CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES FROM EVERYDAY WORKLIFE: JUNIOR ARTISTES ON THE FILM SET

“We were shooting for the film ‘Lady Commissioner’. It was a chase scene where actress Malashri is shown running and a lorry is chasing her from behind and a Junior Artiste had to run in between the actress and the lorry. While enacting that scene one of our Junior Artistes came under the wheels of the lorry. The unfortunate event would not have occurred if the Junior Artiste had not bent down to pick up the fruit that had fallen from the lorry, if that person had just done what he was asked to do, the tragedy would not have occurred. The film producer Ramu paid for the treatment but the Junior Artiste did not survive.”

Govindaraju, Agent (Interviewed by the researcher on 16th, April 2014, Bangalore)

The incident quoted above is one among the several such accidents that keeps recurring in the Indian film industry. This incident while highlighting the prevailing work condition of the film industry, also draws our attention to the status of daily wage earning casual work force like the Junior Artistes both on and off the screen. It is estimated that as many as 276 crafts and trades come together to make a film in the Indian film industry, which produces the highest number of films in the world. (Oommen & Joseph, 3).

Every year more than 1000 films are made across 26 languages in India. What is the work culture and ethics in such a mammoth industry, what is it to work at the bottom of the pyramid in such an industry? This chapter makes an attempt to understand the work culture of Indian film industry, but through the lens of Junior Artistes. With the three major segments - Production, Distribution and Exhibition - involved in the process of film-making, the industry is labour intensive and provides direct and indirect employment to around five million people (about one million directly and remaining four million indirectly), and Junior Artistes at times form the largest recruited work force on the film set, but on the screen they are relegated to the background and they are usually blurred on screen; but their work is hardly acknowledged at the work place. Why and how are they made invisible both on and
off the screen? Why and how are they made invisible and what makes them to go unnoticed even on the film shooting site. To find valid answers to these questions, it is important to study the work lives of Junior Artistes. This chapter uses the narratives of Junior Artistes to analyze the everyday life on the film set.

Field visits to the film sets to get firsthand experience of the nature of work and also the work place of Junior Artistes, was the most interesting and stirring phase of this research. I used qualitative methodologies to study the working conditions of Junior Artistes. The research design made use of non-participant observation. The primary data was collected using semi-structured and informal interviews and group discussions. My fieldwork included visits to the film shooting spot; film shooting spots included outdoor and indoor, indoor being the film studios. I visited film studios in all the four metro cities – Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai. Apart from interviewing and interacting with the Junior Artistes, my field visit to film shooting spots included observing shooting process from morning to late night. This was the most tedious part of my field work, both in terms of getting permission to the shooting spots and also the process of observation. Apart from my interaction, a major segment of the information that I could accrue regarding the work lives of Junior Artistes was through observation. Though there are not many significant works in this area, some scholars (Ganti 2012, Caldwell 2008) have documented their experiences of watching Indian film shooting, while engaging in ethnographic field observations. This chapter aims to add to that experience of viewing Indian filmmaking.

The primary site which enabled me to unpack the film craft of Junior Artistes was the film shooting spots. Observing Junior Artistes at work gave me an insight both into this craft, as well as a unique opportunity to view Indian film production culture from the vantage point of the Junior Artistes. In this chapter I attempt to document those field observation and experiences. Using field notes along with interaction and interviews with Junior Artistes conducted in the last five years - 2010 to 2015 at multiple film shooting locations - Chennai, Bangalore, Mysore, Hyderabad and Mumbai, I describe the everyday work life of Junior Artistes.

In Anthropology, the line between the ethnographic mode and the fictional has always been thin; anthropologists take recourse to modes of story-telling that are
deployed in fiction. This does not mean that what the anecdotes that I am narrating are not true, or merely fictional; it only means that I am narrativizing vignettes of the work life of Junior Artistes; while Junior Artistes are the principal subjects (narratee) of these narratives, I as the researcher play the role of narrator here, telling the story of what happened on the different film sets from my point of view. It is in that sense that I say that I am using fictional ethnography approach; the reason for adopting this method is that not only does it make an otherwise long, boring, uneventful (nothing-happens-on-the-film-set being a predominant perception) day, engaging and effective, it is also to show here how the Junior Artistes appear through the eyes of an empathetic observer and narrator. Here the mode of ethnographic fiction aims to craft conventional ethnographic materials - interviews, non-participant observation, field notes, photographs - into a compelling narrative.

Before my field work, I had watched film shootings in busy bus stands or on streets in Bangalore, but only as a curious passerby or a casual bystander amidst a crowd. During my field work, I was able to gain entry to film shooting sites, with the help of Junior Artistes, the people who make up for the film crowd (reel crowd). Getting permission to enter a film shooting location was always a near impossible process. There were numerous instances where I was asked to vacate the film site, when I mentioned that I had gained access into the shooting spot, through a Junior Artiste.

Apart from film studios, the other important field work location for this study was the union office of the Junior Artistes. During my field work in Chennai, I visited the Junior Artistes union, which is locally referred as Thenninithiya Venthirai Saha Nadigar Sangam (TVSNS) in Tamil. Since every stranger is viewed with suspicion, the process of building rapport for both of us was tough and time consuming. Finally when I managed to break the ice, in one of their daily evening meetings, I asked a few Junior Artistes, if I could accompany them for a film shoot in order to observe their work lives. The TVSNS members who were by then familiar with my study understood the importance of the visit and suggested that I could attend a shooting that would be taking place in Chennai itself on September 6, 2013. Thus I got an opportunity to accompany the Junior Artistes for an outdoor shooting of the film *Veeram* (2014) by Vijaya Film Production, in Chennai, wherein three-hundred
male Junior Artistes were being cast for a background scene. Since the shooting was in Chennai, the Junior Artistes were asked to make their own travel arrangements and reach the location before 8 am.

Shooting for the film *Veeram* was scheduled in the premises of Binny Mills on Meenambakkam Airport road; I managed to reach the location by 9 am. But I was stopped at the entrance as the guards were strictly instructed not to allow any outsiders. Through the rusted gates I could see Junior Artistes changing into white shirt and dhoti. I was fortunate as a few Junior Artistes spotted me near the gate; they called out to the guard to allow me inside. Few yards from the gate stood a tempo with metal trunk from which the costume department crew were distributing white shirt and dhoti to Junior Artistes, who were asked to change then and there. Being the only female amidst the entire film crew, I easily stood out in the crowd. The production manager who was having breakfast at a far off corner called out to the Junior Artistes who were interacting with me.

My entry into the film work site without prior permission was seen as an intrusion and my gender 'female' as a distraction, and as anticipated the reaction of the crew was very hostile. Sensing trouble I showed my University Identity Card and tried explaining to the production manager the purpose of my visit. Before I could complete he interrupted rudely, asking with whose permission I had come to watch the film shooting. Being my first visit to a shooting location in Chennai, I was ignorant about the protocol and politics, and I unintelligently referred to TVSNS. The Production Manger was enraged and started abusing the Junior Artistes who were interacting with me. Despite knowing its futility, I made an earnest request to the Production Manager to allow me to watch the shooting, but he was in no mood to listen to me, and went to the extent of threatening to remove the Junior Artistes from work for not taking his permission before bringing an outsider for film shooting. To avoid further trouble to Junior Artistes I agreed to leave the place. This incident dented the confidence of the novice field worker in me. However I realized the need to be strategic on the field. Later in the day I approached the Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI) office for permission to visit film shooting in Chennai. Sundar, the then Vice-President, after giving a patient hearing to my intention, volunteered to help me; he immediately spoke over the phone to the
production manager of *Veeram*, who then agreed to allow me to visit the shooting spot. Realizing the futility of going back to the *Veeram* shooting spot, as it was already too late, I requested for an alternative shooting site, and in the given options, I chose to visit a film shooting at AVM studio which was near FEFSI office.

It was the last day of *Tenaliraman* (2014) film shooting at the AVM studio. For the scene that they were shooting, young men and women from the North-Eastern states of India were mobilized by the Junior Artistes Agent to be cast in the background, as representing people from China. They were ogled at and ridiculed by the crew members all through the shooting. Ironically, this was at a time, when heated discussions were happening across the country and in every media against prevailing racism towards people belonging to the North Eastern states, following repeated attack on them in Bangalore and Delhi. Here I was witnessing the attitude of the film industry towards them. The question as to why there are not many actors from North Eastern states working in Hindi or South Indian films was answered watching the shooting that day. Since I was only permitted to watch the shooting with strict instruction against interacting with any of the crew members, I could not interact either with the Agent or with any of the Junior Artistes.

