rule. These new concerns, emerged out of the political struggles, naturally got reflected in the cinema. In other words, the social evils like 'untouchability' and alcoholism, the subordinate position of women, and many other gender, caste and class specific problems have become the main content of the stories handled by the film makers. The films made by Prabhat Talkies (1932) Kolhapur, later Pune from 1933; Movietone, Bombay (1934),

⁴⁹Erik Barnouw, *Op.Cit.*, p. 34.

and New Theatres, Calcutta (1930) come readily to our mind in this context. This trend of film making continued right up to the late forties.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the nationalist politics in India were getting radicalised. Besides liberal and democratic ideas derived from the west, Indians, impressed by the Socialist experiment in the USSR, started showing interest in Marxist ideas. Jawaharlal Nehru had introduced 'Socialism' into the political vocabulary of the nationalists. This led to the growth of left wing within the Congress and the subsequent formation of the Communist Party of India. These changes naturally had an echo in Andhra as is shown in the historiography.⁵¹

Literature mirrored the temper of the times. In Andhra a Progressive Writers Association was formed by the writers who were for the creation and popularisation of what Antonio Gramsci called the "national popular literature". They issued a manifesto which rejected the concept of art for art sake and underlined the close

⁵⁰N.V.K. Murthy, **Cinema and Society, Op.cit.**, p.13.

⁵¹Atlury Murali, "Changing Perceptions and Radicalisation of the National Movement in Andhra, 1922-34," in **Social Scientist**, October 1988 and Kambhampati Satyanarayana, **Andhra Pradeshlo Communist Udyama Charitra**, [History of Communist Movement in Andhra Pradesh] , Vols.1-2, Vijayawada, 1983.

links of art with society. For them literature should advocate 'engineering of souls.'⁵²

The Indian cinema reflected not only this new awareness of radical ideas but the earlier critique of inequalities in Hindu society entrenched in the caste system. The themes naturally were attacks, directly or implicitly, on the traditional attitudes in the Indian society. The themes which emerged were: problems of Westernization (**Indira M.A.**, 1934)⁵³; protest against arranged marriages and social barriers for the realisation of free individual love (**Devadas**, 1935); caste barriers and religious bigotry (**Achhut Kanya**, 1936); problems of Hindu widows **Balayogini**, 1936);⁵⁴ the right of workers to participate in management of the factories (**President**, 1936); collective farming and mechanisation of agriculture (**Dhartimata**, 1937); a young girl's marriage with an elderly man (**Duniya Na Mane**, 1937); economic and social disparities (**Adhikar**, 1938); challenge to traditional ideas (**Admi**, 1939); appeal to nationalism (**Sikander**, 1940), etc.⁵⁵

⁵²V. Ramakrishna, "Literary and Theatre Movements in Colonial Andhra: Struggle for Left Ideological Legitimacy," in **Social Scientist**, Nos.236-37, Vol.21, Jan.-Feb., 1993, pp.69-85.

"Ruby Meyers or otherwise called Sulochana's smash hit was **Indira M.A.** She was an Anglo Indian.

⁵⁴**Achhut Kanya** is the best of Devika Rani's films to date. **The Hindu**, 25 June 1937. Ashok Kumar was the hero of this picture.

⁵⁵A. Erik Barnouw, **Op.Cit.**, pp.297-300. For further details of these films, see Appendix IV.

The 1940s were momentous years both for the country and the film industry. The Second World War created, though temporarily, new opportunities for industrialisation and expanded business and commerce which in turn consolidated the prosperous class in the urban centers. Simultaneously a vast and organised working class started getting exposed to the international events and they have become more organised in voicing their **grievances**. Like during the times of First World War, the Second World War had created shortages leading to black marketing and accumulation of black money in the hands of speculators. The War boom has been the greatest encouragement for all and sundry to enter the various branches of the film industry in India, as it provided new areas of profitable investment. With the inflow of this new capital, there originated star system and formula films consisting of songs, dances and contrived plots. The star system has become the order of the day. Ostensibly, these changes in the films were aimed at catering to the needs of a new class of audiences: industrial workers, those who had migrated to the big cities from rural areas in search of livelihood, and the growing bourgeoisie and the neo rich in search of entertainment in an alienating urban **environment**.

