CHAPTER 1

SPOTLIGHT ON THE BACKGROUND: SELF REPRESENTATION OF JUNIOR ARTISTES

“On the first day, I acted as lawyer with Gemini Ganesan in the film “Nalla Theerpu”; second day I was cast as a Beggar in a film which had Sivaji Ganesan in the lead; third day I was a soldier in MGR film. In three days, I had acted in three films with three leading actors of Tamil cinema; I was very happy for getting chance to act with such big stars and in that excitement I immediately wrote a letter to my family and friends that I’m acting in films along with Gemini Ganeshan, Sivaji Ganesan and MG Ramachandran. Surprised with my letter and success story in film in such a short time, some of my friends with dreams of becoming stars came to Madras, but seeing me act in crowd scenes; they immediately understood my status in the film industry”

Swami, Junior Artiste

(Excerpt from an Interview given to the researcher, on August 2011, Chennai)

Film history is known by the ways in which it has been handed down to us: not only in the texts and memories produced, but also through our reluctance to remember. Right from the genesis of Indian film industry, to its emergence as the world’s biggest film industry, efforts have been made to chronicle the history of this centenarian film industry meticulously, but this historiography is from the perspective of the Stars, Producers and Directors, deemed as the architects and pillars of the industry. Certainly one cannot (should not) afford to overlook these significant players, but side-tracking them in my work is a deliberate act, because the attempt here is to write film history from the bottom up, an effort to write the social history of the Indian film history, where the stress is on structures, and processes over actors and events. The spotlight here is shifted onto the lives and experiences of the ordinary people of the film industry, who are invisibilized and silenced. Unlike the traditional methods of historical hermeneutics, I adopt an analytical approach, as I want to historicize the
ordinary people, the structures and trends that have shaped their art and lives in the film industry, thus resurrecting what they said and did.

In this chapter I seek to understand the premise on which the capitalist film industry works, through the oral narratives of the Junior Artistes. Unorganized work culture is the bedrock on which the film industry is flourishing. The life histories of Junior Artistes illustrate the role of aspiration, kinship, and nepotism in the lives of these marginal screen artistes. With the film production practices, constantly evolving, the self narratives reveal how the Junior Artistes are negotiating with these technical changes, along with the exigencies of region, class, caste and gender dynamics at the work place. These informal interviews were documented over a long conversation, in order to validate these oral narratives, I have used multiple sources, like the films they mentioned in the interview; annual reports and souvenirs of the Union, photographs and media reports. I deliberately did not adopt a rigid typology to the interviews; conversations would start with reluctance, but would gradually become free flowing. Though it would start with informal questions pertaining to their work-life, gradually, it would be taken over by Junior Artistes and narratives of what they wanted to say and how they want to be documented.

The Junior Artistes life stories recorded over the years of interaction gives an insight into individual as well as collective life of the Junior Artistes. My relationship with them also grew from being just strangers to friends. From suspicion to volunteering to share personal and confidential information, was proof of being accepted; though it was a tough act to garner their trust, the hard work brought in rich dividends, in terms of information and network. Unfortunately, a few Junior Artistes, who not just helped me traverse this journey, but were also my key sources, met with untimely death, due to sickness, leaving behind several unanswered and incomplete queries; though the void could not be filled, this made me alert to the urgency and importance of documenting the anonymous, unacknowledged artistes of the glamour industry.

The Indian film history has been chronicled from various perspectives but rarely from the vantage point of film labour working at the lower strata of film industry, and this chapter is an attempt towards filling that void. These narratives not just help in rewriting the history of Indian film industry, but also redraw our attention
to some of the major developments in the film industry, such as: the impact of linguistic reorganization of the states on the film labour in the regional film industries; the emergence of freelance system, the Unionization and political mobilization of film workers; Stardom and its influence on film labour.

This chapter is constructed largely in and through the narratives and oral recounting of the Junior Artistes, shared with me in the interviews and conversations conducted between 2010 and 2015. The interviews and conversations were in Hindi, English, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu. Over four years of my field work in four metros – Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and Bangalore - , fortunately, I got to interact and interview several Junior Artistes. All their stories had overlapping experiences, with a familiar framework of narration. Hence here I share the life histories of six Junior artistes, with who I did an in-depth and longitudinal interview; the life histories of these artistes have been documented over years, in multiple sittings. These are also the oral recounting that I repeatedly keep returning to throughout my research.

The first two in this chronicle documents the life story of N K Swami and N K Sakuntala; this couple has been working as Junior Artistes in Chennai from 1950s and has been witness to several developments taking place in the film industry in South India. N. K. Swami’s life history traces his journey from theatre to cinema, from aspiring actor to Junior Artiste; fighter/stuntman to a successful stunt master; film workers’ Union leader; and also, his attempt to be a producer. His film career climaxed as a Junior Artiste and as a manager at the Thenninthiya Venthirai Saha Nadigar Sangam (TVSNS) - Junior Artistes Union at Vadapalani in Chennai of which he was one of the founder members. I had first met Swami on 15 August 2011 at the TVSNS Union office. He introduced me to his family - wife Sakuntala, his younger son Murali, both of them also worked as Junior Artistes. In my first visit in the months of August - September 2011, I met Swami several times at the Union office at Vadapalani and at his son Murali's residence at Ramapuram, in Chennai. His wife Sakuntala’s career as a Junior Artiste is interesting; she worked as a dialogue artiste and also as body double. She started a fan club and also tried producing a film with her son as hero. For the next one year we spoke over the phone. The second time I met Swami and Sakuntala was in September 2013 at their rented house in Vadapalani, However, unfortunately by then Swami's health had deteriorated and he died after a
few months in December. In 2014, I again met Sakuntala at her Ramapuram rented house. Their story is the result of over four years of bond and constant interaction.

The third in the chronicle narrates the life story of Junior Artiste Vijaya, who migrated from (former) Andhra Pradesh to Madras in search of work and had accidentally landed in the film industry. She worked as body double to several leading actresses of the 1970s and 80s. Having worked across languages, she shares her experience and views on the consequences of decentralization of Madras as centre of film production. I had met her during my first field visit in 2011 and then it was a brief informal conversation at the Union office and a I met her again during my field visit in February 2014.

The fourth chronicle is about Raji amma, a senior Junior Artiste, who has been working from the black and white era. She comes from a family of Junior Artistes. Starting her career as child artiste, she continues to work till date. I again met her during my field visit in February 2014 at TVSNS office.

The fifth narrative is of Lydia’s, a Junior Artiste working in Mumbai film industry from the 1970s. I got to meet her at the Mahila Kalakar Sangh, Mumbai (Union of female Junior Artistes) and had a long informal interview in September 2013. Again, I met her at her flat at Vasi, Mumbai, for a day long interview in October 2013. Her recounting provides a fascinating insight changing demography of the film industry, and in retrospect Mumbai city itself and its impact on film workers, especially on female workers.

The interview of Amir Sadruddin Lakdawala is the final life history; Lakdawala, has been working from the 1960s, debuting as a child artiste. Rated as the busiest Junior Artiste in Mumbai film industry, I was fortunate, to have got to interact with him. I first met him in August 2014 at Samvidhaan teleseries shooting at Film City viii in Mumbai, and again during my field work in Mumbai from August to November 2014; I met him for interviews on several occasions at the shooting place, Union office and at his home.

All the above interviews were conducted in more than one sitting, using recording devices – camera, audio recorder, and at different locations – Union office, home and at shooting places. The location did influence the responses of the
interviewee, I present the interviews in the narrative form (in first person). I have removed the questions posed by me the interviewer and have let the text run as one continuous narrative with necessary chronological alterations. And, I have retained the interventions made by other people during the interview, as they add important insight to the conversation. The fact that the interviews took place at multiple locations – Union office, shooting set or home also meant that the artistes were seldom alone when they were interviewed, and at the work place, especially at the shooting location, the interview had to be conducted with frequent breaks, during their break time or after shooting.

These oral narratives symbolize a paradigm shift in the angle of the historical lens, thus providing us with not just the missing blocks but also critical perspectives on the film industry. These narratives flow through a flexible spatio-temporal frame, thus blurring the rigid timeframe within which the film history situates itself. But for NK Swami and Sakuntala, all other narratives are individual narratives; usually I met Swami and Sakuntala together, their narratives overlap and hence it made sense to club them together.

1.1. N K Swami, Junior Artiste, Chennai

I come from a land holding family in a village near Madurai, and belong to the Saiva Pillai caste. My Father could not beget a child from his first wife; he married thrice, and I was born to his third wife. Being the only child, I had a pampered and a privileged childhood. After schooling, I was sent to my uncle’s house in Madurai for further studies. After completion of bachelor degree, I got a government job in the Collector’s office in Madurai. I got married to Sakuntala, who is from my village, belonging to my caste. Both her parents were school teachers.

Aspiring Actor

From my early days, I had a passion for acting, and had nurtured this passion by acting in theatre, which I continued even while I worked at the Collector's office. During one of my theatre performances, noted Tamil film director A.P. Nagarajan who was the guest, appreciated my acting skills in the play and told me that I had a good chance to be a film actor. These words of appreciation from a noted film
director, was enough to encourage me to quit my government job and come to Madras to become a ‘Nadigar’ (Actor).

In the neighborhood of my cousin’s house where I stayed after coming to Madras, was a Junior Artiste to whom I was introduced by my cousin. I along with this Junior Artiste went to meet the film director A. P. Nagarajan, at his house seeking a chance in a film as an actor. But the director’s response to me was, “Trusting my words, you have come in haste to Madras, to become an actor. Let’s see, wait for some time, if there is any chance I will let you know”.

**On work life of Junior Artistes**

After waiting for a few days, I started going for shooting as a Junior Artiste along with my Junior Artiste friend. On the first day, I acted as a lawyer with Gemini Ganesan in the film *Nalla Theerpu*; on the second day I was cast as a beggar in a film which had Sivaji Ganesan in the lead; on the third day I was a soldier in an MGR film. In three days, I had acted in three films with three leading actors of Tamil cinema; I was very happy for getting a chance to act with such big stars and in that excitement I immediately wrote a letter to my family and friends that I’m acting in films along with Gemini Ganesan, Shivaji Ganesan and MG Ramachandran. Surprised with my letter and success story in films in such a short time, some of my friends with dreams of becoming stars came to Madras; but seeing me act in crowd scenes they immediately understood my status in the film industry.

Even after coming to Madras I continued acting in theatre and was also directing a play for some time. Since I was reluctant to return to my village, soon my wife along with our son Balan shifted to Madras. Now, with more people to be fed, I had to continue to work as a Junior Artiste. It was in the year 1957 that I began my film career as a Junior Artiste and it was in the same year that Thenninthiya Venthirai Saha Nadigar Sangam (TVSNS), also known as South India Junior Artistes Union in Madras was established. It was one of the first film workers’ associations to be formed in the history of South Indian Film Industry with Madras as the center of film production.

**On Unionization of film workers**
Earlier, agents would mobilize or gather people for shooting by asking them to assemble in random public places like – under a banyan tree or bus stop, and people had to wait for hours to get a day’s work. Most of the people who formed part of the daily wage casual work force for film shooting were illiterate, hence got cheated by agents who either underpaid them or denied them their payment. In the 1950s we were paid Rs. 5/- for a day’s shooting; out of that we had to pay Rs. 1/- as commission to the agent and after reducing the interest for the loan taken from the agent, they would pay us the remaining money. Also women Junior Artistes had to face a lot of problems especially while returning home after night shooting, and police would arrest them suspecting of illegal activities. So, to address these problems, a few of us who had some educational background felt that organizing ourselves into a Union was the only way we could tackle this menace, and popular actors like T S Balaiah, Shivaji Ganesan and MGRamachandran also supported us in this endeavor. In those days, Congress and DMK were the prominent political parties; MGR was with DMK and Sivaji Ganesan was with Congress; TVSNS was started with Congress support.

I was one of the founder members of four Unions - Junior Artistes, Stuntmen, Production assistants and Agents’ Associations. In addition to this I have been the President of some of these Associations for the initial two years, when the Associations were established, and then handed over the reins to the members of those associations.

Though I was new as a Junior Artiste in Madras, because I was educated and was in the forefront of the formation of Union when the Association was formed, I was elected as the first secretary of the newly formed Junior Artistes Association and later was elected as its President too. In the initial stages when the Unionization of film crafts was still in the embryonic and informal stage, the members in the Junior Artistes Association also did the dancing as well as stunts in the film.

In my initial days, I had asked the directors as to why they don’t insert more scenes of Junior Artistes and the reply was that they could not put in anything and everything on the screen. After hearing this comment, I stopped aspiring for screen space as a Junior Artiste. Our job is only to clap when they ask us to clap; if they ask us to smile, we smile or laugh; and if they ask us to run; we run, and if we are asked
to sit, we just sit. If we are given dialogue, we deliver it with passion but rarely does a Junior Artiste get a dialogue.