But, when I visited the film shooting site in Mumbai through the Junior Artistes Agent I did not face many hurdles as in Chennai, to access the shooting site, because the Agents played an important role at the shooting place as they were the mediators between the director and Junior Artistes. Some of the film directors preferred to work with the same Agent in most of their films as they considered them reliable for supplying right kind of people for background or character roles. While I was doing my fieldwork in Mumbai, I had asked for an interview with Dharmesh Tiwari, the then President of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE); I was asked to meet him at Film City – a famous film studio where they had organized a health camp for film workers on September 19, 2013. Since he was busy at the event, I decided to visit the film shooting that was happening at Film City. One of the FWICE members arranged for it by talking to the art director and production manager of the film *Action Jackson*. I was permitted to not just watch the film shooting, but also to interact with the crew members. As luck would have it, the shooting floors of the film *Action Jackson* and *Samvidhaan* (2014) (a television series
on - the making of Indian Constitution), were in close proximity at Film City. During the breaks one could find the film crew members of both the shooting hanging out together. I decided to harness to its full potential this wonderful opportunity. I juggled between both the shooting spots, and got to observe the work lives of Junior Artistes in two different forms of media – television and the film. It was sheer luck and coincidence that I got permission to attend the shooting of Samvidhan. When I went to the set of Action Jackson, the assistant to the Junior Artistes’ Agent who was in-charge of coordinating the Junior Artistes on the film set felt that he was not authorized to speak or even allow Junior Artistes to interact with me in the absence of his boss. But he was in a fix, as I had come on the recommendation of FWICE member. Hence he informed me about the shooting of the Samvidhan TV serial on the adjacent floor. He suggested that I meet Majid Khan, the senior most Junior Artistes Agent, who was working for the ace director Shyam Benegal for the TV series. With no other choice, I walked into the set of Samvidhan reluctantly, but when I explained about my research topic to Majid Khan, he willingly gave his consent to both observe the shooting process and also permitted me to interact with the Junior Artistes. Later in the day I also got to meet the Junior Artistes Agent for the film Action Jackson, and got his permission to watch the film shooting.

I attended shooting of both the film and TV series for three continuous days. On the first day, after waiting for the lead cast for almost half a day, the Action Jackson film shooting was called off. Later I learnt that the Production manager and producers of the film were upset, due to the rising overhead cost with postponement of a day’s shoot; nevertheless they paid the Junior Artistes for that day. On the second day of my visit, the shooting was in full swing, the Junior Artistes were being cast in ‘passing shot’. A set resembling a busy street was erected with shops and carts on either side, with an idol of the Hindu god Ganesh placed in the centre of the street. The assistant directors along with the Junior Artistes supplier were positioning the Junior Artistes male and female, both youngsters and middle aged, in front of the shops; some were to act as college crowd and some were instructed to act as customers of the shops, while some were asked to just walk across the street when they would call the shot.
The entire morning was spent on setting a perfect camera angle, and the shot was rehearsed umpteen times, using the Junior Artistes, with a dupe stuntman riding on a bike. The film director Prabhudeva could be seen giving instructions in English looking into the monitor, “Ask that madam in red dress to come in front” and sometimes both the director and cinematographer would scream loudly, “Ask them not to look at the camera, that one in the blue shirt don’t look at camera”. Just witnessing it was so tiring; the Junior Artistes were made to rehearse over and over. Around 12 pm, the lead actor Ajay Devgan, after having a brief conversation with director, gestured he was ready for the shot; he enacted a bike ride scene and the take was 'okayed' with the first shot itself, by the director. By then it was 1 pm and it was time for lunch-break, the relief on the face of Junior Artistes was clearly visible, having been made to continuously stand on their feet since morning. It was an eye-opener to me: it made me understand the vital role played by background artistes in making the scenes on screen look real, and their pivotal role in saving both the production and lead actor's time, during the making of film.

In the afternoon, an auto-rickshaw stand scene was being shot; ten auto-rickshaw drivers along with their autos were cast for shooting a scene; the shooting went on for four hours, and the auto drivers were then paid Rs 1,200 each for the shot. Curious as to who had mobilized so many auto-rickshaws, I decided to strike a conversation with the auto drivers; the auto drivers, replied that they have a friend in the film industry who works as a dress-man in the costumes department, and he was their information source; if there is any shooting related to auto requirements, he would promptly inform the auto drivers, and with mobile-phone they said things had become a lot easier, as information about the shoot could be passed around easily. This interaction with auto drivers made me understand the existence of such informal networks and the vital role they played in mobilizing the required background artistes for shooting a film.

After watching the shooting process of a Hindi film like Action Jackson, to watch the shooting of a TV series Samvidhan, necessitated a major transition in my outlook, making me realize that the work culture and nature of work changes with the shooting style of the film director. With a veteran director like Shyam Benegal directing the series both the background and main actors were on time for shoot.
Though it was for a television series it was being shot in film format. The ten-part series on the drafting of the Indian Constitution was shot for almost two months starting from August 16, 2013. A replica of the Central Hall of the Indian Parliament had been put up and the Junior Artistes all dressed in white kurta-pyjama, had filled the chairs of the Parliament and were enacting the role of Parliament Members in a discussion, occasionally tapping the table and raising their hand in consent. For the shooting of Samvidhan, the reason behind selecting a senior and well-networked Agent like Majid Khan by director Shyam Benegal was obvious. Junior Artistes play a critical role in recreating the period and with the shooting spanning for weeks, Shyam Benegal wanted a reliable and known supplier with whom he had worked before. Khan had worked in the past with Benegal in his other films. This was an important project for Majid Khan also as he was getting sustained work after almost eight years.

The role of the Junior Artiste Agent is to supply Junior Artistes for the shooting as per the briefing given by the directorial team that includes – the director and their assistants and associates. Majid Khan could not afford to have an assistant and every evening he would personally go to the Junior Artistes Union office at Jogeshwari in Mumbai and select Junior Artistes. For casting, the first round of selection was done by Majid, and on the film set as per the director’s prerogative, Junior Artistes were made to sit and at times were also given a line of dialogue. The criteria for selection was not only their appearance, but the Junior Artistes were also needed to have the required costume, i.e., white kurta, pyjama and khadi coat. The TV series required people of varied age-groups, and people of both the gender, with different physical features, and apart from this they also had to make themselves available at short notice. The requirement provided to Majid Khan by the directorial team, ironically resembled a shopping list - senior citizen, a short stout man, youngster, dark looking man for a south Indian, tall man with beard, - and the list goes on.

The selected artistes had to follow the guidelines given by the Agent Majid; they were supposed to come in iron pressed clothes, clean shaven (for male artistes) and to report before time on the shooting set. Since the requirement of female Junior Artistes was significantly less, Majid, had mobilized them over the phone from
Mahila Kalakar Sangh (MKS), the female wing of Junior Artistes Association, in Mumbai, and also by contacting freelance models. As the Director Shyam Benegal is particular about his Junior Artistes as much as about the main artists, Majid had to take extra care to ensure the director is satisfied with the Junior Artistes supplied. Once the Junior Artistes arrived on the set, I observed Majid strictly instructing Junior Artistes to switch off their mobiles, to look after their costume and to maintain complete silence. Junior Artistes all dressed in white were cast to fill the chairs of Parliament Hall. Their role was to act as members in the parliamentary discussion and to occasionally tap on the desk, raise their hand or clap, as instructed by the director. The shooting schedule for the Junior Artistes was usually from morning to evening, and at the end of day's shooting Junior Artistes received their daily wages from Majid Khan.

Shyam Benegal being a perfectionist, Junior Artistes had a grueling task on hand; they had to go for several repeat takes of a single shot, which would sometimes stretch for hours. Some of the Junior Artistes would engage in conversations to overcome boredom, but any noise on the set would force the director to go for a retake. Hence the call for 'silence' was a regular fixture on the shooting spot, and every time the director screamed ‘silence’, Majid would give a stern look to the Junior Artistes and warn them during the break, that he would not call them for shooting the next day. Majid's job as an Agent is not simple, the Agent is responsible for all the hundred odd Junior Artistes, and if any of them misbehaves or vanishes, he is answerable to the production team.