On the political front events were moving fast. The Congress party launched its final phase of national liberation struggle, the Quit India movement. The Bengal famine affected three million people. Anger was affecting the armed services resulting in the naval mutiny. A major development during this period was setting

up of the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA). It exposed British colonial policies and reached vast masses with stirring songs and vivid presentation.⁵⁶ IPTA had a profound impact on the performing arts and many associated with it later joined films and contributed in giving a new dimension to cinema. Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, journalist, film critic and a writer was one of the founder members of IPTA. He wrote and produced an autobiographical film, **Naya Sansar** (New World) depicting the story of a journalist under pressure from business tycoons.⁵⁷ Being a popular and financially successful film, **Naya Sansar** brought a breath of fresh air into the formula ridden Hindi Cinema and gave birth to a series of films with progressive themes. Later Abbas also persuaded Mr. Shantaram to produce a film based on his book: **And One Did Not Come Back**; the film was named as **Dr.Kotinis Ki Amar Kahani** (1946) .⁵⁸

(iv) Entertainment Medium in South India

Madras was introduced to moving pictures in 1897, when Edward held shows in the Victoria Public Hall.⁵⁹ But regular commercial shows in Madras began only in 1900 with Major Warwick setting up the first cinema house, the electric theatre, in the building that

⁵⁶Erik Barnouw, **Op.Cit.**, p.34.

⁵⁷**Ibid.**

⁵⁸**Ibid.**

⁵⁹S. Theodore Baskaran, **The Message Bearers, Op.cit.**, p.68.

later turned into Mount Road Post Office⁶⁰. The first studio in South India was set up in Millers Road, **Kilpauk**, with Nataraja Mudaliyar as the director. **Keechakavatham** (1916) of Nataraja Mudaliyar was the first silent movie made in South India. Thenceforth, upto 1932 altogether, 108 films were made in the silent era.⁶¹ The films made in the silent era were mostly mythologicals. H.R.Desai's **Bhagyachakra**, produced in 1932, marked the end of silent era.⁶²

The first full length Tamil talkie was **Kalidas** (1931) made in Bombay; while **Srinivasa Kalyanam** (1934) was the first talkie produced by A.Narayanan, in Madras. A.Narayanan also established the first sound studio, "Srinivas" and with this the era of sound began in Tamilnadu.⁶³ During this period cinema was all set for a meaningful interaction with the contemporary political movements, in particular the Civil Disobedience movement. In Satyamurthy, who was then at the helm of affairs in Tamilnadu politics, the cinema found an enthusiastic patron.⁶⁴ He recognised cinema's vast potential for bringing the message of nationalism to the masses. Symbols of nationalism like the *Charaka* and Gandhi cap were deftly

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., pp.91-94.

⁶²Ibid., p.90.

⁶³Ibid., p.99. A Narayanan is considered to be the father of Tamil film industry.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.106.

used in the visuals and so also the use of patriotic songs. During the period Congress Ministry experiment, patriotic cinema attained its peak in Tamilnadu. K.Subrahmanyam's **Thyagabhoomi** (1939) was a typical nationalist film⁶⁵. Satyamurthy was quick to perceive the propagandist value of actors' involvement in political activities and inducted many of them officially into the Congress.⁶⁶ The participation of cinema in political propaganda forced the intelligentsia which had so far looked upon the cinema as a cheap and contemptible popular art, to take a closer and more serious look. But with the death of Satyamurthy in 1943, Tamil cinema lost its link with the higher echelons of nationalist political leadership.

The earliest Tamil films were mostly mythologicals and, within this tradition, K.Subrahmanyam, one of the few Brahmins among the early Madras producers, outraged the Brahmin community by producing a different Tamil film, **Balayogini** (Child Saint) in 1936. In this movie the role of a Brahmin widow was played by a widow in real life from a Brahmin community.⁶⁷ A number of early Tamil films had an anti-caste attitude. There were of course, films revolving around the various serious contemporary issues and concerns. The marriage of pre-puberty girls had been a widely discussed question

⁶⁵Ibid., p.116.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.120.

⁶⁷Ibid., p.114.

and the film **Child Marriage** (1940) was a story set in the years succeeding *Sarada Act*. It dealt with the story of a child, widowed at the age of seven and, her father, who by defying orthodox opposition arranged for the girl to be married again, when she came of age.⁶⁸ **Vimochanam** (1940) and **Neelamalai Kaithu** highlighted the evils of alcoholic drinks. **Jayakodi** (1939) attacked the practice of accepting dowry. K. Subramanyam's **Bhaktha Cetha** (1940) also created considerable stir. The film was based on an episode from the *Mahabharatha* in which Cheta, the cobbler, won the favour of God, and God appeared to accept his offerings.⁶⁹

The wave of films on nationalistic themes reseeded after independence. The occasional, sentimentally patriotic films like **Nam Iruvar** (1947) or **Thyagi** (1947) marked the last eddies of this wave. In the absence of a powerful motivating force, such as the struggle for freedom, the Tamil cinema lapsed into a predominantly escapist form of entertainment. The signs of a meaningful interaction between the intelligentsia and the cinema did not develop further, but seem to have disappeared after Independence.⁷⁰

(V) THE EVOLUTION OF TELUGU CINEMA

⁶⁸**The Hindu**, 21 June 1940.

