INTRODUCTION

On a number of occasions renowned cinematographer V. K. Murthy\(^1\) used to recall a particular anecdote. In my interview as a journalist of a leading national daily with him, he had narrated to me the same incident; it related to his shooting of a dance sequence 'Saqiya aaj mujhe neend nahin aaye', in one of the classics of Indian cinema Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam (1962), “Before the shot, Guru Dutt, the director of the film, expressed to me his concern, as he felt the background dancers supplied for the shoot were unattractive, and since we were unable to postpone the shoot, we decided not to highlight their faces.” His biography in Kannada Bisillu Kolu by Uma Rao, also records this incident, where V.K. Murthy again recalls how he used the camera technology successfully and avoided showing the faces of the dancers in the background. The song sequence today is considered one of the masterpieces of Indian cinematography. It is sheer brilliance, whereby the camera focuses on the main dancer ‘Minoo Mumtaz’, who is captured in light, and the background dancers are all visible but only as silhouettes, making for a beautiful tableau. But what struck me in his narration was when he regretted, “Sadly the dance girls were unaware that they would not be visible on screen”.

The concern of V. K. Murthy gave rise to several questions in me then – Why were the background dancers not privy to the information about their non-visibility on screen? Was the information withheld because they were worried that the dance girls might refuse to act? Was it just a spur-of-the-moment decision taken in order to save production cost? Or is it that as a matter of practice they do not bother to inform the artistes? Does this reflect the prevailing work culture in the film industry? What is the agency and subjectivity of such background artistes – working either as Stunt Artistes, Body Double, Junior Artistes, Background Dancers etc., in the film industry? How are these set of actors negotiating with such dehumanisation of being reduced to mere bodies bereft of identity? That conversation with V.K. Murthy many years ago had a deep impact on me, motivating me to work in the area of film labour. My research is an endeavour in this direction; I have attempted to study the work culture in the film industry from the margins, using the lens of Junior Artistes, since Junior Artistes are predominantly cast as background artistes.
Background artistes are identified by different names in the film industry – ‘Junior Artistes’, ‘Extras’, ‘Crowd’ etc.; across the different film industries in India, they are popularly identified as Junior Artistes, both on the film sets as well as in the film credits list. One can see how they are perceived in the film industry by the terms used to identify them in their workplace. ‘Extras’ is how the Junior Artistes are referred in Hollywood; Frank E Beaver’s dictionary of film-terms defines an ‘extra’ as merely an embellishment within the mise-en-scene (118). Though the term ‘Junior Artiste’ used in the Indian cinema may seem a little more respectful than the term ‘extra’, one wonders if here too the industry has devised its own ways of denigration.

Generally, the words ‘Artist’ and ‘Artiste’ are confused as meaning the same, and used interchangeably; but both have distinct meanings. The term Artist is used in a restricted sense to refer to an exceptionally skilled person who is engaged in a superior work/creation of art, which is high in aesthetic value. The term ‘Artiste’ is a French word, and used in the English language with a nice sense of discrimination; it is used to refer to a public performer or an exhibitor – rope dancer, hair artiste, etc. (Dictionary.reference.com). Though of late it is fashionable to use this term, the term "artiste" was borrowed into English, to indicate someone who believes him/herself to be a great artist or performer while the world would disagree. The term is used as a derogatory comment on someone's delusions of artistic grandeur (Garner, 2011).

Hierarchy and class distinction is inbuilt into the differential meanings of the terms, ‘Artist’ and ‘Artiste’.

It is hard to trace the genesis of this terminology; however an early reference to this term can be found in P. G. Kher Committee Report (1966), which was constituted by the then Government of Maharashtra to study and report about the working conditions in the film industry. This landmark report on the history of film labour refers to background artists and stunt performers as ‘artistes’. The Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), one of the oldest film workers unions also employs the term ‘Junior Artistes’.

Why is this craft referred by such terms? Is it a reflection of existing hierarchy in the film industry among the screen artists? Or should we see the term a symbol of their assertion of their subjectivity and claim to the status of a performer rather than a body? What is the prevailing work culture in the film industry? What is
the dominant ideology that determines the work culture in the film industry? How is the life of Junior Artistes on and off screen? My research is a quest to find answers to these very broad and inter-related questions, in order to decode the working of the Indian film industry. I would also like to clarify that though I have retained the term ‘Junior Artiste’ in this study as is the practice in the film industry, I approach the Artistes with neither a sense of hierarchy nor a sense of denigration of what they do.

The dominant economic practices have helped produce a unique division of labour in the film industry; however what remains unnoticed is that it is the ideological/signifying practices that determine how the film industry divides that labour. In the film industry apart from the producer, everyone else involved in the process of film-making are workers. The cine-workers which include all the workers who are categorised into 24 crafts are grouped into contractual and casual /freelance workers. Understandably, not all workers come with a skill; most of them learn and acquire skills on job; ‘stars’ are no exception to this pattern. However what distinguishes both these screen artists, i.e. the stars and the Junior Artistes is the ‘remuneration and recognition’; the stars receive both of it in abundance, while the Junior Artistes are deprived in most cases of not just their right to decent wages, a basic right of all labour, but also denied recognition of any sorts, as their work requires them to be invisibilized.