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Once in between the shoot, Shyam Benegal and the associate director Dayal Nihalani, noticed a Junior Artistes dozing off; they were so upset that they stopped the shoot and screamed at the Junior Artistes to be alert at work or to get out. Majid who was himself sitting far of the shooting place and dozing off got scared and walked away. On another occasion, the top button of a Junior Artiste's kurta was undone. That may seem like a minor issue, but an open collar would have been inappropriate for shooting the day of adoption of the Constitution by the Indian Parliament. On noticing that, the director Benegal informed Nihalani who called for Majid Khan in between the shot and sternly instructed him to ensure that his artistes were dressed appropriately, when being casted in the background. The director would hold Majid Khan responsible for any mistake committed by the Junior Artistes on the location. To save his own reputation and to avoid being humiliated in front of the entire crew; Majid Khan would avoid casting people who were caught making any of these minor or innocent mistakes at the shooting place. Hence the Junior Artistes used to be extra cautious to adhere to the rules and be careful not to upset their Agent. Also, the length of a background actor's employment on a production largely depends on the needs of the director and the scene(s) being filmed. Some Junior Artistes were needed on the set only for a day or two; however many Junior Artistes remained with the series for an extended period of a month. On this same shooting set once I got to
meet an entire family of Junior Artistes - father, son and mother all shooting together for series. With the family all working in the same craft, there were such chances of all of them either working for the same shooting or meeting at a work place, if their shooting location happened to be in the same studio.

I observed on the set of *Samvidhaan*, the male and female Junior Artistes were given separate rooms to rest in between the shots. Food and drinking water was provided on the set, for all the film crew including Junior Artistes. However on both the shooting sets, I was surprised to notice that food was served in a separate section for the Junior Artistes away from the other film crew, but Junior Artistes seemed not to mind as this was the standard practice in most of the film shooting places.

Having one’s own costume is important for getting work as a Junior Artiste, and not surprisingly in most of the shootings I attended, Junior Artistes or background models did their own make-up and most often they used their own costume for the film shoot. In fact, the first question Majid would ask Junior Artistes after short listing them for the shoot at the Junior Artistes Union was whether they had a white kurta and pyjama for the next day’s shoot, and in case they did not, he would drop their names from the list. So not just did the Junior Artistes had to have diverse collection of costumes, but they also had to maintain them, hence it was not surprising that I found the artistes taking utmost care of their clothes on the shooting set, as they would require it for shooting the whole day and also perhaps for future shootings.

Let me narrate another incident related to costume and the profession of Junior Artiste. During my second phase of fieldwork in Mumbai I got an opportunity to be on the sets of Hindi film actor Salman Khan's film *Jai Ho* (2014); a daylong action sequence was scheduled on a street in Mumbai with a body double. A huge crowd had gathered to watch the shooting, expecting their popular hero’s presence. The entire attention of the film’s action director and crew was on the individual playing the body-double; he was made to sit in the shade with a make-up artist giving him touch-up every time he gave a shot, and the action director and cinematographer were constantly briefing him about his movements. Junior Artistes were also cast in the background scene but since the shooting was on a street there were no arrangements made for these artistes; most of them were sitting on the footpath waiting for their shot to be called, but I observed that a few of them were continuously standing or
leaning on the vehicles parked on the roadside. I got to interact with them. During our casual conversation, I asked them why they were not resting, as the shooting went on for hours; they mentioned that they were going for an evening shoot in the same dress and therefore could not risk dirtying it; hence they were not sitting on the footpath and also were standing away from the crowd.

**Photograph 28:** Female Junior Artistes resting exclusive restrooms provided during the break at Samvidhaan shooting. *(Photograph by the researcher during field visit to the studio.)*

Some Agents like Pappu Lekhraj are very powerful; he handles multiple productions. Agents have grown in influence and power in the industry, as they have not just remained mere supplier of Junior Artistes, but also investors. The Agents have to pays the wages before-hand to the Junior Artistes, and later recover the money from the producer. Junior Artistes look forward to working with Pappu Lekhraj as he pays their daily wages one hour before the day's shooting ends. During my fieldwork in Mumbai I had the opportunity to interact with him and also visit some of the productions that he was in-charge as Junior Artistes Agent. One of the shootings that I got to visit was at Kamalistan film studio; it was the shooting of the Hindi blockbuster *Happy New Year* (2014), which was produced by Red Chillies Entertainment owned by Shahrukh Khan, who was also the lead actor in the movie.
Photograph 29: Junior Artistes having Lunch at Samvidhaan film shooting at film city. (*Photograph by the researcher during the field visit to the studio*).

I noticed that unlike other film productions that I had visited, Junior Artistes were given a tent with chair and fan; even the food that was served was common to most of the crew members. Agent Pappu Lekhraj had appointed four assistants who worked both as Agents Assistant, as well as Junior Artistes for the film. Since Lekhraj has to manage multiple shootings, he has a team of forty assistants who also doubled up as Junior Artistes on the shoot. The bond between an Agent and Junior Artistes is very important; a comment by a Junior Artiste, Syed Nazeer Hussain working for Pappu Lekhraj, throws light on this bond:

We are around forty of us with Junior Artistes Association card, but we work mostly for Pappu's shoot. Since he is the busiest Agent in the film industry we get work most days in the month and also, we don't have to go to union office everyday and wait for work. This system of Junior Artistes being loyal to one Agent in our field is referred to as 'Ghar' and we belong to Pappu's Ghar; other Agents too have their own team of Junior Artistes belonging to their 'Ghar'. The Agent treats us like their extended family, we participate in his family function and he also attends our family related events. When I met with an accident he visited me in the hospital and helped me financially for the
treatment. Now when I am back to shooting with my limping leg after a two-
year gap, it is Pappuji, who took me back to work. He has been very
considerate, I am given less tiring work but he pays my full daily wages.

Such cordial relationship between the Agent and Junior Artistes is mutually
beneficial. To have a team of committed Junior Artistes working exclusively to a
particular Agent and to be available at short notice is essential for managing multiple
projects. Without such commitment it is impossible for Agents like Pappu Lekhraj to
grow to such significance in the film industry. Hence it is inevitable for the Agents to
be benevolent towards the workers. A trustworthy assistant is a necessity to become
an Agent handling multiple projects. Apart from managing the Junior Artistes in the
assigned film shooting sites, the daily wages to Junior Artistes are also disbursed by
the Agent’s assistant. As this profession involves huge financial transaction on a day-
to-day basis, Agents require trustworthy people in this role.

The Junior Artiste’s loyalty to their Agent is aptly summarized in the statement made
by Keshav, one of the assistant of Agent Pappu, who is incharge of shoot:

Our Agent Pappu pays us one hour before the work is complete. Not a single
day has he delayed wages to us. In addition to it, he also ensures that we get
regular work. We are a few of his trusted people, so we also substitute as
assistant to Agents, as well as work as Junior Artiste. We are paid extra for
the role of assistant, along with our wages as Junior Artiste. So every member
in our team considers it our responsibility to ensure that Pappu’s reputation is
not damaged, hence we maintain utmost discipline and deliver our best on the
film set.

Most of the Junior Artistes I interacted with on the sets of *Happy New Year*
were working for Pappu for more than a decade. I got to visit this film set for three
days and all the three days’ shooting of a song sequence was in progress. There were
thirty Junior Artistes recruited for the scene. They were dressed in black T-Shirt,
enacting as film-crew in the shot. Director Farah Khanxliv was calling the shots and
the Junior Artistes had to run around holding props. I could make no sense of what
was happening; out of curiosity, I asked a few of the Junior Artistes for information
regarding the scene; they too were clueless, but whomever I asked seemed to be least
interested in knowing what was happening; one Junior Artiste as a matter of fact remarked, “Madam, we are getting continuous work for three days and will get good pay and food; what more should we know?” It seemed like that it least mattered to the Junior Artistes as to what the film or the scene was about. This seemingly callous attitude of the Junior Artistes will take a serious observer by surprise; at that point of time, I too could not relate to their disinterest; it could be a defense or a survival mechanism to overcome the depressing feeling of alienation, as they are given no credit in the final product (film) to which they contribute through their labour. A well thought out system is put in place to estrange the Junior Artistes to the final output, and only the lead characters are therefore privy to information about the film, and the specific scene being shot, its significance etc.

Photograph 30: Junior Artistes pose for a picture at the Happy New Year Shooting at Kamalistan studio. (Photograph was taken by the researcher at the film shooting location in Mumbai, 2013).

Usually the role the Junior Artistes are supposed to play is briefed either by the Agent or their assistants. They do not have any contact with either the film director or any other concerned film crew; the Agent acts as the intermediary, both for mobilizing work as well as to provide information regarding shooting. Junior Artistes are not provided information about the scene that they will take part. They are only provided with standard instructions: “You stand here”, “You walk across the road”, “You clap” etc. At the shooting place their objectification, and the linguistic
obscuring of agency is revealed in the way the Junior Artistes are addressed; it is either by their physical features or the color of their dress. During my field visit I noticed they being addressed as: “Guy in the red shirt”, “the dark lady”, “the bald fellow”, “that fat lady”, etc.; with such a working culture in place, it was no surprise that the Junior Artistes were interested only in their wages. On the days when the film hero and also the producer of the film, Shahrukh Khan was shooting there was utmost discipline on the sets. In a system where lead actors’ dates are a perennial problem, the director has to use to full potential the day when the lead actor is around. I could sense that burden on the director of Happy New Year; it might also be a tough act for a female director, as I could see her screaming at her assistants for the slightest mistake. Everything from lighting to camera angle had to be right and the only person who seemed to have permission to make mistakes and go for retakes was the hero. The Junior Artistes Agent looked so tense; they were all prepared and ready to deliver the expected shot.