⁶⁹Two orthodox Sanatanists from Madurai appealed to the additional magistrate to ban the film on the ground that it was a misrepresentation of the Hindu dharma. S.Theodore Baskaran, **The Message Bearers, Op.cit.**, p.124.

⁷⁰**Ibid.**, p.124.

The first Telugu moving picture was made in the year 1913 and the first talkie in Telugu was **Bhakta Prahlada**, released in 1931.⁷¹

There was only one exhibiting hall in the year 1919 and this gave birth to an unbelievable number of hundreds of theatres by the time India attained its freedom. Content wise also, the Telugu cinema acquired maturity by 1940s. Mythologies, folklore, and socials are the broad thematic divisions. In our period of study special attention is paid to social themes. From 1938 to 1947, though there were few social films in number, compared to other themes, the depth at which the social issues are tackled is noteworthy. The contemporary social reform movements, nationalist and peasant struggles; the issue of untouchability, the evil of liquor, movement for widow remarriage, fight against dowry system and feudal values were reflected upon in the films produced during the period of our study.

When in 1895, the actual cinema was born in the world, United States of America was experiencing economic crisis. There was mad rush for gold and the mass exodus to United States from many parts of the world caused a crisis. The inflow of immigrants, drudgery and depression demanded a way out. Silent cinemas grew catering to this internal need in the USA. In other words, the Hollywood films, which matured from silent era into a full fledged talkie industry,

⁷¹Gudipudi Srihari, "Telugu Cinema," in **Yojana**, New Delhi, August 1995, p.61.

began dominating the scene in India, as in other countries of the world in the post- First World War period. By 1925-26, almost 85% of cinema theatres in India were showing only foreign made films, largely Hollywood films.⁷² The films produced in Hollywood studios were like any other capitalist consumer goods designed for the realisation of vast profits. The enduring hallmarks of Hollywood cinema developing under such circumstances have come to predominantly represent illusionism, melodrama, vicariousness, voyeurism, mythification and mystification. The attitudes -hat are sought to be reinforced are conservative and lullifying.³ They legitimise the pillars of bourgeois-imperialist society.

But the surrealist cinema of Bunuel,⁷⁴ the humanist cinema of Chaplin, and the revolutionary cinema of Eisenstein,⁷⁵ Vertov,

⁷²Pranjali Bandhi, **Cinema in Focus: Black and White of Cinema in India**, Thiruvananthapurani, 1992, p.12.

⁷³**Ibid.**, p.14.

⁷⁴Bunuel was creator of surrealist films in France in the 1920s.

⁷⁵Eisenstein, a Civil Engineer in the Soviet Union, developed the technique of "Montage". According to this technique Image + Image is not third image, but it gives rise to a concept and that is what is called Montage. This is the basic theme developed by Russians in silent era. Griffith also practised this but could not reach the level of Eisenstein. Eisenstein says, 'the time of the camera running and that of real happening should be almost equal- Then only a film is said to be realistic one. Interview with S. Hari Purushothama Rao, Film Critic, Hyderabad, 30 June 1994.

Pudovkin and others in the USSR., consciously hewed out a path miles removed from the cliches of Hollywood.⁷⁶

But what is that inspired film language? Oriental art provides the answer. In Chinese and Japanese ideograms, eye drops are shown as eye + sea (pictograph), similarly the Ajanta cave paintings gave them a clue.⁷⁷ Ezra Pound, an US born poet, in his poetry confirms this idea. Similarly, T.S. Eliot brought forth Chinese and Japanese characters in his works. Thus moving picture is a fascinating idea for human beings and the very idea is originated in oriental countries only.⁷⁸ So far as India is concerned, film as technique is imported and as form it is inbuilt one.

Dada Saheb Phalke went on to make over a hundred films, most of which derived their themes from Hindu mythology from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, like *Savitri*, *Sumati*, *Lankadahan*, *Krishna Jananam*, etc. Mythological films, putting Hindu gods and goddesses on the screen, were the favourite ones in Calcutta and Madras based cinemas as well. In 1921, **Bhishma Pratigna** (the vow of Bhishma) was the first movie produced by Rahgupati Venkayya and his son Prakash in Madras. This was the first Telugu feature film. Prakash was

⁷⁶Pranjali Bandhi, **Op.Cit.**, p.15.