I never wanted to be an agent; they are not respected, and the rumor is that they also supply women on demand.

**As a Stuntman/Fighter and Stunt master**

To get more visibility and to be noticed by the film makers, I took up training in stunts under the guidance of fight master Shivaiah, from Karnataka, who at that time was working in Madras. Somehow I wanted to be a hero and with hope that from being a fighter I may get a chance to be an actor I started doing stunts. But see my fate, instead of becoming a hero I ended up being a dupe (body double) to the hero.

I joined the film field to be an actor, to act as a brother of Sivaji Ganesan in a film. I was a drama artiste and knew acting but there was no chance to act here. As a Junior Artiste I had to just stand wherever they asked me to. So, to get more acting space, I started doing stunts. On the film set I would greet everyone with respect, wishing them ‘Namaste’, hoping, that someday the director, producer or a cameraman would notice my talent/acting skills and recommend me for a full-fledged role.

In order to start Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI) the requirement was the existence of minimum seven associations. Hence in 1966, under the guidance of Nimai Ghosh and M B Srinivasan, I started stunt Union. As one of the founder members of the Association I became the first secretary of the Stunt Union. Stunt in those days involved a lot of risk as most of the stunts were performed without any safety measures and the formation of the Stunt Union ensured safety and security for fighters or stuntmen in the film industry.

Compared to Junior Artistes, fighters and stunt masters are better off; some of them have their own house. In the 1950s we were paid Rs15/- per fight and if we worked continuously for two days and were injured while performing stunts we were paid extra Rs. 5/- or Rs. 10/-. Gradually, it increased to Rs. 40/-. Now I believe they are paid Rs.1500/- per fight.
Working under the guidance of stunt master Shivaiah both as stuntman and assistant, I got acquainted with the Kannada film industry and gradually, started working as stunt master in Kannada films, especially for Rajkumar films. In those days during the shooting I used to stay at Moti Mahal Hotel in Gandhinagar and worked as stunt master. Along with managing the household, children’s education, I also bought sites at Ram Murthy Nagar in Bangalore and at MGR Nagar in Chennai.

In 1950s and 60s, when films in all four languages – Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and some Hindi films were being shot in Madras, we had abundant work. In those days, there were so many films made, in Madras that we were unable to go for all the shootings. In a day, we would work in three shifts – morning for Tamil, afternoon in Telugu and in the night shoot for Kannada films. But with the language industry shifting to their respective states, now it’s mostly Tamil film shooting that happens in Chennai, which has led to gross reduction in work; we have heard that all other film industries – Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada are doing well; however I am not sure of the wages being paid to the Junior Artistes in those industries. But in Chennai, workers from all craft were drastically affected.

On Studio System, Regional film industries and Outdoor shooting

The shifting of film industry to the respective language states did not happen overnight; it was a gradual process hence most of the South Indian films continued to be made in Chennai almost until a decade ago. As we were members of Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI), we were not restricted from working in other language films, and most of the Unions that are formed in other southern states are our members only. For instance, twenty fighters from our stunt Union in Chennai went and started the stunt Union in Hyderabad; I encouraged stunt master Hassan Raghu in Karnataka to start the stunt Union there. When the industry shifted, some workers also shifted to their respective states, leading to the emergence of language-wise Unions, but we all continued to work together in movies. Only in the last couple of years has there been restriction on people from other states working in films out of their state. Apart from this demand there is also the demand to hire Junior Artistes who are members of the labour Union in their state. Now, if you go to another industry, you can’t work here and if you work here you can’t go there and work.
the past we film workers were united, working irrespective of the language or state we belonged to, but not anymore.

After the studios closed down, film shooting lost its dignity. Now they shoot anywhere and everywhere. Public observe how film crew treats artistes at work; they scream, ‘Stand here/there’. Before people would be eager to see MGR or Rajkumar and held them in high regard; but there is no more enthusiasm, respect or awe about stars. How will they like them when they see the hero on the street like anyone else? Inside the studio, Junior Artistes also had respect.

Now the whole village is enrolled into the film shooting. If they want a hundred people for the day’s shooting they will mobilize them on the film set. They don’t have to worry about transportation, food and lodging etc. because if they are from the same village they will work and go back, and the agents can also pay them arbitrarily. So they don’t take Junior Artistes for outdoor shooting any more. Now Junior Artistes Associations have been established in Pollachi, Coimbatore, Madurai and Salem. These associations are not affiliated to the Union; they are independent, and when a film crew comes for shooting these associations approach the film unit and propose to supply people for the film shooting there. This trend of shooting outdoor and also having non-members for film shooting was started by director Bharathiraja. The film field was good between 1962 to 1986 but after that it has been deteriorating.

In the film Shankar Guru (1978), where Rajkumar plays triple role, my guru, Shivaiah was the stunt master and I got to play the duplicate for one of the characters. I remember, Rajnikanth’s first Kannada film Sahodarara Savaal (1977); I was the one who did the inaugural pooja, and Rajnikanth remembers it even today and treats me with respect. I am sure if I go and ask him for help he will not refuse; but how can I ask him? When he sees me at the shooting place he greets me saying, ‘How are you’, and asks if I need any help; my reply has always been, ‘I am fine and your wishes will do’. Also, once you ask you won’t be able to face them again so I don’t want to ask. We have mutual respect for each other and that is enough for me.

Actor Prabhakar (popularly known as Tiger Prabhakar), who had started his own career as a stuntman and went on to be popular villain in Kannada, Telugu,
Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi films, later on rose to become a lead actor in Kannada film industry in 1980s and 90s. He also produced and directed films. Prabhakar’s film career of rising from Junior Artiste to a star, has been an inspiration for many aspiring film artistes, and Prabhakar had a significant influence on my film career too. Prabhakar, debuted as a hero in his 100th film and I, who was till then working as stunt man got my first film break as a stunt master in his film.

Photograph 2: Swami, (third from left) posing for a photograph along with actor Prabhakar and co-actor at a shooting location. (Photograph was shared by Swami from his personal collection during researcher field visit in August 2011 in Chennai.)

With Prabhakar’s entry as hero, I got a break as stunt master in Kannada film industry and from there I went on to work as stunt master with top actors in Kannada films like Raj Kumar, Ambarish, Vishnuvardan and many others. In the same year, my elder daughter had delivered a baby girl and I named my first granddaughter as Jaya Prabha, in gratitude to Prabhakar and his then wife Jayamala.

N K Sakuntala, Junior Artiste, Chennai

We belong to Saiva Pillai caste, an upper caste, only next to the Brahmins. However, non-vegetarian food was part of our diet. But my husband Swami was a strict vegetarian. However after he started working as a fighter he too started consuming non-vegetarian food.

On female Junior Artistes and their struggles

Those days a vehicle used to come to pick up artistes for shooting; friends in the neighborhood took me along saying I can watch film shooting. At the shooting
place, they gave us food, allowed us to rest and they would take some shots of us standing, sitting in a group and in the evening drop us back home. In this way, I started going for film shooting initially on the pretext of watching shooting, and gradually started working as a Junior Artiste, but I had not informed my husband Swami about me working as a Junior Artiste.

There was a two-day film shooting for a Malayalam film and our costume was a half-saree and plaited hair with flowers; we were all dressed up. We womenfolk were sitting and the men dressed like hermits with beard and wig were standing, and one of the men was staring at me; so I complained to the lady who had taken us for shooting. She was an old lady, and she immediately went up to him and scolded him saying ‘Any new girl comes for shooting you people start staring at them’. The man did not say anything to her.

When they called for shooting, the man who was staring at me, announced loudly that all Junior Artistes have to go for the shot take, and on hearing his voice I recognized that it was Swami, my husband. Since he was in costume I could not recognize him. It was a dance sequence that they were shooting. After the shooting I told the lady who had brought us for the film shooting that he was my husband. She went up to him and told him that she had brought me for the film shooting and asked him not to worry about me. I was worried that he would scold me once we are at home, but those days his brother was staying with us, so he could not say anything. And, later he would tease me before the children, whenever I would go out for shooting, ‘Your mother dances in films …’

We stayed in Vadapalani, Chennai, where most of the people in our neighborhood worked in the film industry as Junior Artistes, stuntmen etc., So when they would be called for shooting, ladies in the neighborhood, whom I had befriended, and who were also working as Junior Artistes would take me along with them, by convincing Swami that he has initiated the Junior Artistes Union, and if he himself doesn’t allow his wife to work in the film industry, it would be misread. Also it was difficult to run the household with just Swami’s meager income, so it was inevitable that I too work as a Junior Artiste, but Swami opposed my decision. It was only after my elder son Babu Sheelan started questioning his father, about his stand, that I got the confidence to work in the film industry on regular basis.
Still I would avoid going for a night shooting; if I ever did so, Swami would immediately rush to the shooting spot in an auto-rickshaw and take me back home. Since he was revered by the agents too, when they would see him coming they too would request me to leave immediately; the agents were aware that if they did not send me out, Swami would surely reprimand them. Since Swami was held in high regard by Junior Artistes and the agents, as well as by some big stars, I too was extended the same respect at the workplace. I was always conscious of the fact that Swami was not happy about me working in the industry, but frequently it would turn out that we would be working in the same studio or same production; so out of this fear of encountering him on the film set as a co-worker, I would be extra cautious to avoid any quarrels or arguments at home. However if I had any dialogue scenes, agents would beforehand personally call and cross check my availability, in order to avoid any confrontation with Swami.

Only few among us ladies came from well-off families, but most of the female junior artistes were poor; they could not even afford to have a gold earring. Only some of us were able to afford to wear a gold chain and earring to the shooting spot, and also have decent home to stay. I always had a house maid. Few of the domestic workers who worked in my house, were also Junior Artistes.

Are you aware of those woman who marry woman, they dress up like men, drink liquor and also get other women addicted to drinking? Our association’s ex-vice-President Shanthi had eloped with a colleague’s sister. I don’t like her…

**On Dialogue Artistes**

I was just 18 year old, when my first son, Babu Sheelan was born. Initially when I started working as a Junior Artiste, I would feel uncomfortable on the sets, and get scared seeing artistes in make-up, but gradually got used to the work life on the film sets. The first film I acted in was *Konjum Salangai* (1962). On the first day of the shooting itself I was given a dialogue. I kept getting this opportunity due to my education. My parents were both teachers; I had studied till tenth standard (SSLC) and was even called for teacher training; but because of marriage and children I could not take it up then; and ultimately after shifting to Chennai, I coincidently ended up becoming a Junior Artiste. But for a Junior Artiste to get a dialogue scene in films is
both rare and difficult. There are several Junior Artistes, who have been working in the industry for decades, but have not had a single dialogue scene. But it was my education, which was a rare qualification among the Junior Artistes those days that helped me get dialogue scenes regularly.

My first dialogue scene was with veteran actress Sowkar Janaki; the director of the film was so impressed with my dialogue delivery, that he would always call me whenever there was a dialogue scene for a Junior Artiste in his films. I have also done character roles like playing screen mother to actor Jai Ganesh. I have also done costume roles in several films. I have also acted in a Television serial *Til Til Thedade* in which I have a dialogue with Madan Babu. Among the several films that I have acted in, I liked working in Sivaji Ganesan’s films; he had also appreciated my dialogue delivery. In Vijayakanth’s film *Sakshi* I have a character role. Those days I used to get good roles, but Swami would not send me for shooting.

Unlike in theatre, we don’t get to rehearse our lines but we need to be spontaneous. They randomly select us on the set and give us lines that we have to deliver. I have had dialogue scenes with lead actors like Rajnikanth, Vijayakanth, Arjun, Prabhu etc. Rajnikanth is my favorite and I have dialogue scenes in several of his films. Because I would speak Tamil language very well they would also call me for dubbing. Agents would call me for dubbing mostly for small artistes but would never tell me the name of the artiste for whom my voice was dubbed.

**On working as Body Double**

[N K Sakuntala also worked as duplicate to noted actresses like – Srividya and Savitri.]

“Srividya’s backside and mine are similar; you should have seen me as a youngster. For working as a body double, your backside should resemble the person to whom you’re playing the body double. Mostly, I used to play body double in Malayalam films, for scenes such as rape, running or chase scenes. I would never tell this to Swami, but he too has never asked till date what I did at shooting or about the scene that I was part of. I was an active member of the TVSNS Association and was once nominated as a committee member. I also contested in election for a committee member post, but I never wanted to
contest for key posts like Association President, as it involved lot of risk. As a President no matter what good work you do, still you will be scolded. And if you go for regular shooting, then they accuse you of misusing the post, by taunts like ‘How come only you’re getting work?’.