The curiosity of watching a film shooting did not last long as the retakes were a never ending process in the course of the shooting of Happy New Year; it was highly repetitive and boring. There is usually a long wait for the Junior Artistes between retakes. This waiting period came to my advantage as I could interact and also interview them. I went ahead with my interviews though I was aware my interactions with Junior Artistes would be interrupted by a sudden call by the director for a retake. As soon as they heard the call, the Junior Artistes would rush in panic to their assigned spot. Sometime the shooting would go on for long hours; I had no choice but to wait for them to continue my interaction. Meanwhile I would observe the shooting process and the handling of Junior Artistes. It was a monotonous process. Sometime the shooting would be so long that when the break is announced the artistes would be reluctant for any kind of interview and would be in no mood to have any sort of conversation.

I was relieved when pack-up for the day was announced on the sets of Happy New Year, after a grueling long day; but I was informed by one of the Junior Artistes and Agent Assistant Keshav, that they had a night schedule, and the entire Junior Artistes’ team shifted to the sets of the Hindi film Heropanti (2014) in the same studio, where Pappu Lekhraj was also the Junior Artistes’ supplier. I felt sorry for
them, but one Junior Artiste Syed Nazeer Hussain, explained the rationale behind making such choices: “Considering the irregular nature of Junior Artistes profession, it is inevitable that we work when there is work available, even if it requires us to work round-the-clock. In winter and summer we have more shooting and in rainy season we have less shooting because directors usually prefer to go abroad and shoot in those months, as outdoor shooting in rainy season is difficult and also, commuting in crowded cities like Mumbai is a herculean task.”

Unlike shooting in urban locations, I found the process of mobilizing Junior Artistes for shooting in rural areas quiet unique and interesting. Some of the villages around Mysore city were so acquainted with film production that it had become part of their village folklore. I also visited Mysore as part of my field work, and got information about a shooting that was in progress for a Kannada film titled *Dakota Picture* (2012) in a village near, the famous Krishnaraja Sagar dam. The day I visited this village, an indoor shooting in the house of one of the villagers was in full swing. The owners of the house had rented a portion of the house for the film shooting. Otherwise said to be a sleepy village, that day it was bursting with activities. The petty tea shop in the village had become the centre of attraction with film crew members gathering there for tea and cigarettes.

I was visiting Mysore after my preliminary field visit to Chennai and Mumbai; I felt confident, as I was equipped with some field experience; my knowledge about film production, surprised the film crew and others; consequently the Junior Artistes Agent took me seriously. My experience had taught me that winning the Agents’ confidence is most vital to gain entry to the shooting spots, which is the only way to access primary information about their work lives and to develop contact with Junior Artistes. The Junior Artistes Agent, Shivu popularly called as ‘Mysore Shivu’ in the film circuit and also in the film credits, claimed to mobilize any number of people for film shooting even on a short notice. He seemed to be quiet popular among the film directors, preferring to shoot in villages around Mysore; Shivu was well networked with the locals. Shivu also works as a Junior Artiste and occasionally has been cast by the directors in character roles in some of the Kannada films. Interview with Agent Shivu provided me with rare insights into film shooting process in rural locations.
“Earlier villagers eagerly volunteered to act in films without pay, but now they first ask us how much they will be paid for standing in the crowd. Now only if we require huge crowd, we cast villagers, otherwise we prefer to take our own Junior Artistes from the city because we have no control on the village crowd, and if there is continuity scene and people who were casted in morning disappear in the afternoon, we will be held accountable as they have to re-shoot the entire scene. So to avoid such problems we take our own reliable members who will stay till pack-up.” (Mysore Shivu, interviewed in Mysore, 2012)

The shooting was completed by 5.30 pm in evening and Junior Artistes Agent Shivu, huddled around twenty women Junior Artistes into a vehicle, I was asked to share a seat with another Junior Artiste in the driver’s cabin; the vehicle resembled a truck taking cattle or poultry to the slaughter home. But no one complained, as getting another vehicle in the village was impossible. I continued my interaction with the Junior Artiste seated beside me; when I asked her if it is usually like this, she replied, “This is better, it's all women; it gets uncomfortable when we have to travel like this with men.” Seeing me having a conversation with the Junior Artiste, even though there was no place in the vehicle somehow the Agent managed squeezing himself inside the vehicle much to the disgust of the women artistes. With the Agent in the vehicle, the Artistes were wary of having any conversation. Even otherwise, the vehicle was so packed that conversation would have been the last thing on anyone’s mind.

When I visited a Rockline Venkatesh Production, film shooting in Bangalore at Rockline studio, coincidently the same film Dakota Picture shooting was in progress. Both men and women Junior Artistes were sitting separately in the lawn. Shooting had begun and I introduced myself to the production manager giving the reference of the Federation. I tried speaking to women Junior Artistes; they were too self-conscious to interact. So I resigned myself to observe the film shooting process; when lunch break was called, Junior Artistes formed a queue and were served after serving other main crew members.

The whole morning the crew was busy shooting with the main actors indoors, and even after the lunch break the team continued to shoot with the main crew; tired of waiting for long hours some of the Junior Artistes had dozed off in the lawn.
Suddenly, realizing that it was going to be evening and they had some shots to be taken outside the house in natural light, the director came out of the studio floor in haste asking the cinematographer and assistants to arrange for shots with Junior Artistes. The Junior Artistes were made to stand in a group in their own costume, without any make up; the director randomly selected a few members from among the crowd and they were given a word dialogue, just a few seconds before the shot was called. The scene that was being shot with Junior Artistes was at the end of lead actor’s dialogue; the Junior Artistes had to raise their hand and say a few words in chorus with selected Junior Artistes delivering their one word dialogue. I noticed that Junior Artistes were not given any time to rehearse and when they did not deliver the dialogues in first-take, the role was given immediately to another Junior Artiste. And by mistake, during a shoot, when a Junior Artiste happened to look at the camera, the entire crew from the cinematographer and the director to the main cast screamed at the Junior Artiste, as they had to reshoot the entire scene.

All through the shooting of the scene with the Junior Artistes, the film director addressed them disrespectfully in singular in Kannada and at times used abusive language; in between a shot, the director called out for a female Junior Artistes by her name, asking her to change her sari; the female Junior Artiste looked embarrassed, but obeyed him without questioning. All through the day Junior Artistes were conscious of the presence of production crew and were reluctant to interact with me; however as a last attempt, before leaving the shooting place, when I asked some of the male Junior Artistes whether they belonged to the film workers union, they replied, "No, we are not part of any film union. We are from Dalit Sangarsh Samithi (DSS). As the Junior Artistes were in hurry to leave I could not get more information on the relationship between DSS and film shooting.

A common phrase that one will get to hear from Junior Artistes when asked to describe their work is ‘Long Waiting’. One of the reasons for this is the shots in which Junior Artistes are cast are usually scheduled to the end of the day, unless a shooting is exclusively reserved for Junior Artistes. For instance in the film Lagaan (2001), a daylong shooting was scheduled only with scenes including Junior Artistes.

Junior Artistes are the first to come and the last to go on the film set. Accordingly the working hours of Junior Artistes Union in Chennai and Hyderabad
function from 5am to 9 am in the morning. And the evening meetings in Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai are scheduled only after 6.30pm. In Hyderabad on 3rd March 2015, when I visited the Telugu Cine and TV Junior Artistes Association around 5.30 a.m. to attend the morning meeting, I was surprised to be informed that the artistes had already left for the day’s shooting. The record in the log book in the Union shows the ample demand for Junior Artistes; multiple shoots were scheduled for the day:

1. 4.30 am: 300 Junior Artistes to Ramoji Film city for a Muhurat Shot (Inaugural shot of the movie).
2. 6 am: shoot for the film *Bengal Tiger*
3. Mythri Movies, starring Mahesh Babu film *Srimanthudu* - 50 Junior Artistes;
4. First frame Production Company film - 20 Junior Artistes;
6. Railway station scene at Ramoji Film City - 150 Junior Artistes;
7. Saraswathi movies Production Company film - 50 Junior Artistes;
8. For four Television serials - 40 Junior Artistes.