⁷⁷Tears. Eye [picture] + Sea [picture]; pictograph script.

⁷⁸That is why mythology has become a part of Indian cinema (including social films). Even today thematic elements and references to the characters in the epics continue to play a major role in cinemas.

hero and director of it. Thus he was the first Andhra director, hero and founder of a lab. From 1921 to 1931 about a dozen films were produced by Telugu people.⁷⁹ These were: **Gajendra Moksham**, **Matsyavataram** and **Nandanar**. C.Pulliah made **Markandeya** in his house at Kakinada (1926). H.M.Reddy (1882-60) directed the silent film **Vijaya Kumar** for Imperial Film Company in which Prithviraj Kapoor made his debut.⁸⁰ Since our films are largely based on traditions, folklore and epics, usually all is well at the end. Even in most modern films, since modernity has not become a way of life, forms of folklore hangover still persist. After all, our present day cinemas are cultural brought forwards only. What type of culture the early Telugu films reflected? What is the ideology propagated by them? What are the values depicted in the early Telugu cinemas? The early Telugu cinemas were the cultural representation of the ruled people. All themes in epics, historical stories and social stories represent the culture of the ruled.

The 1920s in the history of Andhra are called roaring twenties. This period witnessed a galaxy of political and cultural personalities. Unnava Lakshminarayana, Gudipati Venkata Chalam, Alluri Seetharama Raju, G. Jashuva, Tripuraneni Rama Swamy

⁷⁹Arudra, "Two Decades of Telugu Cinema", in K.N.T. Sastry [Ed.], **Telugu Cinema**, Hyderabad, 1986, p.3.

⁸⁰Bommakanti Subba Rao, "Illustrious History of Telugu Film Industry", p.1 and I. Venkateswara Rao, "Telugu Cinema Parinamalu," both in **Amarajeevi Potti Sreeramulu 90th Jayanthi Souvenir**, Not dated, Madras, p.64. H.M. Reddy is considered to be the 'Father of South Indian Talkies.

Chowdary, Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, Veluri **Sivarama** Sastry, Devulapalli Krishna Sastry and a host of other romantic poets belonged to this period . The social reform activities were already widespread in Andhra.⁸¹ The father of Telugu cinema, Raghupati Venkayya (1869-1941), was a film personality even before Phalke. He organised shows in a tent in Esplanade (1909) and in a theatre Gaiety (1913) in Madras.⁸²

As a tribute to the first Andhra film exhibitor studio owner and producer, the Government of Andhra Pradesh had instituted Raghupati Venkayya award in 1980. Pothina Srinivasa Rao built Maruthi Cinema, the first theatre in Andhra at Vijayawada in 1921. Mote Narayana Rao, G.K. Mangaraju were the other pioneering exhibitors of Andhra.⁸³ Raghupati Venkayya was no other than the brother of Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, a great social reformer. It is the best example of the relation between social reform and cultural field. The results of the great economic depression were still on when Telugu Talkie was born in 1931 with Bhakta Prahlada. Cultural fundamentalism took its birth, with the formation of religious and communal organisations like Arya **Samaj**, Rashtriya Swayamsevak **Samaj**, Zamaet-e-Islam, Hindu Maha Sabha, **Sikh** Movement, etc. In Andhra Caste Associations were found and so new

⁸¹V. Ramakrishna, **Social Reform**, Op.Cit.

⁸²Bommakanti Subba Rao, **Op.cit.**, p.1.

⁸³**Ibid.**

consciousness developed and 1935 was watershed for cultural world.⁸⁴ Liberalisation and democratisation process commenced in 1936. A great debate was going on literature, its purpose and direction. While Chalam was questioning the whole veracity of Hindu family system, on the other side Viswanatha Satyanarayana was being praised for his *Chelialikatta*, *Ekavira* and *Veyipadagalu*.⁸⁵ The modernity remained at ideological level only. It was not practical one. Democratic culture in practice was not achieved because of colonial rule. Gopichand and Gudavalli Ramabrahmam were representatives of advanced modernism. While Gopichand showed nihilistic approach, Ramabrahmam represented a practical, realistic, appealing and compromising type of approach. During 1930s and 40s major literary stalwarts worked for film industry. Gudipati Venkatachalam, Tapi Dharma Rao, Kosaraju Raghavaiah, are to name a few. From the emerging bourgeois class many educated people entered films as makers. Challapalli Raja, a Zamindar, was financier to Ramabrahmam's films. This class of people were having social responsibility.