The Junior Artistes stand out among the other cine-workers, because they form the lowest paid casual work force having a ‘screen presence’. Junior Artistes are cast in background either as crowd/mass or as audience or in a passing scene to enact the reel public, giving a sense of period and place to the film. These human bodies stand for cultural representations of beauty, realism, and typage as well as for narrative legibility on-screen. These people are ‘visible’ but the audience are unable to remember their face; however their 'bodily presence' is felt. The Junior Artistes are performing everyday life before the camera, and in that sense they are actors, but they are actors, but ‘actors devoid of dialogue’. It is my contention in this thesis that it is not just the way they are presented on screen, but the ways in which they are treated on the sets, and in society in general, that estrange them from their agency and subjectivity, thus reducing them to what I refer to in my dissertation title as “Acting Bodies”. The overall purpose of this study is to evolve a framework and analytical
tools that help us understand the role and lives of Junior Artistes - situated in particular historical, socio-economic and political contexts in the Indian film industry.

0.1. Objectives of and Challenges to the study

When I first began my research on Junior Artistes five years ago, the dominant discourse about Indian film workers - generated by people within and outside the social world of the film industry was that film labour across the industry is unorganised. This status of the film industry in the context of its work-force was my starting point for this project. Why was the century old Indian film industry work-force unorganised and what is the work-pattern and work culture prevailing in the film industry? For finding an answer to this question I chose to study this vital craft in the industry - Junior Artistes.

Though the Junior Artistes form a significant part of film-making, whenever I mentioned that I am researching on Junior Artistes in the film industry, a near universal response was of disapproval and dismissal in one stroke, that being a Film Studies student, I was working on a subject of not much consequence to the film industry or to the film making process. Sometimes the response would be such that I felt as if the particular film craft that I am working on did not belong to film industry at all. Even some of those who concurred to the need for researching on film workers and the film trade unions and their leaders would end up suggesting that there were more vital crafts than the Junior Artistes. The general notion is that these are artistes who are paid for doing nothing, that they are lucky and lead easy lives: “Just for being part of a crowd they are being paid handsomely, more than, say a daily wage earner like a construction worker etc.; what is there to research on them?”, would be quite a common response. This constant comparison and contempt towards this craft actually made me more determined to understand the work of Junior Artistes first hand.

Undertaking any research on a category of workers like Junior Artistes, who are a daily wage earning casual work force, without any particular work location, one is bound to face challenges in garnering primary data. But what was unexpected was the lack of secondary information – no written literature on this craft, and the unavailability of documented archival materials, such as commission reports and
other policy documents; some films important to my study were also unavailable. Probably these hurdles might have been the reason for relatively less research being conducted in the area of film labour in India.

I ventured on this less travelled road with a two-fold objective:

1. To document the life of Junior Artistes who are generally seen as mere bodies in the background. This quest took me to multiple film production locations in India, those places producing films in their regional languages - Chennai (Tamil film industry), Hyderabad (Telugu Film Industry), Bangalore and Mysore (Kannada film industry) and Mumbai (Hindi film industry). In my five-year research period (2010 - 2015) I have met and interviewed around fifty-odd Junior Artistes and Agents. With some, I was able to conduct in-depth interviews by meeting them at regular intervals over the years. A few Junior Artistes opened up both their professional and personal lives to me, introduced me to their family, shared rare photographs and their memories in the film industry. Interaction with them gave me an insight into their personal and as well as working life as Junior Artistes, their struggles, imposed subordinate status, denial of their identity as artists, their lowly social status, occupational stigma and the ensuing constraints and consequences. In the midst of all the social pressures and economic subjugation under which they led their lives, I got a sense of how these marginal artistes of the film industry were attempting to negotiate for autonomy, subjectivity and the strategies they were adopting to achieve a measure of agency and control.

2. To understand how a ‘crowd’ comes together on screen. A long standing curiosity that bothered me often was: how does a film-maker mobilise such a large number of Junior Artistes for shooting? Most of the Indian films recruit Junior Artistes in thousands for war sequences or as audience and onlookers, or for song and dance sequences, market sequences etc., making one wonder how they manage to mobilise such a huge human resource. This raised several questions in me: Do Junior Artistes also undergo the casting procedure? What were the criteria for selection? How and who would instruct and train them for the scene? Is there a hierarchy among them? Are they familiar with each other just like the other screen artistes? Are they just like any crowd,
unfamiliar with each other? How are they paid and how much? Who pays them? How do they get the information about shootings which are so confidential? While I was grappling with several such questions, my initial interaction with the Junior Artistes introduced me to the hierarchical organogram existing among the Junior Artistes. My initial interactions made me explore the role of Junior Artistes Suppliers, who are often the only ones credited on behalf of the Junior Artistes performing in the film. In many film industries, the Junior Artistes Suppliers or Agents, as they are also called, and the Junior Artistes had organized themselves into separate but symbiotic organizations and Associations. So the second connotation of “Acting Bodies” which forms a part of the title of this study refers to the structured Bodies or Associations that Junior Artistes and their Agents have formed themselves into, in order to organize and secure their working lives.