**Photograph 31:** Photograph of the ‘work order’ for 3/3/2015, Andhra Pradesh Cine & TV Junior Artist’s Agent’s Union

After the shooting, the Junior Artistes are paid conveyance and wages at the Junior Artistes union (Telugu Cine TV Junior Artistes Union) in Hyderabad, where the Agents make their regular payment.

Seeing me staring surprised at the log book, General Secretary P. Ravi, said:

There is more demand for Junior Artistes than we can supply. Today morning we started assigning work to Junior Artistes at 4.30 a.m. and by 6 a.m. all
Junior Artistes from the union left for film shooting. Every day evening 6 p.m. onwards, the General Secretary of the union is informed by the Agent on the number of Junior Artistes required. Sometimes Agents fight for artistes; so we send some artistes directly to the shooting spot. When there is no shooting, Junior Artistes will scold us for not giving work, and when there is more work Agents fight with us for artistes.

When I was still at the Union office around 9 a.m., an assistant to the Junior Artistes Agent came to the office asking for Junior Artistes for a11 a.m. scheduled film shooting that he had committed to supply. On knowing that all Junior Artistes had left for the shooting he got into an argument with the general secretary who was trying to make him understand that there were multi-shoots scheduled for the day and that he is helpless. Finally, sensing that the Agent was under pressure to supply people, the general secretary tried calling some people who had not turned up for shooting in the morning.

Most often Junior Artistes leave for shooting in the early hours, and are the first to arrive on the film set among all the screen artistes, but often their scenes are shot in the last, and sometimes the wait is more than 8 hours and, even if they complete their scene’s shooting, they have to be there till the completion of the shooting. Once on film shoot when I asked a Junior Artiste as to when the shoot would get over, assuming that I was a newcomer to the profession, she replied that the biggest quality that one needs to be a background actor is ‘patience’.

I could understand the distinction between Junior Artistes and the other screen artistes while witnessing the film shooting of *Action Jackson* and *Happy New Year*. Unlike the Junior Artistes who are usually considered unskilled work force, the stuntmen and dancers are regarded as skilled work force. There is camaraderie that develops between stuntmen, dancers and lead actors who usually act as their dupe and cooperate with the repeat takes and rehearsals for fight and dancers’ sequences. There is interaction between these crafts on the film set, which builds a relationship and mutual dependency and respect for each other; whereas, on the film set there is absolutely no interaction between the lead actors and the Junior Artistes, further alienating them at work place. In fact, on some of the film sets that I visited, male and female Junior Artistes were not allowed to interact among themselves too, and I also
found them not interacting with other film crew members. Even background models and Junior Artistes supplied by the same Agent were made to sit separately as the Agents feared that they might divulge their wage details as it drastically differed; while the Junior Artistes were paid according to the remuneration fixed by the Union, models were paid at Agents discretion, most often more than Junior Artistes.

Another interesting aspect I noticed in my interactions with Junior Artistes is that several Junior Artistes had two names - a film name and a real name, though a few also have changed the spelling of their names based on numerology or astrology. Generally, Junior Artistes’ names are not mentioned in the film credit and rarely are their faces visible on screen; this being case, I wondered why some of them had taken up new names. Most often artistes would cite star actors as inspiration for having a film name; while some revealed that it was there way of concealing their identity of working as Junior Artistes in the film industry, due to the stigma that is attached to this profession.

During my field work I noticed that ‘chair’ had a special significance at the shooting site. In the film shooting locations that I visited in Chennai and Bangalore, Junior Artistes were not given a chair and were sitting on the floor; usually the Agent sat on a chair. In Mumbai, on the film sets I visited which were of some of the big film production houses, Junior Artistes were provided with chairs. The reference to chair may appear insignificant, but highlights the prevailing feudal attitude of film industry where workers are not allowed to sit in front of the employer and are also made to sit far away from work place. These are ways of communicating the distinctions, and making workers adhere to the prevailing hierarchy and also marking of their status within the film industry.

Also, on the film set food was served separately to the Junior Artistes from the rest of the crew members; this was the case even with the big budget productions that I visited in Mumbai - Samvidhan, Happy New Year as well as Holiday. Even in Chennai on the set of the film Tenaliraman, Junior Artistes were served separately; in Bangalore at the film shooting location, the food counter was the same for all, but the Junior Artistes were served food only after all the other crew members were served. During the interaction, most of the Junior Artistes complained that even the menu and
quality of food differed from the rest of the crew members, and also that the production team served food to Junior Artistes with contempt.

In recent times since film shootings are usually done on ‘sync sound’ in order to avoid any kind of disturbance or noise on the film set, especially during outdoor shooting, big production houses recruit film security guards known as ‘cine-securities’; their job is to ensure that Junior Artistes as well as the onlookers don’t make noise on the film set; to ensure that no one uses mobile camera to record or take pictures of the film shooting; and restrain anyone from approaching film actors for autographs or photos. This is indicative of how Junior Artistes are treated as outsiders, as nuisance and as insignificant as the crowd. Some of the Junior Artistes in Mumbai recall that in the past it was they who were assigned to guard the film crew from public, especially the lead actors, but today security guards are recruited to keep a watch on Junior Artistes. Along with police security, some big production companies hire private security services; whereas in the smaller production houses, the film workers in the production team, spot boys, assistants and Junior Artistes all act as 'crowd controllers', protecting the film crew and its costly equipment. Junior Artistes in these smaller productions have to act as human-fence to demarcate the area of work, which would ensure uninterrupted film shooting, including keeping public out of the film frame.

In Mumbai, I noticed Junior Artistes at shoot would have an assistant to do small errands for them. These assistants were not part of any union or craft; their job was to buy tea, cigarettes or other requirements from nearby shops. At the end of the day each Junior Artiste paid this assistant 10 or 20 rupees, and since some of these assistants are familiar faces on the film set, they also get a free meal. Explaining his work, Manoj, one such assistant/helper for Junior Artistes, working for the TV series Samvidhan, said: “For twenty years this has been my way of earning livelihood. Earlier I would wander around film shooting places and do whatever small work the Junior Artistes would ask me to do, like buying paan, cigarette or tea and they would pay me Rs.10 or Rs.20/- at the end of day. Because Artistes cannot go out in between shoots and also shops are far from the studio floors so I come handy for them. Now Junior Artistes themselves call me if there is a shoot. I manage to earn 100 to 200
rupees per day.” At the end of the shoot Manoj asked for my contact number to keep me informed about shootings in Mumbai.

My visit to the film production site provided me with rare insights into the prevailing work culture in the film industry. Not just is the work of a Junior Artiste monotonous and repetitive in nature, but also Junior Artistes at their work place are treated with utter disregard and in an undignified manner, denied of their agency, autonomy and subjectivity. Exposed to everyday humiliation at work place Junior Artistes are well aware of their below-the-line status in the hierarchical film industry. This social alienation has contributed to an inferiority complex, stigma and dissatisfaction with the work early in their film career. But most of the Junior Artistes I interacted with, across the different film industries have continued to work in the craft for decades, despite these working conditions, as it has become their main source of livelihood. Junior Artiste Neelu’s comment reflects their work life aptly, “We are like the string that holds the garland, you cannot have a garland without the string, the flowers dry off, but the string remains, actors come and go, we continue working. Everyone in the industry is aware of our critical role, as well as the treatment meted out to us, but no one wants to recognize us, stand for us, or speak for us. … Our invisible status on the screen is just a reflection of the exclusionary treatment meted out to us in the film industry.”

It is no wonder that the work life of Junior Artistes and other crafts have for long been censored to the outside world.
CONCLUSION

Prelude:

As a prelude to this chapter, I want to narrate two interesting events that occurred during the course of my research:

1. Popular Hollywood actor Tom Cruise visited Mumbai in December, 2011, to promote his film - *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*. The organisers of the event had hired a Model Coordinator to mobilise people to give him a rousing welcome as he stepped out of the Mumbai Airport. Nearly two hundred Junior Artistes were hired for the event at the rate of Rs. 150/- per artiste. Considering the huge fan base Tom Cruise has across world, the incident may sound ridiculous. But Tom cruise was totally unaware of the crowd being ‘hired fans’. But the episode is mirror to the significance of a trained crowd (First post. 4 December 2011).

2. The second case, refers to an email from a casting company called, 'Classic Casting' with a subject line - *Bollywood calling – Expat Extras required over weekend!* The body of the email contained the following details:

   'we need you for a day or two over the next weekend of 5th, 6th & 7th April to be a part of Bollywood's much awaited movie of the year : "BHAAG MILKHA BHAAG", a biopic on the life of India's Living Legendary Olympian, Milkha Singh.'