On Stars and fan club

Phograph 3: Sakuntala initiated Rajnikanth Fan's association; letter head of Bharatha Jyothi Rajnikanth Rasigal Nathpati Mandram. (Shared by Sakuntala with researcher during her field visit in Chennai, February 2014).

In those days, we would go regularly for Rajnikanth’s film shooting at AVM studio. We were all huge fans of Rajnikanth; hence I along with a few friends and with the support of my younger son Murali started Rajnikanth Fan’s Association, and we called it Bharatha Jyothi Rajnikanth Rasigal Nathpati Mandram, inspired by the title of his film Mr. Bharath that was released then. After we started this Fans Association, people in the film industry started referring to me as Bharatha Jyothi. I was the President; the Vice-presidents were K L Vanaja, Shaila, Meenakumari; other committee members were Susheela and Nagalakshmi. Most of them are now dead, only Meenakumari and I are still alive. It was started in the year the film Mr Bharath (1986) was released.

My friends and I are ardent Rajnikanth Fans and have known and seen him from his first film Apoorva Raagangal. For actor Vijayakanth, his female fans had started a fans’ association, we did not want to be left behind; so we decided on starting Rajnikanth Female Fans’ Association. This Association was formed by some
of us who were financially better off than our other friends. Before the release of any Rajnikanth film, the main Rajnikanth fan association, would give us written material about the film and about his role in the film, along with the posters of the film, which we would paste on the walls and distribute at the film theatres, apart from putting up banners from our Association. We used to be very busy with the activities of our Fans’ Association. However, unfortunately the association gradually closed down.

It was after my elder son’s death, when I got into depression, fell sick, lost weight that I also stopped acting. Gradually, the domestic life took over; I got involved with children, their marriage and grandchildren

Photograph 4: Sakuntala posing with actor Rajnikanth at a shooting place. *(Photograph shared by Sakuntala with researcher during her field visit in February 2014, in Chennai.)*

**On Retirement**

I retired in the year 2002. After my younger daughter Viji’s marriage, I stopped going for shooting. Her in-laws are from a village and are financially better-off than us; they are into hotel business. They look down upon women working in the film industry. If I tell them that I work in the film industry, and I am a good woman, will they believe me?. However my son-in-law who is a teacher and also owns a hotel, knew that I was working in films, but his parents are not aware, and if they ever get to know it will not be nice. Also, when Viji mentioned that she feels embarrassed when her husband teases her while watching movies in which I have worked as Junior Artiste, I decided to quit working as Junior Artistes.
[Family: Swami and Sakuntala have four children – two sons and two daughters. The elder son Babu Sheelan, worked as a fighter, stunt man, body double, but died in a tragic accident on the film set, while performing a stunt. The younger son Murali works as a Junior Artiste.]

As a Producer

Babu Sheelan, was good at fighting and dancing from his childhood. So my husband got him registered with the Stunt Association. He had worked with leading actors of South Indian film industry as well as in Hindi films. He was well built and had a good physique; he had worked as a duplicate to several actors. In one of Rajkumar’s films in which Swami was the stunt master he had worked as body double to Kannada actor Rajkumar.

Swami had worked as a fighter with Rajnikanth in a few Kannada and Tamil films, but Babu Sheelan had acted in several of his films as stuntman. Since my husband Swami’s dream of being an actor was not realized, I decided to take the risk of producing a film with my son as the Hero. Like Swami, he was well built and good looking and was a skilled dancer and stuntman. His father could not become a hero, and I did not want my son to be deprived of an opportunity of being a hero. So, we decided to produce a film with him in the lead. Then Swami was staying in Bangalore as he had more work there. Fearing opposition from him we did not inform him about our plans of producing a film.

In our experience, we don’t remember any Junior Artiste, who are registered as member of the TVSNS, becoming a hero. There are many artistes who started their film career as Junior Artistes but not necessarily as an association member; for example, comedian Vadivellu, had started his film career playing the roles of Junior Artiste. There are a few of them from the Association who did get a chance as second hero/lead in a film; but after one or two films they never got any chance. There are Junior Artistes who have become dancers, fighters and producers, though I don’t remember their names; but Junior Artistes who had registered as members of the association have not become heroes or stars.

N.K Swami’s narration
I was informed about my son’s film on the day of *muharrat* (first day of shooting); they had roped Dev Sundar a Makeup Artiste, as the film director, it was his debut film as a director. Since everything was decided I did not have much choice but to agree, and also I thought that, I could not be a hero; at least if my son wants to be a hero I should support him. It is difficult for a Junior Artiste, who is a daily wage earner in the film industry to be a producer, but we at least tried.

**Death and Depression**

After completion of shooting of two fight sequences and two songs, shooting came to a halt due to financial problems. With film shooting stopped, Balu Sheelan was not working and was at home, and so when his friends called him for performing as a dupe for the hero of a Hindi film he agreed to do, as he could make some money, and went for the shooting. While performing the stunt sequence his spinal cord was severely injured, and after battling for his life for almost two weeks he succumbed to his injuries. It was a Hindi film titled *Prem*, starring Anil Kapoor’s brother Sanjay Kapoor. His sudden death left all of us in a terrible shock; he was married and left behind two daughters.

*Photograph 5: Stunt artiste Babu Sheelan’s Death condolence meeting organised by Stunt Association. (Photograph shared by Sakuntala with the researcher, during field work in Chennai, September 2013).*

Along with the loss of our son, we also suffered huge financial loss as we had invested all our earnings on the film, which remained incomplete. The producers of the Hindi film, paid one lakh rupees to the Union for his treatment, and the fighters Union also financially supported his treatment; whatever money the family received
from the Union was kept as a fixed deposit for his daughters. Recently, the elder daughter got married and his younger daughter is studying in Bangalore.

**On his return to Junior Artistes Association**

Sakuntala and I, both of us went into depression after the sudden accident of our son. I did not work for years, and it was during this phase of depression that we had to sell all that we had earned in order to survive, and after almost two years, when I returned to the field newcomers had taken over. I worked as stunt master in a film starring Kannada actor Shiva Rajkumar, but when I did not get much work in the Kannada film industry, I returned to Chennai. But here too, I was not getting any work as stuntman, so I returned to the Junior Artistes Association and started working as a Junior Artiste and as writer in the TVSNS office. One of the reasons for getting back to work was also to prevent our own daughters from joining the film industry, and even they were not interested to work in film industry. Both our daughters are school teachers.

[Their elder daughter is married to Sakuntala’s, brother S Rajendran, who worked as manager at FEFSI for a short time, but M.B Srinivasan, helped him get a central government job.]

**Next generation Junior Artistes**

Our younger son Murali, while still in school, had tried imitating my stunt scenes in films by jumping from the roof top of our house and had injured his leg. He also discontinued his studies. Unlike, our elder son he is slim built, dark complexion and adding to that he is a school dropout; so we got him registered with the Junior Artistes Association. It has been over twenty odd years now; he is still working in the film industry. As we both were also working in the same craft, we encouraged him to join as a Junior Artiste. But as we do not get regular work as Junior Artistes, Murali does other odd jobs, like cooking, and taking up other wedding related assignments, still photography and real estate to earn the extra income to run the family and to give better education to his children.

Now- a- days we get only four to five days of work every month. But it is also very difficult to take up any other regular job if you are a Junior Artiste, because you
need to go for shooting whenever they call you for work, and if you don’t, they won’t call you next time. Also, those who get into this profession will be reluctant to take up any other work. Fortunately, somehow my son came out of it and has been doing other kinds of work to run the household. The name of his real estate business is – Padayappa Real Estate, named after Rajnikanth’s film *Padayappa*.

When we workers demanded wage revision, in 1997, the producers, instead of increasing our wages, formed a separate Union, and we workers protested this act by calling for an indefinite strike for fifteen days. Shooting was stopped for almost a year and we did not get proper work as there were not much shooting, and producers were also giving work to members from a newly formed Union. Later, we united and resumed work but during the strike period we faced a lot of hardship; some of our Junior Artistes started working as coolies and some even committed suicide. These producers waste so much money shooting in foreign locations, but when we request them to increase our wages by hundred or so they get offended and punish us by denying us work.

**On child Junior Artistes**

Our younger son Murali’s daughter, Meenakshi saved us all. She was barely three months old and had to work for the family, and on the babies earning, we family members had food for days. She was chubby and cute and was in demand. Then, she did not even know that she was running a household. If not for the strike we would not allow our child for shooting; we never allowed our grandson Avinash for shooting. Our then Chief Minister J.Jayalalitha, from AIADMK party, helped Junior Artistes by sanctioning subsidized food grain and other related items for all the Unions. But the newly formed Union received support by the DMK party. What can workers do when the government is listening to the producers?

Usually, when there is a need for children or babies in the film, they first enquire with the Junior Artistes. Our son Murali, was given for film shooting when he was six months old; it was for MG Ramachandran’s film *Petralthan Pillaiya*. Murali had urinated on MGR, but the star did not mind. Murali’s child Meenakshi also acted in films like *Avvai Shanmugi* (Hindi Version) when she was just nine months old. The producers had agreed to pay Rs 500/- but paid Rs 1000/- for the day’s shooting. She
worked in television serials like Sundaravanam, acting for almost a year. But, we are against her pursuing a career in acting in the film industry.

Daughters in our family don’t work in the film industry. We did not allow our daughters to work, and the same rule applies to daughters-in-law; and we do not want Meenakshi to work in the film industry. Then, she was a small child, and because the film industry was on strike and there was no work, our financial condition was bad; so friends from the industry convinced us to allow her for shooting, saying that it is fine with our children working in our own cine family. Then we had agreed because of the circumstances but now, we want her to study well.

It was during the strike period that Murali shifted from Vadapallani to Ramapuram where he worked in a hotel and maintained the family. The last film that he went for shooting was Padayappa. It was a crowd scene, where he too had some sloganeering. It’s been quite a while now; he has not been to film shooting. But he is still a member of the Junior Artistes Association. However, I want my grandson Avinash to become an actor but his parents are keen that he completes his education. The death of Babu Sheelan continues to bother our family and we are reluctant to encourage any of our grand children to pursue a career in the film industry. At present, Avinash is studying engineering and is interested in pursuing a career as a cinematographer.

**Ageing, deterioration of health and death**

Decades ago while performing stunt as a duplicate for actor Krishna, I had to jump over a divider but had slipped and injured my leg by severely fracturing the knee joint; but then I was unable to take proper treatment' and several such injuries that I had suffered while performing the stunts are affecting me in my old age; the old injuries cause severe pain, restricting my mobility. Those days when we went for shooting it was not assured as to whether we will come back alive. Now there are precautions and safety measures taken at the shooting place, but still my own son died while performing a stunt. So you cannot guarantee anything in this profession.

Recently, at Kannada actor Shiva Rajkumar’s 100th film I was personally invited by him because when the Rajkumar family was in Chennai, I had trained Shiva Rajkumar in his younger days in fighting, horse riding and sword fight. In his
first film *Anand*, I was the stunt master and also in his next film *Rathasapthami*. Because I was not staying in Bangalore and after my son’s death, I did not go for shooting for a long time, they had started working with other stunt masters.

On his 100th film celebration, he felicitated me and on the occasion also announced that he will help me for my leg treatment. Shiva Rajkumar had asked me to work as stunt master for his 101st film. He had asked me to just sit and guide the director and wanted to see my name in the credit line of his 101st film. I am waiting for his call; the last Kannada film I worked as stunt master was *Roshagni*. The director and actor of the film *Roshagni*, Rajaveer, also offered to help me with the treatment. Recently, I stayed at his house for twenty days and got my leg treated. They will be soon starting the shooting of the new film *Karate Master* and my son will be working as his assistant director. Most of us have been working as daily wage earners in the film field for over half a century without any social security. The government should recognize our contribution to the industry and support us with welfare schemes such as pension for old artistes like us. Successive governments from different parties have been promising since decades now of providing housing facility to the film workers, but it has only remained on paper. We have heard that a land is allocated for film workers at Bayalanur, in Chennai and we are expected to buy the land and construct a house, but how can we daily wage earners build a house? They are asking us to take loan; then how will return the loan amount or even pay the interest, when we do not get work regularly.

[The above third round of interview was conducted in September 2013, but two months later Swami died in his sleep on 20th December, 2013. When I had met him in September he had become weak, unable to walk and had difficulty in swallowing food and had stopped going to the Union for almost a month. When I met him, it coincided with the centenary celebration of Indian Cinema, and Chennai was hosting the celebration for South Indian films. Swami was sad that neither he nor any other junior artistes were informed or invited for the celebration of their own industry. In my last visit to Chennai in 2014, Sakuntalamma had reminisced that M.B.Srinivas had made a short documentary film in which Swami had acted as the lead. It was a one reel film. However she could not recollect the title of the documentary. Now, Sakuntalamma is staying in a rented single room house, which is closer to her younger son Murali’s]
house at Ramapuram, meeting ends with monthly old-age pension of Rs. 500/- given by the government, and with the support of her children."