The directors of the early period had their origins in such places which are in line with social reform activity, e.g., C. Pulliah from Kakinada. P.Pulliah from Nellore, Raghupati Venkaiah

⁸⁴Interview with S. Eari Purushothama Rao, 30 June 1994.

⁸⁵Ibid.

from Masulipatnam **and** many others entered the film industry⁸⁶. All these were mostly **from** upper castes, already in the mainstream of economic and educational development.

They believed in idealistic approach. They also believed that cinema can be a very great platform for culture. They were under the impression that cinema can enlighten people and it can be a great force in that direction. The reason for this feeling is the influence of international (Russian) and national situations. Gopichand was believed to be called Andhra Hitchcock and Andhra Pudovkin.⁸⁷ Devaki Bose, Shantaram, Sarat Babu, Premchand, etc. were inspirers for them. Almost all the people acted in early Telugu cinemas were **professionals** - well in touch with theatre/drama/dance/harikatha, etc. The early **producers**, directors and some of the actors men/women were with social **accountability** and in touch with modernist ideas. B.N. Reddy, K.V. Reddy **and** others were men with liberal democratic tendencies. They were archetype of emerging ruling class.

When we consider the content, decor and **technique** of the cinemas of 1930s and 1940s, all cultural forms including folk, were utilised in them. Harikatha, Dance, Song and other **cultural** forms like beggar's songs, *tattvas*, etc., were liberally employed.

⁸⁶Interview with C.S.Rao, Film director and son of veteran director, C. Pulliah, 27 May 1994 in Madras.

⁸⁷**Ibid.**

Text: Hero **was** modeled as dominating social, political **and** cultural, but behaviorally, a conventional type - humble and never speaking loudly. Hero would never utter words that will dismantle the system. Dominant defiant ideology was given vent through subsidiary characters. Patriarchy operates all through. Modern lady character succumbs to conventional ideology only. As is society, so the characters are. As there is no mobility of the social structure there is no decipherable mobility of characters. Usually all characters are stable. This can ultimately be **related** to our traditional aesthetic philosophy and mythological constraints. In the films of those days situations are created from themes but themes are not from situations. This is perhaps because of the influence of *alankara sastra* and also because our society is culturally closed and not democratic. During the period of our study historical films were also created. *Palnati Yuddham* was glorified in a historical manner but its projection was delineating, romantic and dramatic. Films *Vemana* and *Pothana* were treated as folklore subjects.

During war period many folklore films were picturised. **Gulebakavali** was produced earlier to the Second World War. Folklore is that which was already known to the people in a different form, e.g., through *Jangam* story, ballads and *Kasi Majili* stories. But synthetic or structural folklore was the **one** only in form not in content (its text will not be available like the others), e.g., *Guna Sundari Katha*.

Folklore glorifies good while parading evil. **Imagination is** involved. The unbelievable things in life happen recreationally in folklore. The characters are generally with ignorance, foolishness stupidity and **cunningness**.

As a whole, the film makers up to 1950 were having ideological honesty. But later on films are left with patriarchy and pseudo progressive ideas. The audiences up to 1946 were mainly from middle class. After 1946 and by 1950 working class people formed bulk of spectators. The colonial heritage left the legacy of not making pictures like **Griha Pravesam** or drama like *Kanyasulkam*.

Music: The Indian tradition of performing arts has always been full of song, and quite a bit of it was suffused with dance. Before the advent of the talkie, the regional flavours were restricted to the areas where those languages, religions and cultures **reigned** for the most part. A celebrated exception is the *Natya Sangeet* from Maharashtra, the stage music of the area in that period. A peculiar amalgam of classical modes and folk influences made itself felt all over the South, originally through drama, later through gramophone records and finally through films.⁸⁸ The Parsi and Bengali stage too influenced Telugu film music. Folk traditions were **better** used by the early music directors. For example, B.Narasimha Rao used them in **Mala Pilla** cinema.

⁸⁸V.A.K. Ranga Rao, "The Musical Film," in **Genres of Indian Cinema**, Platinum Jubilee of Indian Cinema, Bombay, 1988, p. 86.