The email also mentioned the date of release of the film and names of the principal cast and crew, and the details of the scene to be shot – which was of an audience watching the race during 1950s. Casting for 5th April was open to persons with "Oriental looks" and for 6th and 7th open to Caucasian Adults and Family (on both the days only children above the age of nine were permitted). The selection procedure was through email and those interested were asked to email a clear photograph of just their face along with their bio data. The venue of shooting was at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi and timing was from morning 6 am to 6 pm. And the mail detailed on the facilities that will be provided for the selected Extras on the set which included - 'A Crèche for kids below 10 years of age, if you can't leave them at home; Doctor and Ambulance on call; Costumes, changing rooms and clean...
and hygienic toilets. And remuneration was vouchers for holiday trips, hotel stays, restaurants, lounges etc.

Both the above incidents are indication of the challenges confronting the profession of Junior Artistes. The ‘Tom Cruise’ incident, from a cursory perspective can be interpreted as emerging work opportunities for the Junior Artistes. But when seen through the prism of labour rights, their misuse becomes apparent, forcing one to ask certain uncomfortable questions. The hiring of Junior Artistes to cheer Tom Cruise at the airport is not a sole example of misuse of the potential of an organised work-force like Junior Artistes. Political parties today are hiring Junior Artistes for their party gatherings, political rallies, election campaigns; being trained to perform as instructed, the Junior Artiste make an admirable crowd. Their acting skills which are not appreciated in the industry are being exploited by the rich and powerful to serve their narrow, selfish interests and to deceive the larger public. In cities like Mumbai, the regional political parties floating their own film artistes unions is an indication of the potential of this unified work force. The Chapter 3 on unionisation of film workers quotes Shalini Thackery, who acknowledges that their Film Union Members are expected to take part in the political activities of the MNS political party. The repercussions of reel crowd replacing real crowd is in itself worthy a study.

Unfortunately this practice of the rich appropriating the social capital – such as networks (formal and informal) and the institutions (unionisation) of the poor, to their advantage, has not been scrutinized academically. These new emerging non-film earning opportunities appear like conscious strategies of the elite and powerful, to render the organisation of Junior Artiste ineffective. Unlike their earlier exploitative ways, the appropriation of social capital is accomplished, by such refined methods, that the victim and the onlooker are mistaking them as opportunities for growth. The Bhag Milka Bhag, email incident, confirms that the industry is mindful of the importance of background artistes, and also cognizant of what they owe in return for their crucial service. The kind of work-related information shared on the email is a proof of this awareness, The email, goes much beyond one’s expectation, it talks about the facilities to be provided on the film sets –which includes not just toilets, but CLEAN & HYGENIC TOILETS, crèche, Ambulance etc., Having witnessed the deplorable conditions of the Junior Artiste on the film sets, the email came as cultural
shock. What made the producers to acknowledge the rights of the background artistes in this case? And why are these rights so blatantly denied to the Junior Artistes?

The audacity of the film industry is manifested in the email; on the one hand they are depriving the Junior Artistes their rightful share of work within the film industry and their ensuing income. On the other hand when they are outsourcing the job of Junior Artiste, they are acknowledging the rights of the people, to be casted in the background. This dichotomous approach of the industry is appalling. Does the ‘Bhag Milkha Bhag’ incident reveal the class consciousness of the industry? Did the treatment to the film crowd differ, because they are from a different class? Junior Artistes have struggled since the inception of the film industry not just for self-dignity, but also to organise themselves into a collective body, transforming themselves from being a group to facilitate the film production, to a labour union demanding for their legal and human rights. But today with production techniques and culture undergoing lots of change, the choice of background artistes has also diversified, in their search of new fresh faces and energy, while the industry is blatantly turning away from its responsibility towards the Junior Artistes. On one hand industry is denying opportunity to them within the film industry; on the other hand, the Agents are taking non-film assignments, and reducing them from a Junior Artiste into a real crowd.

Another important aspect to be observed in the ‘Bhag Milkha Bhag email’ incident, is the impact the development of communication technology has made on the profession of mobilising crowd for film. Once a stigmatised profession, where the unionisation of this casual workforce was vital to ensure that a crowd was available exclusively for shooting, as per production requirement, today demography of background artistes is undergoing unprecedented transition, including more middle and upper class crowd. This also indicates the film making trend in the industry. In recent years a new category of background artistes have been introduced, called the 'background models'. As documented in the chapter on Unionisation, even the profession and identity of Agents has undergone a huge transition from being a crowd supplier to being looked up as an ‘Entrepreneur/ Investor’; this transition is acknowledged even in the film credits – eg. Pappu Lekhraj, the popular agent in Bollywood is acknowledged in the film credit as ‘Pappu Lekhraj and Co’.
I refer to this change in demography of Junior Artistes as ‘gentrification of the film background’; this is the consequence of film-makers distancing themselves from financially disadvantaged masses. Narratives with socio-economic diversity got replaced with high gloss movies that better suited the aspirations of the consumerist society and NRI viewers who have formed into major audiences (overseas collection is prominently displayed in the box office figures). According to Tejaswani Ghanti, the gentrification of Hindi cinema is articulated through a discourse of quality, improvement and innovation that is often based upon the displacement of the poor and working class. This process is linked to the desire of film-makers to be seen as practitioners of a respectable trade, one that moves away from the “roots of moral and social stigma” that arise out of “the origins of its finance, the social origins of its members, and the class location of its audiences”. (Ghanti, 2012)

But the reel gentrification has disgorged into the real life. Film industry is always desirous to capitalize on new and fresh, hence every producer/director wants even for the blurred background new and fresh faces, to suit their big-budget commercial flicks, leading to the displacement of the working class Junior artiste from screen, in favour of elite middle and upper class crowd. These structural discrimination has pushed Junior artistes to become a daily wage earner, but if the Junior Artistes who have an absolute advantage (i.e. naturally they are better at playing background artistes, due to their years of experience in the profession) are treated with dignity, accorded the status of a performer/artist, and provided with proportionate wages secure work life with opportunities for growth – would they have chosen to be a cheering crowd at the airport, or sit as fake audience at a political rally, or act as supporters in the act of political vendetta? Hence the marginalised status of the Junior Artistes seems to be a conscious creation by the film industry.

One of the key arguments of this study being that the unionisation of casual work force was mainly to facilitate production, the discourse of labour rights is of a recent phenomenon, but now with production practices undergoing tremendous change, with new unions being put up by political parties, and emergence of non-film work opportunities, the significance of Junior Artistes union and the relevance of its current pattern of functioning needs a serious re-jigging in order to challenge the new hurdles.
Hence taking recourse to conclude, at this stage, will be detrimental to the subject of my study viz., Junior Artistes, a subject which is least explored. This study is successful in unpacking the subject, but I can hardly announce its end or arrive at a concrete conclusion. Therefore this chapter should be regarded as a postscript than a conclusion. Hence the observations I draw from this research are not conclusions, but rather an attempt to foreground the social world of the invisible background artistes of the Indian film industry. This research is a significant precursor to the infinite such research that is critically required in this area of film labour.

**Brief summary of the findings from the study:**

The thesis has been divided into four core chapters with the single focus of attempting to unpack Junior Artistes in Indian film industry. Following are the key findings of the study:

1. The self representative stories provide us with rich primary data to write the social history of the film industry.

In chapter 1, 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 a 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 study shows that 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 Artists 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 and how the closing down of studios has had severe impact on film workers. 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. This narration also mirrors the meaning of work ethics in the industry.

N K Sakuntala’s attempt to start a Fans’ 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 the community feelings. She also openly shares her opinion on the prevailing gender bias in the industry. Finally Ameer’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 six 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 segments of social history of the film industry viewed through the lens of Junior Artistes.

2. Junior Artistes screen ‘presence’ is essential to constitute stardom.

The study shows that the arrangement of screen artists in the frame shows one’s place in the hierarchy of screen roles, showing the inherent relationship with acting role and identity. Junior Artistes have no privilege of individual identity; they exist as a group for the industry, their 'individual' acting or persona has no significance, most often attributing their role to mere bodily presence on the screen. But the casting of Junior Artistes for a film scene is of a great aesthetic significance as well as to create an impression of realism and through their casting in background scene or as body double they continue to be treated as the invisible work force, but Junior Artistes 'presence' on screen is essential to constitute stardom.

While composing a film scene, several factors are taken into consideration - camera angle, movement, object and placement of the character within the frame for visual and dramatic experience. And, composition is achieved by positioning characters and objects in the foreground, mid ground, and back ground areas of the screen frame giving a sense of depth to the screen imagery. The 'presence' of Junior Artistes in the film scene carry both realistic and expressive values - suggesting time and place; conveying atmosphere, underscoring theme, and revealing abstract ideas. Hence casting of these artistes in a film shot depends upon certain psychological and learned facets of visual perception and the ideologies about identity they embody. Therefore Junior Artistes and everything else that constitutes this industrial-aesthetic form is crucial for comprehending the construct of an actor.