1.2. Vijaya – Junior Artiste, Body Double, Stuntwoman, Chennai

I am from Ponnur, Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. Born in a poor family, was deprived of education; I was married off at a young age, and had two children by the time I was sixteen. Since my husband was not taking care of my children, concerned with my plight, well-wishers suggested that I shift to Madras for work. I moved to Madras, and I started working as domestic help at the house of film industry personnel. While working there, I gradually got introduced to a few people from the film industry. Once there was a need for children for a film shooting and one of the film industry acquaintances had asked me to bring my children for shooting.

**Photograph 6:** Junior Artistes Vijaya at TVSNS office *(Photograph was taken by researcher during the field visit in February 2014, Chennai)*

**Beginning as Junior Artiste**

The film they were shooting had NTR and Lakshmi in lead roles. While I stood watching the shooting along with my children, a Junior Artistes’ agent asked if I would like to do a nurse’s role in the film and I agreed. After the shooting, the same agent asked me again, if I would be interested to work in the film industry. I agreed and since then I started working as a Junior Artiste. After joining as a Junior Artiste I
did not have to think of any other alternative job to run the household, and though I have not been to school, I am self taught and could manage to read dialogues.

While shooting for the film *Seeta Kalyanam*, my co-Junior Artistes suggested that I become a member in the Union and the Union card. I don’t remember the date of joining TVSNS, but my joining as Junior Artiste coincided with the year when Anna Durai passes away. I got my Union card by paying Rs. 6/-, and at that time, I remember, the shooting of the film *Karunamayi* was in progress. In several Telugu films of Raghavendra Rao, Krishna Garu, Narasimha Garu, Kodandarama Reddy Garu, I have got to do small character as well as costume roles. I have worked more in films produced by Gopala Reddy Garu and directed by Kota Krishna Garu. They usually worked together and had a very good understanding. Because of Junior Artistes Association most of us have a decent livelihood. When the Telugu film industry was in Madras, we would get a lot of work; then Madras was the center of film production for all the South Indian language films as well as Hindi and English films, but after Telugu film industry shifted to Hyderabad, now it’s mostly Tamil films that are made here in Chennai, because of which the work has reduced, and also the opportunities are much less for senior artistes like us. I manage to get only ten days’ work in a month and that too, only roles in mass scenes. The staff at Junior Artistes office does inform us if there is any work, but still we have to visit the office every day at five in the morning and evening to get work.

When I was young and good looking, I usually got character roles and rarely audience or crowd roles. It was Mohan Babu Garu, who helped me the most in those struggling days, and I was ready to do any role for his company. Recently, he had sent word for me through an agent to come for his film shooting, and I went for shooting and was paid four times the payment. I was hesitant to take the extra money but the agent insisted that I take it, as it was from Mohan Babu. Yesterday, also he came to Prasad studio and asked for me; there too I was paid twice the day’s wages.

**On Working as Body Double**

For the Hindi remake of the Telugu film *Devudu Chesina Manushulu*, Zeenat Aman was the heroine. The film maker had taken many people to her for playing the dupe but she had rejected them all saying that they did not have her height etc. Then I
was shooting in Goa. Fight master Daasu’s assistant took me to meet her at Taj Hotel; surprisingly, she agreed immediately on seeing me and I shot as her body double for ten days at AVM studio. I have done several fight sequences as dupe for actress Zeenat Aman. Whatever role I was offered I have done boldly. I have done dupe for actress Sarada Devi, K R Vijaya, Jayaprada and Bharathi, including several actresses in Malayalam movies. For the Telugu film Mundadugu produced by D Rama Naidu, I did the role of body double for Sridevi and when it was remade in Hindi, my friend who is also a Junior Artiste did the duplicate role for Jayaprada. Then I was shooting for another film but D. Rama Naidu insisted that I come down to Hyderabad for the shooting; so, I went and shot for a week. I have done body double for action scenes for several heroines. The fight master demonstrates the action scene and I rehearse for two to three days, and when the shot is called I act in accordance to the guidance of the stunt master’s assistant.

According to me anybody can do stunt scenes, they just need to have guts. The fight master and assistant instruct both of us – the heroine and the dupe; it is just that the heroine’s action is shot in close up shots and our actions are shot or captured in long shot. For instance, in a Telugu film Bala Krishna was the hero, Sarada was judge and Mohan Babu was villain. In the film there is a fight scene shot on the boat, with a bomb exploding on the boat. Shots of Sarada standing in the boat are shot, but I was made to stand for the scene to be shot when the bomb blast occurs. When the explosion happens I jump into the water; the shot of Sarada walking out of water wet is taken in close up. So, usually the risky shots are done by the body double. Here the water was deep and jumping into it was life threatening, but the close up shots are of the heroine in the action scenes making the spectator believe that the stunt is done by them. In reality it is we who do the stunts for them. In this profession we can’t afford to be upset or disappointed, we need to do whatever the filmmakers ask us to do.

In a film, I had to do the body double role for actress Sridevi, shooting for ten days in the helicopter. While shooting in the helicopter I had to control my bladder for hours, and sometime had to miss lunch. In a Krishna garu film, there is a scene where actress Sowcar Janaki dies, and I did the role of the dead body where I was carried around the village. I have done similar scenes for Jayasudha; her face close-up shot was taken but I did the acting of a struggling person before death and my body will
also be taken around. It was at the Venus Studio. Most of the actresses don’t do death scenes usually; particularly no one agrees to do death scenes on Friday; but I have done that for actress Jayasudha. Well, after the shot was taken the filmmakers would remove the bad omen by doing a ritual using coconut, and when I came home my mother would ward-off the bad omen with lemon. But I did the scene courageously; by taking several such risks I have brought up my children.

On shift of Telugu film industry from Madras and the challenges

I did not try for a better chance or role in films, because the struggle was to sustain every day, and also at that time I was getting good roles as a Junior Artiste. However when the industry shifted to Hyderabad, actor Kota Srinivasa Rao Garu, asked me to shift to Hyderabad, but then I was already settled in Madras and had to think of my children’s future, and I was more familiar with Madras than Hyderabad; so relocating to a new place did not seem like a feasible option then. I worked in many Telugu serials but now even the Telugu serial production has shifted to Hyderabad.

Next generation: Dancer, Cinematographer and a Hero

I got my daughter enrolled into dance class and later got her registered with the Dancers’ Association. She worked as a group dancer in the film industry and also married a dancer, and managed to build a house in Madras, and I stay with her. Now, she has stopped working as her son, Umecccha, will be soon debuting as hero. He had failed in his SSLC and was interested to act as a hero, and recently he has got a break to act in a film as a lead. My son had dropped out of school and was also keen to join the film industry as a cameraman. Then I had requested cinematographer Pandian for help; he had referred him to a camera assistant at Balaji Telefilms Company, and now he is working as a camera department chief. He is married and has two children. I have been an active member of the Junior Artistes Association, have worked in the committees; but recently, after my mother’s death I have been less involved with Union work. For constructing a building for our Junior Artistes Association, we had approached several Telugu directors, producers and other film industry people for donations; we succeeded in mobilizing a sizeable amount for the association to take up the good work.
[Vijaya continues to work as a Junior Artiste; she also recently, acted in a short film as the mother of the lead character. Film institute students had come and selected her at the Association for the role. She eagerly looks forward to the debut of her grandson as a hero.]

1.3. Raji amma – Junior Artiste, Chennai.

I am from Andhra Pradesh, I studied there until class three. I came along with my mother Suryakanthamma, when she moved to Madras, where she started working as a Junior Artiste and married Junior Artiste A. H. Khan Bhai. My step-father, also served as the President of the TVSNS Association. With both my parents working as Junior Artistes, I also started working in the film industry as a child artiste, and have been working as a Junior Artiste for several decades now.

My mother was also a dialogue artiste; she shared scenes with several noted actors, she died two years ago; she was working almost till her death. In her early days she got to do small roles with dialogues and has done body double role for some artistes

When I started working as a Junior Artiste, our Union was not as organized as it is today. Then the Union was in Revathi Street, near 100ft Road in a shed. We had to go and sign for work every day and then, the elders were paid Rs. 3/- and youngsters were paid Rs.1/- per day. It was difficult to manage two meals a day with this meager income. Those days the agents would not pay us on time, but with the Union becoming strong, the payment and the call sheet for work are in place, and we are given food at the work place. Earlier, the agents would lend money and would charge huge percentage of interest which was deducted from our daily wages.
Closing down of studios, formation of language industries and insecurities

With studios closing down we faced a lot of problems not just in terms of less workload, but we are also deprived of basic facilities. For instance, in studios we could use the bathroom but in outdoor shooting we don’t have such a facility. Even transportation is provided only on demand; otherwise agents don’t bother and we have to reach the shooting spot on our expenses.

My husband was a cine-driver who abandoned me and my children and shifted to Hyderabad when the Telugu film industry shifted from Madras. Several families with both husband and wife working in film industry had separated with the shift in the language film industry. My sons worked in the film industry; the elder son was a Junior Artistes and the younger one was a dancer, and both died young. Addicted to alcohol my elder son died of heart attack just outside the Junior Artistes’ Association office.

There is neither security nor savings in this profession because of which artistes like me and my mother have to work even in our old age, and till our death. Actors like Shoban Babu would give artistes like us monthly Rs. 500/-, but after he died even that money stopped. My mother and I went for his cremation. When I was young I would do whatever I was asked to – run in rain or a bomb blast scene; but now with age we get less work. I have to survive on two days of shooting per month. By taking retirement we don’t get much money, because we have taken loans from the Association, and only after deducting that, they pay us. The reason for still associating with the Union is because when I die there should be someone to bury me. There are no caste issues in the film industry. Here everyone is like brothers and
sisters, it’s like a family. Tomorrow when I die it is the Association which will do my last rites.

[With all of Raji amma’s family members dead, she stays alone in a rented house near the TVSNS office, and spends most of the time at the Union.]

1.4. Lydia – Junior Artiste, Mumbai

I am basically from Goa; my father worked in Pakistan, Kuwait, London, before returning to Mumbai in 1942, joining work at Taj Hotel. Our house was in Chembur; we are five siblings and we had a peaceful childhood. My sister and I studied at St. Antony’s School and my brothers were studying in another school.

Photograph 8: Junior Artistes Lydia (This photograph was taken at her residence by the researcher during her field visit to Mumbai in October 2013).

While my father worked in a five-star hotel, mother had a paan and milk supply business. Bal Thackeray used to come to have Paan and Black tea in our store. My mother had joined Congress and later the Shiva Sena; she died of paralysis. I studied till 10th after that I discontinued for assisting my parents in their milk business. Others continued their studies; both my sisters are married and one of them is a Junior Artiste, and my brothers worked as mechanics and were extremely good at repairing cars. I wanted to be a nurse and also did a course in nursing for two months at JJ hospital, but unlike today, in those days there were fears about various diseases. So, I finally gave up on nursing and started going for film shooting.

When I was a child my father used to take me for film shooting, and I have acted in films as a child artiste along with Nargis, Rajendra Kumar and baby Farida. Raj Kapoor’s chief assistant Kala Chand was our neighbor, a fair, very good looking
guy, like a foreigner. Those days Raj Kapoor used to have an Ambassador car and would come to our house with Kala Chand. They would talk for hours about Pakistan and Gandhiji; even Anil Kapoor’s father Surendar Kapoor would come to our home in those days. When we were kids, Bal Thackeray would sit in our house at Tilak Nagar, Chembur and draw cartoons.

Raj Kapoor was shooting Bobby and they wanted young girls. So Kala Chand asked me to come for shooting; with this film I entered the film industry as a dancer and Junior Artiste.

In the beginning, our Junior Artistes Union office for both male and female artistes was located at Saath Rastha, the Dancers’ office was at Ranjith studio. Owning a membership card was a privilege those days, Agents would insist that we become members for getting regular work. But we had to pay Rs.5/- which was unaffordable those days, to enroll as members and get the card. Bachchan Singh, who was Shami Kapoor’s driver, had become a Junior Artiste supplier. One day Bachchan Singh was sitting with money, but I did not have five rupees for getting the card. I proposed to Bachchan Singh, if I could help him count his money; he agreed but insisted that I count the money in Hindi. Then Union president Balli understood my circumstance, and asked Bachchan Singh to lend me five rupees. He exclaimed, ‘Five rupees!’ I requested him to give me work and deduct it from my payment; this is how I got my Union card made. Later, when I went to return the money he gently refused to accept the money; those days people were nice. It was after six months of entering the film field that I got my card made; I would go for shooting mostly at RK studio, and I knew to travel only to four studios - RK studios, Asha Studio, Basant Studio and S L Studio, all of which were in Chembur. I loved working for RK films and was disappointed when they sold it for a hospital; there was a nice garden with roses, and it was a big studio. And, at Basant Studio, they would usually shoot mythological or dharmic films and we would act in the role of Dasis.