Coming of Telugu Talkie:

The complete list is given in the Annexure V. **Mythologicals** like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* attracted people since they **were** for long in the form of drama, folk songs, *Harikathas*, puppets, etc. Gradually theatre with mythological themes gained peoples patronage. The songs with the aid of music (harmonium) entertained the audiences because of their easy attractive nature. With the emergence of talkie all the theatre themes were adopted into cinema along with more or less the same cast. In fact, mythologicals are permanent. If they are produced properly they are acceptable to audiences any time unlike social films. They are as valuable as puranas.⁸⁹ Hanumanthuni Muni Reddy, i.e., H.M.Reddy, directed the first talkie in Tamil (**Kalidas**) and Telugu (**Bhakta Prahalada**) to earn the title, father of the South Indian Talkies⁹⁰. **Bakta Prahlada** was released in Andhra on 15th September 1931. **Kalidas** was the first Tamil film. The first Telugu talkie **Bhakta Prahlada** had Muniyappa Subbayya and Surabhi Kamala in the lead.⁹¹ L.V. Prasad donned a minor comedy role in this film. Interestingly, L.V. Prasad acted in bit roles in all the three first films (Hindi, Tamil and Telugu). These three were filmed in Imperial Film Studio of Bombay

⁸⁹Kamalakara Kameswara Rao, "Mana Pauranika Chitralu, " in **Vijayachitra**, Special Annual Issue 1986, p.196.

⁹⁰**Ibid.**

⁹¹Arudra, " Two decades of Telugu Cinema," **Op.cit.**, p.4.

by Imperial Company. H.R. Padmanabha Sastry was the Music Director of **Bhakta Prahlada**.⁹²

Bhakta Prahlada was an instant success and the commercial profits prompted the business instinct to exploit the language medium. Next year, **Paduka Pattabhishekam** and **Sakunthala** with Yadavilli Suryanarayana and Rama Tilakam in the lead were produced. Neither the producer nor the director knew Telugu. In 1933, **Prithviputra** based on the story of Narakasura, was made by Pothina Srinivasa Rao, the first Andhra exhibitor, casting Raghuramayya and Parupalli Satyanarayana. This was the first Telugu talkie financed entirely by Andhra people.⁹³ C.Pullaiah made **Lava Kusa** with Sriranjani and Parupalli Subba Rao as Sita and Rama which was a sensational box-office hit⁹⁴. The scenes of hundreds of villagers traveling with food packets in scores of bullock carts to nearby towns to see **Lava Kusa** confirms the power of this cinema medium.⁹⁵ Sita **Kalyanam** of P.V.Das, the proud owner of first studio, Vel Pictures at Madras, was directed by Chitrapu Narasimha Rao⁹⁶. In 1935, P.Pulliah produced **Harishchandra** with Kannamba as the leading

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Interview with C.S. Rao, S/O C.Pullaiah, in Madras, 27 May 1994. C.S. Rao is a well known film producer and director.

⁹⁶Arudra, Op.Cit., p. 6.

lady under star combines of Kolhapur; **Addanki** was its hero.⁹⁷ Dasari Kotiratnam of **Sakkubai** fame emerged as the first woman producer of Telugu film industry by producing **Anasuya** in 1935. **Sri Krishna Lilalu** of Vel Pictures starring Gaggayya and Sriranjani, produced by P.V.Das, in 1935 was a great success. In this, Master Saluri Rajeswara Rao, who later became a renowned music director played, the role of Krishna in this film." 1937 was a milestone in the history of Telugu cinema, for it presented **Kanchanamala** the most glamorous lady of the early Telugu films as the heroine in **Vipranarayana**.⁹⁹

Thus more than 60 films of mythological themes have been produced from 1931 to 1947. Mythologicals developed in people the habit of seeing films.

Folklore:

In the name of giving message to spectators in social cinemas, film makers at times have to face the displeasure of the people and there by incur box office losses. Folklore subject is free from bias and far from naturalness. Hence some of the producers thought folklore is the best bet and they can be hundred **per** cent entertainers. Another advantage of folklore films is that they can

⁹⁷**Harishchandra** was the first film of Kannamba, a noted first generation Telugu actress.

⁹⁸Interview with Saluri Rajeswara Rao, in Madras dated, 22 May 1994.

⁹⁹Arudra, "Two Decades of Telugu Cinema," **Op.Cit.**, p.10.

be dubbed to other languages because the subject is **adaptable** to any region. These films did achieve the same what mythologicals once did. These films attract vast rural masses easily.