3. The history of unionization of Junior Artistes in Indian film industry challenges the reigning perception that producers and unions are unlikely partners.

Tracing the unionisation of casual daily wage work force, highlight the fact that the purpose of organising Junior Artistes was to facilitate film production by
ensuring constant and instant availability of mobilised work force. The unions by grading and categorising the Junior Artistes based on their appearance have made it convenient for agents and producers for hiring background artistes.

The tracing of unionisation of Junior Artistes highlight the nexus between Linguistic Reorganisation of the state and establishment of Language based film industries in the respective language state and its relations to formation of regional film industries’ individual work base. The case of Mysore and Bangalore Junior Artistes Union show that Junior Artistes were organised to facilitate the film production in the state. Therefore in the Indian labour history the film workers’ movement is significant because it was a movement of film workers that started for supporting the employer in production and gradually emerged as the trade union for ensuring labour rights and to prevent exploitation by the employer.

Another significant observation of the study is the connection between film labour, political party and criminal world. Usually, the relationship between underworld and film industry has been written from the perspective of those at the upper echelons of the film industry, like the stars and the producers. But this study shows the important role the local rowdies/goons play in the unionisation of Junior Artistes as in the case of Kannada and Telugu film industry. With largest number of membership in comparison with other crafts, the Junior Artistes union is considered the important organ of Film workers movement. And, in Mumbai with political parties establishing their own distinct film workers union, it highlights the influence and importance of film industry in the political economy of the nation state. This organising of film crowd also emphasises the significance of mobilising crowd and diverse use of this organised crowd for various purposes like political rally, campaign etc, and for casting the reel crowd as real crowd.

With film industry being vertically integrated with no written contracts, the study shows how workers and agents reduce risk using informal social networks with various communication technologies, and an important role is played by family connections in these networks. However, networking also fosters inequality of access to work between workers at the centre of the networks and workers at the periphery of the networks. The study also shows how organising based on kinship, ethnicity, and the hereditary create vested interests in the form of socio-economic monopolies.
Unionisation has thus strengthened the film workers, enabling them to challenge the capitalist attitude of the industry but with the recommendations and suggestions made by the State-formed committees to improve the labour situation in the film industry not being implemented, one can understand the status of demands made by film workers through various unions and organisations. Therefore despite the strong organisation of workers, little progress has been achieved by replacing individual bargaining with collective bargaining.

4. The Indian film production practices from the perspective of below-the-line film workers shows that it is hierarchical, exclusionary with limited scope for upward mobility.

The visit to the film production site revealed the prevalent work culture in the film industry, where the production process is usually unplanned and chaotic; introspecting on the production practices of the film industry after having witnessed the deplorable condition of the Junior Artistes at work sites, one can conclude that their invisible status on the screen is a mirror to the exclusionary treatment meted to them at the film work site. The study shows that exposed to everyday humiliation at work place Junior Artistes are well aware of their below-the-line status in the hierarchical film industry. This social alienation has contributed to an inferiority complex, stigma and dissatisfaction with the work early in their film career.

**Scope of this study:**

There is tremendous scope for research in the area of Indian film labour, understanding the intersection between creativity and hierarchy, and its consequence, which is a least explored in the discipline of Film Studies. Indian film industry provides job for around 5 million people and understanding how labour functions in the film industry, and its impact on film production process is necessary to comprehend the Indian film industry and its social history. The study makes a significant contribution to the Indian film labour history by tracing the unionisation of film workers in four regional language film industries. The significance of the study also lies in its endeavour to understand the production practices of Indian film industries from the perspective of below-the-line workers. However the novel
contribution of this study is highlighting the vital role played by Junior Artistes in the construction of stardom.

Limitation:

The choice of studying Junior Artistes in four Industries was important, but at the same time too ambitious, therefore significant part of my research time was itself spent in exploring field in these four states, and hence had less time to delve into the analytical realm.

A major criticism of the methodology with a focus on personal narratives and oral recounting is that of ‘falling into the trap of replicating people’s representation of themselves’. Also, engaging in this project as a ‘participant observer, would have definitely added important insight to the field. But the choice of taking non-participant position was a conscious decision as the attempt was to understand the field through the lens of Junior Artistes and not enforcing my views of the crafts. As there was not much work in this area, I invested substantial part of my research time on understanding the craft from the Junior Artistes’ perspective.

Possibilities for future research:

The sheer enormity of the Indian film industry, and its complex and heterogeneous composition along ethno-linguistic identities and territorial lines, necessitates a more sustained and in-depth study of film labour, if we want to further our understanding on the functioning of Indian film industries. This research on Junior Artistes raises several vital questions and each of them needs in-depth analysis. This thesis makes an attempt to trace the history of unionisation of Indian film workers but considering the vastness of the topic, this itself calls for a detailed research in the area, as it is important for organising the film industry.

The second important question the study raises through the multi-site research on film labour in four language industries is the need for a detailed research on the impact of the Linguistic Reorganisation on the film workers in Madras. With most of Indian film production centres located in cities, there is need to study the relationship between city and film labour. Because Indian film labour can be seen as being embedded in a location, for example, Junior Artistes’ labour is increasingly tied to the locality, but at the same time it is more profoundly affected by the risks of globalised
capital flows over which it has little control. Considering the multiple/diverse regional film industry there is vast scope to understand the intersectionality between geography and labour in the context of film industry.

In the male dominated film industry the unions are also built on the traditional structures of gendered divisions, reinforcing the marginalisation of women in the labour market. But over the years there has been growing realization among the female Junior Artistes of their own autonomy and Mahila Kalakar Sangh – women’s wing of Junior Artistes in Mumbai stands as a torch bearer of such rising empowerment. It is important to study gender roles and reason for exclusion of women from work at the lower strata of the film industry.
NOTES

i V.K Murthy (1923 -2014) was a doyen of Indian cinematography famous for shooting the first Indian cinemascope film *Kaagaz Ke Phool*. He is the first film technician to receive the Dada Saheb Phalke Award, India's highest award for cinema. In May 2010, I had an opportunity to meet this legend, as a journalist working for *Times of India* newspaper for an interview. During the course of the interview he shared the above anecdote. Though in the printed article, “A classic life behind the lens” (17 May 2010,TOI ) the anecdote was edited, the long conversation with him influenced me to work in the area of film labour. He recalls this incident even in the documentary made on him *Through Light and Shadows* by Govind Nihalani and also in his biography by Uma Rao *Bisillu Kolu* (Kannada, 2006).

ii Ashokamitran one of the most influential figures in post-independent Tamil literature. His oeuvre includes now over 200 short stories, eight novels, and some 15 novel’s besides other prose writings, having worked as manager at Gemini studio in Madras in the 40s some of his short stories and novels give us insight into production practices in studio era.

iii Equity, UK based trade union for professional performers and creative practitioners was started in 1930 by a group of artist. For more details refer to - equity.org.uk.

iv SAG, established in 1933, the guild plays a significant role in organizing American film work force. For more details refer to – www.sagaftra.org

v The States Reorganisation Act, 1956 was a major reform of the boundaries of India’s States and Territories, organising them along linguistic lines. Although additional changes to India's state boundaries have been made since 1956, the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 remains the single most extensive change in state boundaries since the independence of India in 1947. The Act came into effect at the same time as the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956.

vi Thyagarajan is popular stunt master of Indian cinema, he has predominantly worked in Malayalam and Tamil films. He has worked as body double to popular Malayalam actor Prem Nazir. I had interviewed him during my field visit in Chennai in 2014.
Several Film historians have documented that Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (Now Chennai) have been important centre of Indian film production. Madras was the centre of film production for all the four south Indian language industries and it was only after the linguistic reorganization of the states the language industries gradually shifted to their respective states. From the inception of cinema in India, Mumbai has been one of the main centers of film production. With the largest Indian film industry - Bollywood, based in Mumbai it continues to be the centre of film production.

Film city is an integrated film studio complex situated at Goregaon, Mumbai in India. It is owned by Maharastra State government to provide facilities and concessions to the film industry. It is also known as Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari.