In the past, audition was done in Natraj Studio, and I remember when I went to get the card, among others producer Sawan Kumar Tak was present in the selection panel. I was shooting, so for this interview I went to the interview with my shooting dress, which included heels, a short skirt, and a T-shirt. I was the first person at the audition; I entered, and wished the producers ‘Good morning,’ they gave me a super
class card; I was elated; I said ‘Bye Sweethearts’ and they had a hearty laugh; I think I had made their day. To be a ‘super class’ Junior Artiste you need to carry yourself in a particular way, and it’s not just about speaking in English and wearing modern dress. But now, there is neither audition nor any kind of selection process; today either people get cards by paying two-three lakh rupees to the association, or they are favourites, or the coordinators.

We were shooting for the film *Dard Ka Rishta* and I had spoken to Sanjay Dutt’s driver Ameer Bhai that my brother was a mechanic and good at driving, and on his recommendation, Sunil Dutt Saab, agreed to have him as his driver and asked him to come to his home; but on that fateful day it was raining so heavily that my brother could not reach his place on time. He lost the opportunity and continued working in a garage in Chembur.

Initially I was not interested in a career in films. But those days there were many Catholics working in the film industry especially as Junior Artistes and dancers. The work becomes interesting when you have your own group, and those days Catholics were loved by actors; we did not speak much Hindi; it was usually English that we spoke on film sets. Raj Kapoor would give instructions in English: ‘You come to my right, darling go that side, little behind’; we had Catholic dance masters, Robert master and Vinay master; Raj master, Kamal master were also there – they were all nice to us. We would do the rock and roll, jive etc.; those days all types of dancers were there; it also depended on the genre of film being made. I was a good dancer and those days we could own two cards of two Association – Junior Artistes as well as Dancer’s Associations’ card, but later new rules were made and when Oscar master became the President of Dancers Association, he said, Junior Artistes could not work with that Association. Because of this initially there were all kinds of problems; some who had typical Indian look with long hair, were not getting work. We never refused to work; it was the dancers who did not want Junior Artistes to work as dancers.

In those days the understanding was that those who are good in dancing will work as dancers and other will be cast as Junior Artistes. But gradually, only dancers were cast as dancers and dance masters had their own association, and they started giving work to their own dancers. So Junior Artistes were not taken for dancing roles, and only when there was a need, they would put four to five of us as group dancers.
Some of them left the industry – my friends Sharon shifted to London and Pam moved to Bangalore. Today, there are very few Catholics associated with the film industry; I wonder as to where they have all gone. Those days we would wake up early in the morning and rush for shooting; we felt the daily payment of Rs. 55/- was sufficient, though nothing could be saved, as we had to pay for both travel and food. Unlike today, the film company would not provide us with food and also, we had to save ten rupees for next day’s travelling, then the transportation fare was cheap. Though nothing could be saved, but I still do not understand, why we were happy with Rs. 55/-.

Apart from dancing, I would also work as a body double to actresses like Jayapradha, Dimple Kapadia and Rekha. They usually don’t give any credit for the duplicate role in the film credit line. But the film makers and actors talk about our work. Director Saawan Kumar Tak loved Junior Artistes. He had a golden cigarette lighter and would only give it to me to hold, and he would openly say that he was also a Junior Artiste and that he loved Junior Artistes. Before the shot, he would tell us to keep quiet for 10 minutes as he had to take a shot, and we would all laugh. After every shot he would ask the production assistant to serve us tea-water (Chai-Pani); it was fun shooting for him, we miss such people in the film industry. In those days producers would come for film shooting and would interact with us; but today even the directors don’t talk to us; it’s usually the assistant directors or the agents who give us the instructions on the set.

Actor Manoj Kumar also loved Junior Artistes; our dinner money came from Manoj Kumar. We were all young and would feel hungry but would have no money for food and would be whispering among ourselves, saying that ‘I have 2 rupees, I have just 3 rupees.’ Seeing our plight, it was he who first started the trend of giving us dinner money, and it was eight rupees – big amount in those days. He used to publicly acknowledge that he cannot make movies without Junior Artistes. Unfortunately, producer and director Prakash Mehra is no more. He was also very good to us; I used to ask him where he was taking us for shooting and he would say to the studio; I used to be very happy because it was an air conditioned studio. Actor Mithun Chakraborty used to talk to us and Shakthi Kapoor would joke with us. If I was sitting quietly, Mithun Chakraborty would call loudly, ‘Lydia sleeping,
Kamachor,’ and I would say, ‘No Mithunji’. We would go to his house for parties, he had five dogs and even now when I see him on the sets I enquire about his dogs. Then we would go to parties and discos with them but no one ever tried taking advantage of us, and we were not exploited like we are today.

Amjad Khan was very good to us; he would share his tea with me. Today, if Amjad Khan would have been alive, Junior Artistes would not have been suffering. He also loved Junior Artistes, fighters and lights men. In those days during the month of Ramzan the lights men would fast and while working in the heat without break, some would fall from the set, get hurt or die. It was common on the film set to hear such conversations: ‘Why are the lights off?’, ‘That fellow fainted’. So, Amjad Khan would suggest that those who are fasting would work down, and only those who were not fasting would go up on the set work because during fasting they don’t even drink water and feel dehydrated. Amjad Khan worked for the welfare of the film workers. On his set, we would have so much fun, everyone would be laughing. We would ask him to give us one and half shift (starting from 2 pm to 10 pm) and would ask Actor Shatrughna Sinha, to come late to the film set for work. Amjad, would say, ‘Lydia is so naughty, she wants an additional shift and that is why she is asking you to come late’.

In those days, while shooting, directors like Raj Kapoor would ask us Junior Artistes, whether the film female lead, Padmini Kolhapure was looking good. When his son Randhir Kapoor, was working as assistant Director, he had strictly informed him to check whether lighting was falling properly on the Junior Artistes. Even cameramen would talk to us with respect. In those days, people would greet each other regardless of their position/status in the film industry. All of us wanted to shoot for Raj Kapoor because his shoot usually used to be from 10 am to 10 pm (morning to night), two shifts. All of us would be happy as we would be paid 55 rupees at end of the shift. Even for Prakash Mehra, it was 2 pm in the afternoon to 10 pm, making us all happy. Working on the film set in those days, was a joy and time just flew by. Chintuji (Rishi Kapoor) once celebrated his birthday with us Junior Artistes. We were shooting then at Panchagani for the film Sangram; I remember we danced till 12 am in the night. I have worked with actor Sanjeev Kumar in several films; he was also very good with Junior Artistes.
But today, actors like Shahrukh Khan don’t talk to Junior Artistes. I have been working with him from his struggling days as a TV actor, starting from his hit television serial *Circus*, and in Fauwji, I did the role of nurse. Stars of today are afraid that if they talk to us, we will pester them with our problems. They don’t understand that we Junior Artistes are educated and don’t want anything from them; at the most we only request them for a photograph with them. I had so many photographs that my husband was so jealous, and one day he burnt them all. Today, they may get best of the women but not a friend. I never forget to wish Randhir Kapoor on his birthday. Today it is just work, no one smiles or greets each other; artists just sit and smoke and even if we smile they don’t. Also, today's actresses do everything, they don’t need duplicate, and they don’t take rest. Those days actresses would take rest, look after their health and looks. They would tell the director that they have been working too hard for those two long shoots; they would suggest to the director to have a duplicate, or suggest my name for performing their dupe. But today actresses work continuously and look so tired and worn out after working in just five to six films. Those days duplicates were paid hundred rupees and five rupees was the supplier’s commission.

In RK studio, facilities were very good. They had the same room for make-up for Junior Artistes and other artistes. Raj Kapoor was very particular; he would ask us to sit in front of the mirror in the green room and do our makeup. Those chairs are still there and the costumes of *Bobby* are showcased in glass. Today, at work place, Junior Artistes are taken for granted; the attitude is that “you need work but we don’t need you.” Because we are dependent on work, we do our own make up and if we complain, the coordinator will not call us for work the next time. Then Junior Artistes were fewer in number and they were educated; they would talk to the production manager very decently unlike today’s Junior Artistes, who are uneducated and they shout, ‘Hey dada, there is no room’. There is a way to ask, I would rather politely request them to allow me to change in the Vanity Van.

Those days, film sets were rich, and we were given costumes; but today they ask us if we have the costume and accordingly we are given work. Most of us can’t afford to go for film shooting because we don’t have the required dress, and how can they expect Junior Artistes to have all kinds of dresses. So, the coordinators usually don’t call the 'A' and 'B' class artistes at all; instead they only request to supply super
class, because these artistes have rich costumes. Going with the market demand today Junior Artistes also have expensive sarees costing five thousand and more; recently I bought a red shoe with heels costing 3000/- rupees.

It is such a headache to carry our clothes and accessories for shooting every day and in case the two sarees we have taken for the shoot are not approved by the assistant directors, the coordinator will not call you again. And, since we need to sit in the scorching sun, because of exposure to heat, along with sun burn, my blood pressure has also increased. How much sun screen can we apply? The coordinator keeps a constant eye on you and will not call you again if you hesitate to stand in the sun.

Photograph 9: Photograph of Lydia taken while acting as a Body double to a Hindi film actress. (This Photograph was shared by Lydia with the researcher during her field visit to Mumbai in October 2013.)

Once I went to meet my daughter at her shooting place and director, Subhash Ghai, on recognizing me asked to come for a Punjabi song shooting the next day, and when I called the supplier in charge to enquire about the shooting, his reply was that there is a need for young people. What do I understand by this - that the director of the film does not know as to who is young or old? Aren’t we right in blaming the suppliers for denying us work?

Those days there were regular shootings and I got lost doing body double to heroines, that I did not give time to plan my career, or grow in the film industry. There was lot of work and frequently we had to work in back-to-back shifts. I have
been duplicate to many actresses; in the film Rajput, I did Reena Roy’s duplicate. When Hemamalini was pregnant her duplicate Maya used to dance for her, and it was not easy to act as body double to stars.

Production Manager, Subash would give me his cash bag and one day, when he handed over the bag saying it has forty lakh, I teased him, saying has he become a producer, and he had replied that with my wishes if he ever becomes a producer he would frame me in 70 mm close up. He actually became a producer and signed Mithun Chakravorthy as the hero, and when we were shooting at Mehboob Studios, we were tired and were asking the Masterji to announce pack up. His reply was that after one close up shot, we would pack up. Subash then came and asked me if I remembered his promise, and in a song in that film, I don’t remember it now, if you see, there is close up shot of me cheering Mithunda.

Those days the director would come and ask for our names, and we would feel nice when the directors would call us by our name, asking for us to come in front. I remember, Sawan Kumar Tak, would say, ‘My darling come in front, I am taking your big close up’. Today, even the assistant directors do not ask for our name and they randomly call ‘madam’, ‘crowd’, or ‘Bhai log’; their announcements are so bereft of respect: ‘this person in front’, ‘that person go back’, ‘stand here or there’. Directors should ask for the name of the artistes they are working with on the film set. When they treat us with dignity we also feel like respecting them. Also, Junior Artistes should talk to other film staff with respect and greet each other on the set. Before there were many Catholics and we would speak in English; now the Junior Artistes don’t speak in English and that makes assistant directors look down upon us.

Nowadays directors who have become producers address collectively by tags like Bhai log etc. In those days, directors, producers would call us by name; so it did not matter what others called us. Today, the condition of work is so bad that the assistant informs the coordinator the scene and he will shout, ‘Lydia come in front or they point fingers and say, lady standing behind come forward’. Dev Anand, would say, ‘You have such a beautiful sexy face; come in front’, making me feel so proud in front of all those actresses. When we were shooting for the film Oh My God, Mithun Chakravorthy, would ask me to come in front and when the co-actor Paresh Rawal, said you’re shouting at a Junior Artiste, his reply was, ‘Lydia is a Junior Artistes but a
friend too’. And, every day, when he came for shooting he would greet me by hugging me, and that makes you feel that your part of the team, and not just a Junior Artiste. It is not bad to be part of Mahila Kalakar Sangh; many noted film personalities are married to Junior Artistes and some Junior Artistes have become stars like Mumtaz, Aruna Irani and Meena T.