Gulebakavali (1938) was the first important folklore film. It is a Liberty Picture's production whose director was Kallakuri Sadasiva Rao.¹⁰⁰ **Balanagamma**, produced in 1942, with the cast Kanchanamala and Govindarajula Subba Rao, was directed by Gemini's C. Pulliah, while **Mayalokam** (Magic World) of 1945, was from the Sarathi banner, directed by Gudavalli Ramabrahman with the main cast by Dr.Govindrajulu and Kannamba.¹⁰¹ The story of the latter film is based on *Kambojaraju Kadhalu*. Sarabandiraju character was played by Akkineni Nageswara Rao. This film was a box office hit.

In 1946, **Mugguru Marathilu** was directed by Ghantasala Balaramayya for Pratibha Pictures. Govindrajaula Subba Rao and Kannamba were the lead artists.¹⁰² **Balaraju** was a roaring success (1948), with Akkineni Nageswara Rao and S.Varalakshmi¹⁰³ as the lead pair.

CINEMAS WITH SOCIAL THEME

¹⁰⁰Gudipudi Srihari, *Op.cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁰¹**Natasamrat**, a silver jubilee souvenir, Madras, 1970.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

From the very beginning, Telugu film industry was obsessed with adaptation of successful mythological stage plays and crowd pullers into films. Departing from this, for the first time, an attempt was talkie with semblance of a made to produce a social theme in 1936. Krithiventi Nageswara Rao of India Aru cinetone produced a movie called **Prema Vijayam** (triumph of love).¹⁰⁴ Though, this theme of ultimate triumph of true love had been dealt perennially, its exposition in the contemporary setting and in the latest medium, was a fine reflection of the times. This solitary attempt, however, like a small island in the ocean, was submerged by the continuous flood of mythological movies and failed to carry any impact. Prabhala Krishan Murthy was hero of the picture.¹⁰⁵ [No more details are available]. K.Subrahmanyam's **Balayogini** (1937) was an attack on the caste system and a daring exposure of the hypocrisy in the priesthood. Child artist Baby Saroja was introduced in this film.¹⁰⁶

FILM MUSIC:

Today our national music is nothing but film music though it is popular. Never before the music reached people like this. Firstly, the music of theatre made inroads into cinemas. There was initially no orchestra but except harmonium and tabla. Film music

¹⁰⁴Arudra, **Op.cit.**, p.10. Details about **Prema Vijayam** are not available.

¹⁰⁵**Ibid.**

¹⁰⁶**Ibid.**, p.11.

started popularising since **Lava Kusa** (1934) only. The songs of this film came as disc plates (gramophone). The tunes were in Hindustani style with Bengali flavour. Prabhala Satyanarayana was its music composer.¹⁰⁷ With **Malapilla** film music was modernised. Bhimavarapu Narasimha Rao was its music director. Folklore was freely used. The song tunes used by New Theatre's pictures were utilised in the songs for **Grihalakshmi, Vandemataram, Sumangali Chandidas, Devadas, President, Street Singer, Amarajyothi, Duniya no mane, Gopalakrishna, Admi**, etc., set example for Telugu film songs. S.Rajeswara Rao, Gali Penchala Narasimha Rao and Ogirala Ramachandra Rao were the noted music directors after Bhimavarapu Narasimha Rao¹⁰⁸

FILM JOURNALISM:

Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao pantulu was the first person who encouraged film journalism.¹⁰⁹ Film news found place in **Andhra Patrika** under his insistence. The early film journalists were men like Inturi Venkateswara Rao, B.S. Rama Rao, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao and others.¹¹⁰ **Chitra Kala** was the earliest pioneering film journal whose editor was Inturi Venkateswara Rao. K.J. Mohan,

¹⁰⁷Adinaraya Rao, "Cinema Sangeetam mariyu Parinaamamu, " in **Vijaya Chitra** [Telugu], Special Issue, 1986, p.162.

¹⁰⁸**Ibid.**, pp. 161-2.

¹⁰⁹Bommakanti Subba Rao, "Telugu Film Journalism, " in **Vijaya Chitra, Op.cit.**, p.162.