Saiva Vellalar is a Tamil community in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Saiva Vellalars often use the title of Mudaliar in the northern part of the state and Pillai in the southern part Tamil Nadu, thus giving rise to the alternate names of Saiva Mudaliars and Saiva Pillais. They all held a very high position in the society and enjoyed a very high social status. They are forward caste people held in high regard comparable to Brahmans. (Source: Wikipedia)

C N Anna Durai, was a former chief minister of Tamil Nadu and founder of the political party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). He had scripted - story, screenplay and dialogue for films with Dravidian ideologies. He extensively used film as significant medium for propagation of Dravidian Politics. Noted film actors of Tamil film industry - Sivaji Ganesan and M G Ramachandran were associated with DMK. He died on 3rd February 1969 in Madras. Junior Artistes whom I interviewed often remembered some of the important events of their career associating it with important public events that had occurred then.

The affix ‘garu’ - is an honorific plural affix to singular noun used in Telugu language in addressing elders or master.

John Cawas was a stuntman and actor in Hindi film popular in 40’s and 50's. He debuted in the Hindi film Hunterwali, in 1935, directed by Homi Wadia, a stunt film.
produced by the Wadia Movietone company of Bombay starring fearless Nadia as the heroine. He was cast in a series of Tarzan films till early sixties.

xiv Extras is a British sitcom about Junior Artistes working in television and film. The series was co-produced by the BBC and HBO, and was created, written, and directed by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, both of whom also starred in it. Extras, has two series of six episodes each as well as a Christmas Special. The first episode aired in the UK on BBC in July and in September on HBO in the US in 2005. The quoted lines were spoken by a film extra in a short documentary about Karl Pilkington's day as an extra on the set of the 'extras' Christmas special in 2007. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=g33LOveGR4Y)

xv The quote is an excerpt from the interview with Amir Sadruddin Lakdawala, Junior Artistes in Mumbai, conducted in 2013 and more detail information about him, is mentioned in Chapter 1: Spotlight on the background: Working life narrative.

xvi Srividya was a popular Indian actress and singer who predominantly acted in Malayalam and Tamil language films.

xvii N K Swami and Sakuntalamma, Junior Artistes from Chennai, were interviewed by me in 2011, 2013 and 2014. In this chapter I am quoting some of the excerpts from the interview to substantiate my argument. More detailed information about them is mentioned in Chapter 1, titled Spotlight on the background: Working life narrative.

xviii Rahul, Junior Artistes, from Mumbai; he is categorized as model among Junior Artistes. He is cast as body double to several Hindi actors. He was interviewed in 2013 on the sets of shooting of the film Holiday (2014).

xix Tara Bai Vital Mandre, Junior Artistes at Mahila Kalakar Sangh, Mumbai. She has been working for over three decades. The quote is taken from the interaction I had with her at the Union office in 2013.

xx Karnataka Film Workers, Artistes, Technicians Federation (KFWATF) was formed in the year 1987 to encourage Kannada film industry to establish in Karnataka and establish its own distinct work force. In fact the first and foremost agitation organized
by the federation was to restrict subsidy to only those films which were produced in Karnataka with the condition that all the activities of production must be carried out within the state. The three decade old KFWATF continues to play a significant role in the Kannada film industry.

Ashok is a popular Kannada film actor. He is the founder member and President of Karnataka Film Workers, Artistes, and Technicians Federation (KFWATF). He is an active participant in the film workers trade union movement.

The information on stuntmen strike in Telugu film industry was gathered through print media reports and is also based on the field interview conducted for my pilot project on December 2010. During the strike I had interviewed Stuntmen, Junior Artistes, and other members of film workers federations and Producers’ Council for the project.

All India Film Employees Confederation (AIFEC) was established in the year 1973 in Mumbai. It was formed to have all Indian film workers body with to represent and voice film workers concern across film industries

Andra Pradesh Film Industry Employees Federation (APFIEF) was renamed Telugu Film Industry Employees Federation following the bifurcation of the state into Andra Pradesh nd Telangana

M B Srinivasan is a popular south Indian music director and one of the pioneers of Indian film workers trade union movement.

Vasant Kulkarni, one of the pioneers of film trade union movement in India. He was founder member of Indian Motion Picture Employees Union which came to standstill after his death in 1974.

In early 1951, CTA in Madras had organised All India Cine Technicians conference held at Vahini Studio. CTA Bombay and Calcutta had participated in the event. At the conference a resolution to form a All India body of Cine Technicians was proposed at the conference by late Debaki Bose and seconded by L V Prasad. In
mid 1953 another All India Technicians conference sponsored by CTAB was held in Calcutta. The first executive committee of AIFEC from all, the region were - President - Manmohan Krishna and General secretary Vasant Kulkarni. western region: Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Madhusudan, Haren Bhatt, Salil Choudhary; Southern region - M B Srinivasan, Nimai Ghosh, N Sheshadri and Eastern Region - Subrata Sen and Salil Sen.

In April 2015 after a 10-year battle that went all the way to the Supreme Court of India, Charu Khurana, a female make-up artist, won her case against Cine Costume and Make-up Artists and Hair Dressers Association and was allowed to become a member of the association.

It was in the 70's after the Cauvery river water-sharing dispute, that the relationship between the Tamil and Kannada film industries also worsened. The agreement on Cauvery water sharing between the Madras and Mysore government had come to an end in 1972. And, the water sharing issue had come up again between the states when the Kannada film industry was gradually building its base in the Karnataka. The Kannada directors had began to shoot films in popular outdoor locations in Karnataka; New wave films were being produced in Karnataka; Recording studios were being established and technicians had also started to shift to the state and gradually, dependency on Madras (Chennai) was reducing. (Puttaswamy 2010:251)

M. P. Jayaraj ruled the Bangalore underworld throughout the 1970s. During the congress rule in Karnataka in the late 70s, Jayaraj was also the made president of the “Indira Brigade” – the youth wing of Congress Party. He also ran a news paper "Ghareebi Hatao" targeting Janata Dal politicians and police. He was murdered in 1989 in Bangalore.

Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) is a forum to educate, organize, and lead the Dalits (Schedule Caste) in their agitation against the exploitative system. DSS was started in Karnataka, by the educated Dalit employees, writers, and students in 1975 in the backdrop of the Bhoosa Movement. DSS is the strongest and the long lasting Dalit movement in the country.
Dr. Dattatray Samant popularly called Datta Samant (21 November 1932 – 16 January 1997) was an Indian politician and trade union leader, who is most famous for leading thousand textile mill workers in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) on a year-long strike in 1982, which triggered the closure of most of the textile mills in the city.

In 2011 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had organised an expert meeting on Trade in Audio-visual services at Paris. On this occasion, Supran Sen, who was the then secretary of the Film Federation of India, shared the figures on Indian film labour in his presentation. Quoted in the article – “Out of Frame: the State and Film labour in Indian Film industry”, published in Indian Journal of Labour Economics. Vol 56, No.3, 2013.

Dhoti is a traditional men’s garment worn predominantly in South Indian States.

Shyam Benegal is Indian film director and screen writer. He is recipient of India’s highest award in film - Dadasaheb Phalke Award.

A shot producing a projected image that travels quickly across the screen, either by moving the subject past a stationary camera or by panning the camera past a stationary subject.

Prabhu Deva is an Indian film director, dance choreographer and actor.

Ajay Devgan is a Hindi film actor, director and producer.

In an interview to DNA newspaper on March 2, 2014, Shyam Benegal has said that Samvidhaan is not really a 10 part series. It is a 10 hour long film. Since it was impossible to tell this story in the two or three hours duration of a cinema film, the format of a mini-series for television was the only alternative. The execution, the camera work, the look and feel of it is entirely cinematic.

Freelance Models, perform as back ground artistes similar to Junior Artistes but they are not associated with any union and are recruited through model coordinators who supply artistes to union registered Agents.
Kamal Amrohi Studios (Kamalistan Studios) was established in 1958 by Kamal Amrohi (17 January 1918 – 11 February 1993) who was an Indian film director and screenwriter. The Studio are spread over 15 acres; the studio is situated in Jogeshwari East, off Jogeshwari –Vikhorli Link Road in Mumbai. Over the years, it has been venues of films like Razia Sultan (1983) Kamal Amrohi's last film as a director and Amar Akbar Anthony (1977)

Shahrukh Khan is popular Bollywood actor, television presenter and producer. In his biography, King of Bollywood: Shah Rukh Khan and the Seductive World of Indian Cinema (Chopra 2007), published by Warner Books, the author hails him as the new face and persona of a new type of Hindi cinema.

Farah Khan is Bollywood film director, producer, actress and choreographer

Rockline Venkatesh is a film actor, producer and distributor based in Bangalore. Who also owns the Rockline studios.

Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) is a forum to educate, organize, and lead the Dalits (Schedule Caste) in their agitation against the exploitative system. DSS was started in Karnataka, by the educated Dalit employees, writers, and students in 1975 in the backdrop of the Bhoosa Movement. DSS is the strongest and the long lasting Dalit movement in the country.