Those days big coordinators were from Punjab. Some of the coordinators were good and popular – Lekhraj and Devraj brothers, K K Dewan, Shakthi Sawan, Lalchandji, Shahir Hussain and Nasir Hussain, Suri Saab and others; they would work for big pictures like Raj Kapoor’s and Dev Anand’s.

In the 1970s the Junior Artistes Union was at Saath Rastha, near Mahalakshmi Station; then men and women were together in the same Union. The road to the Union office was dirty and the men on the street would ogle at us, pass comments, and call us extras. Taking that route every day to reach the office was very disturbing; that office place was not for us, educated. The policemen would stare at us. We had to be in office from 3 pm till 7 pm; it was a big room with benches arranged like in the stadium, and the men would insist that we women sit up and it was difficult for us to climb those benches with our short shirt or dress and long heels. Unlike today, we did not have mobile phones; even coordinators did not have mobiles; they were all small suppliers, and with movies becoming hits, their commission increased and they also became rich.

Today, these Association leaders give work to their own community people, and to those who engage in gambling (play cards) with them. Producers are cheated as they are not even aware that people working in their films are not Junior Artistes but outsiders. The irony is some of the successful coordinators are sons of our own Junior Artistes. If I have to get work, I have to travel every day to the office or call the office; most of the days I don’t get work because I am old. Several women in our association are single mothers, unmarried or widows and divorcees. They are told, ‘What will you do at home, come for film shooting’. Women from all kinds of background come to this profession; some get their family members – sisters and daughters - enrolled or introduce their neighbors, friends to the field.
Now the Association is not issuing new cards, because when we members are not getting work how can we take new members, and also membership fee is runs up to a few lakhs, and not many can afford it. Also when you are able to get work without being members, why spend money on a Union card? Also, there is no transparency on the money transaction, who paid and to whom and how much, no one has any clue. Slowly, outsiders will take over and we will close down the Association which is actually the objective of the coordinators.

I am not sure of transferring of my card or nomination of members, but it is safe to collect your money before you die from the Association. Our Association leader Sulekha’s father was a supplier, and that’s how she became a Junior Artiste and she falls in the category of super class, when she does not have the look or the personality to be a super class. She does not have to go for shooting as she gets payment sitting in the office itself, through commission from the coordinators. Some of these leaders make these B class artistes work as domestic help in their houses. Because of inefficient and corrupt office bearers today non-members are busier with shooting assignments than us. You should have come to the night shooting, I would have shown you the non-members; you could have taken a picture and informed the Federation people. [She thought that since I am interviewing her, I could also solve some of these nagging problems of hers.]

Apart from films I also work in television and the super class is paid Rs.1,200/- per day. The agreement with the Association is when they employ a non-member for the day’s shooting they need to pay that many members’ money to the Association which will be paid to old Junior Artistes who are not getting work, or are unable to go for work. But the coordinators are paying Rs1200/- as compensation for four days shooting; then what is the use, and how can this be considered as compensation for depriving us registered Union artistes from our work? These leaders are paid Rs. 50/- commission for every non-member they employ for the day’s film shooting. In films where the crowd requirement is more than two hundred odd people, even then agents don't call us for shooting preferring outsiders. This is a strategy to marginalize us and our association, and slowly eliminate it.

I have maintained myself well and I look fit. I still wear jeans, short tops and heels; people who are not even as good looking as I am are getting work, and we are
forced to sit back at home because of the politics of the Union. What is the use of having a Union and elected representatives when they can’t assure work for the registered Union members? In the past Catholics dominated the field, and gradually they disappeared; today majority of the artistes are from the Muslim community, and it is obvious that they will prefer to vote those candidates belonging to their community. Maybe, if I was Lydia Khan I could have become a leader and also managed to get regular work. And, usually members enroll or introduce their own family members – wives, cousins or children because of the kinship system. People of a certain community become a majority and even when I joined the field I brought my sister too; but today our children don’t want to work as Junior Artistes.

My husband is also from Tilaknagar in Chembur; we, along with Anil Kapoor, would go to school together; they were of the same batch. Later my husband worked in the Middle East in an Oil company. After our marriage, he did not want me to continue in the film industry, but he died of illness. We have one daughter.

I did not want my daughter to be a Junior Artiste. So, I got her registered with the Dancers Association because dancers are respected and can also earn more. We had to pay 20,000/- for the association card; then Nandaji was the secretary and I knew him; so I requested him to give membership to my daughter and promised to pay the fees in a month’s time. Trusting me he registered her, and my daughter worked in day and night shift with Jay master, and we managed to pay the registration fee in one month’s time. Even among dancers there is lot of competition, and seniors bully newcomers; sometimes they don’t even give chairs to newcomers to do their make-up.

It was in an Aishwarya Rai film shooting at RK studio: my daughter was sitting in one corner and doing her make-up and they were screaming saying ‘We are ten years senior. Why should we leave the chair for you’. I went to their office and complained to Sheelaji, Raj master’s assistant, that having worked for forty years in the film industry I have never misbehaved, and senior dancers in the Dancers’ Association are claiming to be seniors and are not letting my daughter use the chair to do her make-up. I am always there for my daughter.
Even when we go for film shooting, dancers don’t allow Junior Artistes in their room, but in night shifts if we wanted to sleep I would go to the dancer’s room, and they would allow me because I have worked as a dancer too in the film industry. Today, my daughter works as assistant to dance directors – Raju Khan, Boney Verma and Farah Khan. Her name is Zeena and is shown in the film credits; and you can also find her in the ‘making of the films’. Recently, she was seen in Rowdy Rathore and Dabaang. She is very hard working, she has moved up to become assistant choreographer, and dancers and others at work place address her with respect as Zeenaji. And, I tell my daughter that now that she has become the assistant, she can give work to dancers, give work to those who are in need like paying children school fees etc. If my daughter sees anyone dancing well, she encourages them by asking them to come in front.

Though the career span of the dancers is short, fortunately my daughter continues to work in films, shows and gives training to actresses at their home. Before, we did not have television at home and my daughter wanted to watch Kaho Na Pyaar Hai and our neighbors refused to allow her watch, and then I told her you will see all these actors in person. Today my daughter is dancing in movies acted by Hrithik Roshan. She did try to be an actor. She acted in a short film – No entry and also, did an advertisement with Remo but eventually she gave up aspiring to be an actress, and now she does not want to do choreography either, having worked for so long in the film industry; I do understand her reluctance.

I have seen many models get into depression; they take up drinking and get into drugs and also lose everything – their good looks, health and whatever they have earned. It is very difficult to work in the film industry; directors scream at assistants, and it is very embarrassing and humiliating. Even to instruct artistes to move to left or right they yell at them ‘Get out… get out Zeena,’ instead of saying, ‘Come to the side,’; but the same director talks with utmost politeness to actors; they need to behave in the same way with the film crew members. These directors should learn to talk to their assistants, and they don’t care about us Junior Artistes, because the job is given to the coordinators. My daughter is educated; she could have been air hostess in Emirates but chose to be a dancer. She is happy with four days’ work and four days’ rest.
For *Gandhi* film shooting, Bachchan Singh was the supplier; film shooting would commence as early as 5 am in the morning and we would all take the early morning local VT train. When the movie became successful, the makers of the film gave a cheque for artistes who worked in the film but senior artistes in the Cine and TV Artistes Association (CINTAA) took all the money, and did not bother to give us our due money even though only a handful of their artistes worked in the film; it was we Junior Artistes who shot for hours standing in the hot sun. The scene was of Gandhi returning from South Africa and we are all waiting to greet him in white saree standing and waving. Today, most of the Junior Artistes who worked in that film have died without getting their share. I can demand on behalf of the Junior Artistes but I am afraid that the senior artistes may threaten me and my daughter. I am waiting for Sanjay Dutt to come back from jail so that I can ask his help to resolve the money issue of Gandhi film; I also have problem with my in-laws about my property.

In *Om Shanti Om* film, SRK says, ‘A Junior Artistes dies with only his card on his body and nothing else’, that is indeed our state in the film industry. The second lead actor in the film Shreyas Talpade’s grandfather was a Junior Artiste and in the film Shreyas delivers this line with real emotion because he is aware of his own grandfather’s struggle in real life. Recently, I went for a shooting; there the film director Rana, who is working for Balaji Production came and hugged me; I was happy to see him grow from a Junior Artistes to assistant director and now the director of a film. He would ask me to take rest between shots and also, he would pack up early so that I would not miss the bus. In our line of work, there are talented female Junior Artistes who are capable of giving a good shot to the camera and directors. They have unbelievable patience to take retakes after retakes of a single shot of those actors whom they pay in billions, but the same directors are reluctant to do a retake with a Junior Artiste who is paid meagerly; isn’t this unfair?

Atulji is making a new film and I have been given a character role of playing mother of two sons. When we were shooting for a church scene, he would ask for my suggestions, ‘Lydia is the expression of the priest right?’ This reminded me of directors like Raj Kapoor who would also consider Junior Artistes’ suggestion. Unlike in the past, today they have a monitor, and when they ask for our suggestions these are the moments we feel important, and part of a team and that we too belong to the
film industry. Even when it was for an outdoor shoot, Raj Kapoor always wanted
decent crowd for his shooting and would shoot only with Junior Artistes and he also
knew us by our names. If I did not turn up for shooting, Dabooji (Randhir Kapoor)
and Chintuji (Rishi Kapoor) would reprimand the suppliers if they did not call me for
shooting.

Without us Junior Artistes, directors can’t make a film. Along with senior
artistes we are also seen on the screen and we are skilled enough to give any kind of
performance. Today, there is no Amjad Khan to help us; I hope Mithun Chakraborty
comes forward to help old Junior Artistes like me who are not getting work. Our
neighbours don’t interact with us because we work in films and are scared that we
may not have money and may go to them for help. But I love my film industry,
whether the director greets me or not, because here you may get less money but
nobody starves; it was Bollywood which gave me financial independence, helped me
when my husband was sick and when he died, and it is the film industry that has
helped me in educating my daughter and also in helping her to make a career and
grow in the film industry. And, so I continue to work as Junior Artiste.

[Today Lydia, stays alone in an apartment at Vashi in Mumbai and continues to work
as Junior Artistes.]
1.5. Junior Artistes: Amir Sadrudin Lakdawala

Photograph 10: Amir posing with DadaSaheb Phalke trophy at his residence in Mumbai.(photograph by researcher during her field visit to Mumbai in Oct, 2013.)

My parents ran a stationary store called ‘Good Luck Store’ near Bhendi Bazaar, Mumbai where I would spend most of my time after school. I studied at Bombay English School. My entry to the film field was accidental; on that fateful day, I was as usual after school standing outside the school gate dressed in my school uniform – which was a white shirt and pant with a red color tie. I must have been around 12 or 13 years old, a fair and handsome teenager. Two men walked up to me and asked for my name, and enquired whether I was interested to act in films. Hearing this unusual proposal, I started laughing and jokingly asked as to which film it was. Unlike me they were quite serious and introduced themselves as working in the film industry, and collected my house address, and asked whether they could meet my parents.

Excited, I eagerly took them to my house which was at a walking distance from my school in Bhendi Bazaar. My father was standing at the entrance, and I introduced them to him. One of them introduced himself as the director of the film and told my father that they want to cast me in a film by Homi Wadia productions, and that the hero of the film was John Cawas\textsuperscript{xiii}, a fair looking Parsee, and since I
resembled the actor they wanted to cast me as the younger version of the hero in the film. Surprised by this sudden proposal and also skeptical, my father asked them as to what kind of work was expected from me; anxious that my father may refuse, I interrupted the conversation insisting that I want to act in the film; seeing my enthusiasm my father agreed.

**As a Child Artist**

We were asked to come to Basant Studio, Chembur at 10.30 am in the morning. Those days, the taxi fare per kilometer was 60 paise; so when we reached Chembur from Bhendi Bazaar the taxi driver demanded three rupees and sixty paise. Those days, Basant studio was a two floor building and was surrounded by a big ground and a forest.

On the set, I was made to dress in two-three different costumes and was presented before the hero, as the artiste playing his childhood character. John Cawas’s spontaneously remarked, ‘Yes, he is perfect’. Actress Nadia also agreed that I was the right choice. Today, when I look back at my first film, I laugh thinking about the remarkable resemblance between me and the hero of the film. The film was a sequel to the famous black and white movie *Hunterwali* (1962). I was mesmerized at the spectacle of a giant mahal set made in glass; I was dressed up in chudidar and kurtha; the director and their assistants had instructed that when they say ‘action’ I had to act in a certain way and I obediently followed their instructions. For the next five days I was in Basant studio, working for the film, the film makers were extremely happy with my work. I was paid 25/- rupees for conveyance and 51/- rupees as salary for the work. Though the production person had paid for the transportation they gave the conveyance again, along with my daily payment, at Rs. 10/- per day. They treated me well on the film set, and in that old film my name is listed in the credits as child artiste – Amir.