¹¹⁰**Ibid.**

Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, Kamalakara Kameswara Rao, Kathanjali Acharya Rupavani Seetaramayya, Dhanka Achari, Suryaprabha Appa Rao, M.S. Sarma were a host of other film journalists.¹¹¹ Tapi Dharma Rao, Samudrala Raghavacharya, Narla Venkateswara Rao, Gopichand were some others who contributed with their writings¹¹² The harsh criticism on **Draupadi Vasthrpaharanam** earned a place for Kamalakara Kameswara Rao in the company of H.M. Reddy, the director of **Grihalakshmi**. Most of the above mentioned men settled in film industry.¹¹³

MELODRAMA:

The structure of a family melodrama on the Hindi screen has the following elements¹¹⁴

- (a) A common and stereotype story-line;
- (b) a straight narrative with visual flash backs;

¹¹¹**Ibid.**

¹¹²Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, the Editor of **Prajamitra** used to organise "Durbars" in his press office wherein many critics participated and discussed contemporary Telugu cinemas. Tapi Dharmarao, Samudrala Raghavacharya, Gopichand and many others participated in the symposiums. Their film criticism found place in **Prajamitra**, **Krishna Patrika**, **Andhra Patrika**, etc. For example, see **Andhra Patrika**, **Ugadi Sanchika** [Annual Number], 1945-46 where Samudrala Venkata Raghavacharya wrote an article, pp. 82-84. Also see **Krishna Patrika**, 22 March 1952 and Etukuri Prasad, **Tapi Dharma Rao Jivitamu-Rachanalu**, [Telugu], Hyderabad, 1989.

¹¹³Bommakanti Subba Rao, "Telugu Film Journalism", pp.95-96.

¹¹⁴Shoma Chattarjee, "The Family Melodrama," **Genres of Indian Cinema: Platinum Jubilee of Indian Cinema**, Bombay, 1983-89, p.73.

© too many coincidences - the loving boy in the neighbourhood turns out to be the long lost son of the widowed mother;

(d) emotional relationships among the family members are grossly exaggerated - both negative emotions like anger and hate as well as positive emotions like love and respect;

(e) women are largely allowed to remain passive, submissive and dominated by men;

(f) all family melodramas are extremely sentimental,

(g) too much dialogue based.

COMEDY:

The early films of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd provided a sound foundation for latter day Hollywood exponents of comedy like Billy Wilder, Ernst Lubitseh and a few other masters in this genre. In the talkie era both in Europe and America comic had both political content and social bite.¹¹⁵

Starting as the Indian cinema did with an obvious bias on well known epics and stories from mythology, as in Phalke's film, it seemed natural that the first talkie era would rationally follow that very path which it did. The films of the early talkie

¹¹⁵Rinky Bhattacharya, "The Comedy Film," **Genres of Indian Cinema: Platinum Jubilee of Indian Cinema**, p. 79.

era were therefore preferential to epics where comedy was considered a fatal flaw.

India's first authentic comedy film was that of Dhiren Ganguly's **England Returned**: B.N. Sircar followed the suit with **Excuse Me Sir**. P.C. Barua's **Rajat Jayanti** was another popular comedy. **Brahmachari** (1938), **Mantra Mugdha** (a social satire) of Bimal Roy, and Master Vinayak's films are worth mentioning in this context.¹¹⁶ Soon comedy in any Indian film was reduced to a single comic figure.

In Telugu, L.V. Prasad acted in **Bhakta Prahlada**, the first talkie of Telugus as a comedian. Kanchi Narasimha Rao and Rangoon Rama Rao acted in **Bhakta Prahlada** (1942) as comedians. In Tamil films the popular comedian of yesteryears was N.S. Krishnan. Krishnan and Madhuram acted in **Bhagya Lakshmi** (1942), the Telugu film.¹¹⁷ **Barrister Parvateesam** (1940), **Bondam Pelli** (1940), **Taru Maru** (1941), **Bhale Pelli** (1941) - are the first full length comedy pictures. Siva Rao acted in **Swarga Seema** and **Mugguru Marathilu**. Linga Murthy, Bhimavarapu Narasimha Rao, C.S.R. Anjaneyulu and Sivaramakrishnaya made their mark as comedians. Siva Rao brought an image to the comedians.¹¹⁸ From 1938 onwards upto 1947 (ten

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 80.

¹¹⁷Padmanabham, "Mana Hasyam - Hasya Natulu," **Vijaya Chitra** [Annual Special], 1986, p.150.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

years span) many films have been made. Only important social films are taken for indepth study. These are **Malapilla** (1938); **Grihalakshmi** (1938); **Vandemataram** (1939); **Malli Pelli** (1939); **Rythu Bidda** (1939); **Vara Vikrayam** (1939); **Sumangali** (1940); **Illalu** (1940); **Dharmapathni** (1941); **Mahatma Gandhi** (1941); **Devatha** (1941); **Apavadu** (1941); **Pantulamma** (1943); **Swargasima** (1945); **Grihapravesam** (1946); **Palnati Yuddham** (1947) and **Yogi Vemana** (1947). These films are analysed in the next Chapter.