My father left his contact details, on the last day of my shoot, to keep him informed if there were any more such offers. After the film was released, some film makers contacted the Wadia production house for our address, and from then onwards vehicles from production house would come to our home and pick me up for the shooting. I was cast to play the childhood character of Ashok Kumar, Dilip Kumar,
Ajith and many others in several black and white movies. Since I was getting regular offers, I frequently had to miss my school, and gradually I too lost interest in studies.

But as I was growing out of adolescence, I think, offers to act in such roles stopped coming, when I was around 14 years old. I was considered too old to be a child and too young to be an adult, and was not even called for playing the teenager role. I had dropped out of school and would hang around Mehboob Studio, watching film shooting standing in the crowd. As I became familiar with people in the shooting place, I gradually started getting work, for standing in the crowd; suppliers, would say ‘stand, you will be paid rupees 5/- rupees’, ‘stand you will be paid 10/- rupees’ - and I continued to do this standing job in films.

**As a Junior Artiste**

When I reached sixteen, I had approached the Junior Artistes Union for a card; then the members had advised me to go back and to continue my studies and if I still felt like joining the film line to come when I am 18 or 20 year old. In those days, Anwar Hussain, brother of actress Nargis was popular for playing villain roles; he was also the President of Junior Artistes Association. I decided to approach Nargis madam, so I went to RK studio, where she was working, and requested her to help me, by asking her brother to recommend to the Association to issue me a Junior Artiste card. I kept frequently visiting the studio and requesting actress Nargis to help me get membership in the association; and I was once even thrown out of RK studio. Probably tired of my persistent efforts, one fine day, she asked me to come the next day as her brother would be there for shooting. In RK studio, Nargis was shooting on the first floor and her brother was shooting on the second floor. When her brother came down in the break, she called him and asked him to help with a Junior Artiste’s card. Her brother replied, ‘If you’re recommending Aapaa (sister), we will make him a Junior Artistes’. And, thus I became a Junior Artistes Association card holder.

Then the Association charged a membership fee of 104/- rupees. Today it has escalated to three to four lakh rupees. However, since last few years the Association has stopped issuing new cards. We now have only replacement, that is, when someone retires or dies their card is transferred or sold to a new person. And, when a member decides to retire, the only saving is the money they get by selling their card.
Neither the association nor the industry provides any kind of financial assistance to senior Junior artistes, who have worked for decades in the industry. In 1990, an event was organized called the ‘Oye Oye 90s’ in which around twenty-two lakh rupees was raised for the welfare of the Junior Artistes which is kept as deposit, and the interest earned from this fixed deposit is the sole source for bearing the maintenance expenses of the Association, in addition to granting death fund for artistes, which is a meager amount of Rs.15000/-. But for this death fund, we do not receive any social security benefit or any kind of exclusive support from the government. In my observation, more than the film industry, it is in the Television sector that Junior Artistes are treated with more respect, but I firmly believe that ‘Thameez (etiquette)’ and ‘Tehzeeb (culture)’ is equally essential in the film industry.

On Film Studios and Junior Artistes

In those days there were several studios - Ashok studio, RK studio, Filmalaya, Filmistan, Mehboob studio, Prakash studio, Mohan studio and Natraj studio. Hence there was regular work for us Junior Artistes; most often those days we would work round the clock. That on every Friday, minimum eight to ten movies would be released, is evidence to the demand we had in those days. But with collapse of studio system of film making, not just the number of films being made got reduced drastically, but the themes of the movies too changed from catering to the masses to niche audience, movie theatres and talkies made way for shopping complex. Single theatres are being replaced with PVR; the entire film ecosystem we knew was transformed, changing the entire film ecosystem. Popular talkies in Mumbai, such as Taj, Nishan, Royal, Alfred, Apsara, Minerva, Novelty, Opera, Swasthik and many such were closed down. With the closing down of studios, several film workers lost their livelihoods; a few committed suicide, and many succumbed to poverty; many migrated back to their villages; a few got into totally different occupation, and I remember a few who had saved some money got into garment business. Most of the Junior Artistes who had joined along with me, gradually quit the film line as the opportunity to get work decreased. Today there are just three from my generation who have continued to work in the film field; most of the members now in the Association are those who joined the Association in 2000 and later.
Today there are only a few fully functioning studios in Mumbai, such as Filmalaya, Filmistan and Mehboob studio. Now, the shootings are done at Film city where there are 20 floors for shooting. The number of the films being made is few; if you have noticed today, every Friday with great difficulty two movies are being released. Today, it is a case of more supply less demand; there is less work, but more people working in the film industry. But in those days we did not have these many Junior Artistes, makeup Artistes, technicians or directors. But when all these studios and theatres started closing down, another avenue opened up. The small screen i.e., television industry came as our savior; because of the increase in the number of serials and daily soaps, reality shows, today most of film workers are able to get work. However, even with all these ups and downs, I never once felt like quitting this field.

**Aspiration to be an Actor**

Initially I too had an aspiration to be an actor. There was a producer by name S K Kapoor who was willing to offer me lead role provided I work without any payment. I told him when the horse won’t get the grass to eat, how it will work; I refused to work without payment. His reply was that those who have worked for free have all become actors. That was true, actors like Ranjith, whose real name was Gopal and Shatrugna Sinha, had also come to watch film shooting; they struggled and became actors. Maybe if I had worked like them probably I would have been a hero, villain or a character actor. But I did not pursue my dream of being big in the film industry; there is lot of risk involved; if the film flops no one on the street will even identify us. ‘Ye hai film industry, chaddathe suraj ko he salam karthe hai,’ (This is film industry, only rising stars are revered here.). In my film career I have seen many stars come and go; there was a hero by name Anil Dhawan, today, no one even knows that there used to be a hero by that name.

Recently, near Lokhandwala Coffee Day, I saw actor Vishwajith walking on the road, he was a top hero who had worked with some of the leading actresses in the film industry. I went and greeted him and saying, ‘Dada you were such a big star’ and he replied that in this film industry only rising stars are respected. I asked him what he was doing these days and his reply was, ‘Nothing, staying in a flat and living in the memory of those good days’. Even today, I go and meet Dilip Kumar on his birthday at his house, and he gives me a hug. The general opinion is that, with age, actors do
not get work; but most often the fact is also that they will suffer in poverty but will not want to work; having enjoyed the glory and glamour of being hero, many restrain themselves from acting in character roles (as that of a parent etc), for the sake of social status. An actor should not be ashamed of his art. You should not be ashamed of acting. Actor Rishi Kapoor and I have acted together in *Mera Naam Joker* as child artistes. Today Rishi Kapoor plays supporting roles, and I continue to work as Junior Artiste. My roles as a Junior Artiste have not changed with age; I am still pushed into the background. Both our children are working in the film industry as artistes: hero’s son is a hero and Junior Artistes son is a Junior Artistes, but my daughter is working as a lead actress in television serials or soap operas.

Local people can be mobilized for outdoor shoots, but the film makers must take us for outdoor shooting because they need our cooperation too. When technicians can go wherever the shooting takes place, we also have the right to go for outdoor shooting, and we are screen actors depending on this profession for our livelihood and our right comes first. Recently, around hundred Junior Artistes were taken to Goa for *Chennai Express* film shooting; it was 10 to 15 days’ shooting and we were paid for one and half shift. They gave us VIP food and VIP lodging. We went in luxury bus and stayed in luxury hotel, two people in each room. Red Chillies, which was the production company, handled us with dignity. I like working for some of the production companies like Red Chillies; Salman Khan’s films and Karan Johar’s films. The Junior Artistes are treated well here, the food served is good; but there are some production houses which are so pathetic, that they out rightly refuse to give food and other basic facility for the Junior Artistes, and if we Junior Artiste argue with them, they instruct the supplier not to call us to work again.

The supplier today is the kingpin; the director gives instruction to his assistant directors, with regard to the requirement of Junior Artistes; the assistant directors then brief the supplier the number and the kind of junior artistes required for the shoot. Based on this requirement, the suppliers use their discretion as to who to send for the shoot. Usually if more than hundred Junior Artistes are required, the supplier will have six assistants who will handle the Junior Artistes during the shoot. But in earlier days, directors would talk to us directly; the chief assistant would give us instruction. Now, it’s not even the assistant director, it’s the supplier’s assistant who gives us
instructions. Today the core film crew, does not have any connection with the Junior Artistes; I cannot believe that the times have changed so drastically. How the times have changed!

As a Body Double:

I have worked as body double or as duplicate to many actors like Mithun Chakraborty, Jitendra and Shahnugra Sinha. We wear the costume of the actor whose dupe we are asked to perform, and the scene usually involves running, jumping on the terrace and we have to run holding the hand of the heroine who will also be a duplicate. We are paid double the fixed daily wages for this work. Stunts involving risk are done by stuntman or fighters, while Junior and stunt artistes are shown in long shot and it’s mostly our back which is shown; the scenes are juxtaposed with a hero’s close-up shot on the editor’s table.

When I was young I was cast as the lead actor’s friend, and because these scenes had continuity, those days I would get work for ten to fifteen days continuously in the same film. I had dialogue scenes with actors like Sanjeev Kumar, Rajesh Khanna and Jitendra. Now I get roles such as doctor, police officer, and lawyer, and also in passing or crowd scene.

When I started acting in films as a Junior Artiste, I would feel bad when my scenes would be edited especially when I had a dialogue or shared screen space. But over the years, visibility or not being seen on the screen seems to matter the least; once we get our payment it does not matter whether they have kept the scene or not.

Supplier/Agent

I never wanted to be a Junior Artiste’s supplier because, Junior Artistes who don’t get work curse the supplier in abusive language, and hence I did not want to earn my daily bread as a supplier. But I worked as an assistant to the supplier for films - Sanam Teri Kasam and Hukumath; in those days assistants did not have mobile phones, and had to travel in taxi or bus, day and night to fill the board. Suppliers would order us to go to different places; we had to make telephone calls whole night; it was very difficult. But today technology has removed the drudgery from this work; technology has revolutionized the task of mobilizing people; if you
ask suppliers to supply a hundred people he will be able to supply in a few hours; work has become faster, but competition has also increased. In our male Junior Artistes association there are 1200 members and in case they need more people than are available in the Association, the Association informs the producers that they will be supplying non-members and payment needs to be made accordingly. Some of the Junior Artistes have alternative jobs or have taken up part time work.

When I started working, the producer would pay the supplier immediately after the shooting. Also the cost of living was also much less those days. But for the past thirty years, suppliers pay from their own pocket and later collect it from the Production Company, because of which several suppliers have been incurring heavy losses. There are instances where the suppliers are not even paid if the producers incur loss, Sometimes they pay the suppliers after six months or a year after the film has been released. Suppliers are respected because they make the day’s payment to artistes regardless of receiving or not receiving their commission from the producer. It is a risky venture as their role is not limited to supplying Junior Artistes, but they also have to invest substantial money. This actually has made the suppliers very powerful because most often the producer is in debt to the supplier, and due to this delay in payment by the producer, the suppliers are no more just intermediary between the producers and Junior Artistes, but rather today they have become their boss, the pay master. The producers are gradually losing their influence and hold on the Junior Artistes, though they are still the employers. There are around seventy suppliers, but only 10 to 12 get work, and most are jobless. Currently few of the leading suppliers in Bollywood include, Pappu Lekhraj, Mohit Chadda, Raju Mital, Nanda and others. Pappu Lekhraj is the leading supplier and usually does not talk to all Junior Artistes. His father Lekhraj too was a popular supplier, working with well known production houses like RK and was known for helping the Junior Artistes in crisis like paying their children fees or for their health problems. Well, his son Pappu is also good but expects discipline from the artistes on the set. Since he is investing money on us, and he is our paymaster, we have to listen to them. Pappu has twelve assistants, and four of them are made in charge of Junior Artistes for the day’s shooting; also Pappu makes payment one hour before the day’s shift gets over.
At our workplace, which is usually the film set, there will usually be some important or casual discussion happening between the director and hero, or shooting will be in progress; hence we are expected to maintain discipline and silence. Junior Artistes often keep chatting, and the director, technicians keep yelling ‘silence, silence’, and most of the time, the Junior Artistes don’t care and continue their conversations; fed up with them, the director and technicians are forced to shout at the supplier, usually with the following instruction, ‘Send this person out, call him/her when he is needed’. Suppliers feel humiliated and they don’t call that person for work again or reprimand them. So Junior Artistes should be disciplined, wear the costume or dress properly and ensure the make-up and hair is done and maintained as instructed until the shooting is over.

Most often I have worn my own clothes and rarely have worn clothes provided by the production company. Sometime they ask us to bring an extra pair and would be paid Rs 20/- extra for the additional clothes that we carry. If I am in the decent class, then I should behave decently and wear good clothes. I should show to the producer that the money the supplier is charging is for the kind of quality people he is supplying. Also the payment the supplier makes is according to our dressing. The supplier may be taking 10% or 20% commission, but he is investing on us and it’s important to be disciplined.

**Union**

In the Junior Artistes Association I have worked as a leader for almost 14 years, in which five years, I have worked as the President of the Association. I keep telling the Junior Artistes to be disciplined and to dress up properly and not to indulge in activities that might upset the suppliers, who might deny giving them work again. If they are disciplined and decent, the supplier will always call them for work. On set, Junior Artistes generally don’t have much work to do; so there is a tendency to involve in a casual talk. Well, there is no restriction on talking or laughing but it is expected that artistes behave in certain disciplined ways on the film set.

Earlier popular actors would volunteer to become President of our Junior Artistes Association, which ensured that we had support of influential people in the industry, and also this helped in checking any kind of exploitation by the suppliers or
the film industry. Actor Raza Murrad was our President, and when I had joined the Association, the President was Anwar Hussain and after him it was Jagadesh Shetty, followed by Krishna Kumar, Zafar Ahmed Siddique.

I was the fifth President of the Association. I was President continuously for five long years. I also worked as committee member for fourteen long years. It is not easy to be elected to head the Junior Artistes Association, because every year there is election, and the competition is intense with 40 odd people contesting for 12 posts. I have won consecutively, most often winning in second or third rank, and when I got fifth or fourth position in the election I have worked as committee member. There is a lot of competition to be the President as it is the most respected position in the Association.

Film workers will be united as long as the Union is strong, and without the Union support, even Junior Artistes also cannot represent themselves as an organized workforce. As the President, I would go on the film set to check on non-members. Some of the elected members of our Association come to shooting and collect their wages, without participating in the shooting. This is a wrong practice; they have been elected with a purpose, hence they should not misuse their position, even when seniors like us, perform our role given to us on the film sets. Junior Artistes should work honestly without troubling the producer, director and actors. They have to maintain discipline on sets and not argue with the supplier. The supplier’s assistant is also a Junior Artiste, so we should also respect them. The supplier invests his money and it’s our responsibility to do the work properly.

Earlier both male and female Junior Artistes, were represented by a common Union, but we were divided by external forces, in order to weaken our collective bargaining strength. There was a lobby among the producers, to break the unity among the Junior Artistes, a Union is always a threat to these people, as they will be made to stick to norms; when there is no unity among us, they can pay us as per their discretion. In order to tackle this cunning strategy of the producers, we Junior Artistes went on a protest; our strike went on for almost a year, including a week-long hunger strike in front of offices belonging to Sriram Bora and G P Sippy.
Many in our Junior Artistes association are ex-members of dancers and fighters Associations. When these artistes are injured, fracture their limbs etc., they join our association. We do not stop anyone; everyone is welcome in our association. Junior Artistes can become stuntmen or dancers in their youth, but not later, but there is no age limit to become a Junior Artiste.

On Political parties and Union

Language is used by the political parties to mint money. First, the Shiva Sena started this, claiming that they are going to let only sons of the soil to work in film industry in Mumbai; they were followed by MNS, and other political parties. NCP also toed their line; all these political parties have their own Union. It is a free country, anybody can do anything. Everyone wants to make profit. Some of these Associations have enrolled more than two thousand members; guess how many crores of rupees they must have made. But what is the use? Only professionals can do this work, and when we need huge crowd these Associations are approached to send their members. However, when they are making a Marathi film we ourselves assert that members from these political associations should be hired; they have the right to work in Marathi films. They can work in our films too but only when we have shortage of people from our Association, otherwise they can’t. First preference will always be given to us because we are professionals; this is a government recognized body and a registered trade Union, and where will people like me who have worked in the field for forty odd years now go? However apart from films, I have also been participating as hired crowd in political meetings across parties – Shiva Sena, MNS, or Congress.

Family and Kinship

Also, during my tenure as the President in 1996, I enrolled my son Javed as a Junior Artiste by paying the membership fee of Rs.5000/-; he was 16 years old, had completed his tenth grade and was not good at studies, nor was he smart and good looking like my daughter. If he had the basic qualities required for an actor, such as being dynamic, handsome, fair complexioned, good height and weight, I would have definitely made him an actor. I would have enrolled him into an Acting School; I would have requested the director and producers to give him a chance. One should have the personality to become a hero, because this is a glamour industry and the
more good-looking and talented the boy, more work he will get. I thought that he does not have the personality, so I made him a Junior Artiste. I was smart in my younger days but was not interested to be a hero. But if I had pursued, if not a hero, I would have at least been a popular villain.

In the beginning, my wife worked for a brief time in two or three films as a non-member; in the film Sangram she was made to stand for a song with me, and also in the film Kaalicharan. But I did not want her to work as a Junior Artiste, so never got her registered with the Association. My daughter is beautiful and has studied B.com. I was interested that my daughter works in the film field; so I would carry my daughter’s photographs and show it to the directors, and had even forced her to get a portfolio done. But she on her own strength made a career for herself in the television industry; today she works as a heroine in television serials, and no one in the field knows that she is my daughter. Her real name is Nasreen and her screen name is Alisha, given by me because in the film industry we should not reveal our real name; so I gave her a screen name Alisha Khan. She plays the main lead in TV serials and has long dialogues, and the cupboards at home get filled with her script/dialogue papers. Recently she did a serial for Rajshri production where too she was a main lead.

My daughter Alisha says that as a child, she never understood the difference between an actor, dancer and Junior Artiste, for her all was actors and she was very proud to see me act in films. Alisha had wanted to become an airhostess but opted to do what her father wanted – acting.

"He was very clear that he didn't want me to become a Junior Artiste. He never told me why, and I never questioned him. He must have had his reasons," [This was shared by Alisha who I got to meet her when I visited Ameer at his residence for an interview. She spoke to me briefly about herself and her father.]

Alisha has worked as main lead in serials Shisha and Urmila produced by UTV. She has also worked as lead actor in serials titled Ghara ki Lakshmi Betiyaan; currently she is working in a popular daily soap, Jill Mill Sitaoron ka Angan Mein. In between she also worked in Fair flies and CID. She has been actively associated with the film industry for the past six years. My daughter also has acted in a film, but the movie did not have a theatre release and she was heartbroken. It was a love triangle story and she was the heroine. Popular actor Aamir Khan’s brother Faisal Khan was
the hero, and the name of the film was *Chand Bujh Gaya*; Faaiz Anwar had directed the film. After this bitter experience she did not want to work anymore in the film line. Artistes receive more respect in the Television industry than in films. Like how I watch all the films I have acted in, similarly, I don’t miss watching all my daughter’s serials.

I left my father's home in 1968 and the first room I bought at Bandra, was financed by my brother, and with some savings of my wife. For Rs. 3500/- I had bought a small room in Bandra where both my children were born. Due to some problem I had to sell that room. The single room house where we are currently living is bought from the earnings of my daughter.

I am still quite active in the film industry, and monthly I manage to get minimum ten to fifteen days’ of work, and the remaining days either, I stay at home or I roam around. Well, my earnings are enough for my own expenses, and I also give some money to my wife. I also need to wear good clothes. When I dress up and go out, it is important that four people look at me. Junior Artistes can lead a good life if they are not addicted to alcohol and gambling. I also indulged myself in these vices, but not at the cost of my family. My son pays the electricity bills; my daughter pays for ration and manages the house. I also give in my contribution for maintaining the house. Similar to the ‘Oye Oye programme’, supported by stars, and other film fraternity, which helped raise substantial money for the welfare of the Junior Artistes, I wish more such programmes are organized by big stars to raise donations, to help old Junior Artistes with a retirement fund.

I have worked in 4000 odd films in 48 years of my film career and continue to work as one of the busiest Junior Artistes, getting work most of the days in a month. I wish everyone works like me, even when they are 64 year old. Some of the popular films that I have acted in are: *Saat Hindustani, Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, Duplicate, Deewana, Mere Hum Dum Mere Dost* and TV shows - *Buniyaad, Shanti, CID* and *Aahat*.

[The lines below lines were inscribed on a memento holding Ameer’s family photograph and displayed prominently as a show piece in his residence]
Amir Sadruddin Lakdawala – I left my father’s house in 1968, because I wanted to be an actor. I had just Rs. 104 in my pocket. I got married, educated my kids in good English medium schools, and now I plan to buy my own home. I’ve managed it all by just being a Junior Artist.

Amir Lakdewala, who will be finishing 50 years in film industry, was on May 5th 2009, honoured by the Indian Motion Pictures Distributors Association, with Dadasaheb Phalke Academy certificate award, for his immense contribution the film industry. His name was recommended by the Federation. For an actor, who has worked in four thousand films, and continues working even after five decades in the industry, it was for the first time, in his career his work was recognized and also appreciated with an award.

Conclusion

These self representational stories provide us with rich primary data to write the social history of the film industry. In this chapter, though the narratives seem to be tracing a personal journey, these sojourns unravel to us the embedded workings of the film industry intersectionalities of gender, class, age, community and the changing social composition and practices of the film industry. Accounts of their career, family, their relationship and network with other stakeholders of the film industry – such as agents, suppliers, production assistant, actor, producer and director, help in getting an insight into the personal and work life of the invisiblized workers of this industry. These life histories of the Junior Artistes go beyond their own immediate experiences to weave a tapestry of how the industry functions at a social level. These words of the artistes are, inarguably, retellings of their lived experiences; although every individual story is unique, one common thread that weaves across these personal narratives is the aspiration for affirmation, acknowledgement and acceptance, both from within the industry and from outside. The aspirations and the career graphs also show the similar path. While the individual cases, presented here, do not by any means exhaust the complexity and inconsistencies in the lives of the workers, they are reasonably representative of the broad features observably present in a cross-section of the general working community of Junior Artistes; the multiplicity of viewpoints and experiential knowledge comes out here quite clearly, and with some parallels of life that most of the artistes live.
The gendered narration of working lives stories show the differences observed in the conversation of male and female artistes. This is recognized in the way female artistes located their working lives and the events of personal life like the death of son, marriage of daughters, which would become an important part of their work life narrative; this regular overlap of personal with the professional life is missing in the narration of men who were centered around their position and relationship within the film communities and about the broad problems of social world of the Indian film industry.

The recounting of the Junior Artistes helps us to understand to how changes in the film industry impacted the lives of the film workers at the lower strata of the industry. The narratives of Junior Artistes - Swami, Vijaya and Raji amma, highlight the impact decentralization of Madras as centre of South Indian film production, with the shifting of regional film industries to their respective states after the linguistic re-organization of the country. The closing down of studios had severe impact on film workers, though this has been mostly recorded from a comparative perspective of senior artistes who have experience of working since the studio era. However this can be juxtaposed with the narration of the post-studio Junior Artistes, who are concentrated in cities, which are the actual centres of film production like Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad etc., with regard to how they are affected due to outdoor shootings, to understand the impact of the end of studio culture. The problem is not with outdoor shooting which is an inevitable part of film making today; instead it lies with the practice of directors, preferring to recruit the locals in the places of shooting, rather than hiring the professional Junior Artiste, who depend on this work for their livelihood; it is a telling criticism of the production companies that pay the stars huge amounts often running into lakhs and crores, while trying to minimize their expenses at the cost of the workers at the base of the industry pyramid, who are already deprived of all benefits including a proportional wage for their labour. These narration also mirrors the meaning of work ethics in the industry. N. K. Sakuntala’s, attempt to start a Fan’s association shows the nexus between the star and Junior Artistes, both as a fan and a screen worker. Lydia tracks the changing demography of the film industry, and in retrospect Mumbai city itself; interesting is her reflection on the influence of religion and ensuing nepotism in the industry, which is linked to
community feelings, otherwise rarely spoken about. She also openly shares her opinion on the prevailing gender bias in the industry. Finally Amir’s narrative helps us trace the journey of Junior Artistes towards gaining a status of an organized work force, through Unionization, the vital role it plays in ensuring regular work and wages for Junior Artistes, who are treated as casual work force in the film industry. Their Union comes across as the only social capital available to the Junior Artistes in the industry, but there are forces working to snatch even this from the Junior Artistes.

Though these five narratives from senior Junior Artistes of four main film industries – Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, cannot be deemed as representative of the entire Indian film industry, nevertheless these self representations help us in sketching the broad contours of social history of the film industry; thus these narratives are not mere individual life stories, but sources full of sociological insights into the film industry; this is the world of cinema behind the screens, viewed through the lens of Junior Artistes.