I invested a significant part of my field work time in understanding unionisation of film workers in four major film industries in India - Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Telugu film industries. This attempt to study unionisation was also to seek an explanation for the purported ‘unorganised’ status of the film industry. Due to dearth of literature in the area of Junior Artistes unionisation I had to rely on the narratives of the Junior Artistes, Agents and other film trade union leaders. Visiting the union office gave me access to a variety of crucial documents maintained in their offices - such as souvenirs, annual reports, photographs, trade union records, certificates and union daily office records. Apart from referring to policy documents, union bylaws, Government initiated various committee reports for information on Junior Artistes, attending the union meetings and interview with office bearers helped in understanding the function and role of the union vis-a-vis the state, film industry and Junior Artistes. When I began this research, neither did I have any contact with Junior Artistes nor did I have any network within the film industry, which could have helped me to get easy access to Junior Artistes. As I had to start somewhere, the obvious option was to walk into the office of the Junior Artistes association in Hyderabad, the city I was based, during my research period. Though building rapport took its own time, the ambience of the union helped me in garnering the confidence of the Junior Artistes.
0.2. Pilot Study

As preparation for the field work, I started with a pilot study in November-December 2010 at the Telugu film industry in Hyderabad. The objective of the pilot study was to have insight to the field of study and to accordingly design appropriate research methodology to collect data.

I was an outsider to the film industry and knew no one in the film world. Access to the film industry without ‘right’ contacts or network is difficult, and even amidst a large film crew it is still possible to identify the outsider; hence without prior permission from the higher ups, it is difficult to spend a day on the film shooting set especially when it is an indoor shooting. Since I was visiting film set through the Junior Artistes and Agents, because of their limited agency in the industry, my access within the shooting place was also limited.

Since I was not familiar with the unorganized film sector and this unfamiliarity and lack of network in the film industry left me with few options, and I thought of directly meeting the Junior Artistes at their office. The intention was also to build rapport and seek the Junior Artistes’ permission and participation in the research, rather than meeting them with references and putting them into an obligatory situation to cooperate with the researcher. Before defining the field site, I had to test the feasibility of the research and Hyderabad, the centre for Telugu film production (popularly referred as Tollywood) was the closest site to my university; hence I decided to do my pilot study at this convenient field. Since one my core objectives was to understand the film industry through the eyes of the Junior Artistes,
the Junior Artiste Union office was a right place to begin my journey. However, within a few days of starting my field work, cine-workers called for a strike and the Telugu film industry production came to a sudden halt for almost one month, introducing me at the very beginning, to the uncertainty and vulnerability that governed the unorganized Indian film industry. The reason for the long strike is explained in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. But broadly we can say that the main reason behind the strike was the exploitation and violation of workers’ rights in the film industry.

Undertaking this study as a non-participant researcher, I was more curious than apprehensive, at the beginning of the fieldwork; also because it was a pilot study the field visit was more exploratory in nature, which actually helped in widening my understanding of the subject of my study. For instance, while I was searching for the Stuntmen’s Union office, I stumbled into the Dancers’ Union and this accidental interaction with film dancers helped me to understand the distinction and relationship between the dancers and Junior Artistes, thus bringing home to me the vital need of understanding both the vertical and horizontal structures within the film industry.

I employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as my initial tool to enter into the world of Junior Artistes and their Agents. The use of FGD as a data collection tool for my first stage of study helped in developing my research methodology and also allowed me to explore my novice ideas. Though the principal requirement on the field was to take part in local life of the subject of study, both due to time constraint and also due to the ongoing strike in the film industry, access to my subject of study (Junior Artistes) was restricted. Conversation with Junior Artistes Agents helped me in getting an insight into the functioning of the community, the conflict of hierarchy and identity within the Junior Artistes. The strike gave an overview of the organization of film workers in the Telugu film industry and interaction with other screen artistes like the Stunt artistes and Dancers, facilitated in understanding the characteristics and difference among the screen artistes.
0.3. Literature Review

Although it is true that barely any literature is available on Junior Artistes, the supporting material which have endured - the films, newspaper and magazine articles, television interviews, documentaries, government records, trade journals and above all, biographies and autobiographies - are engaging; though scattered, it is still a staggering archive. The diffuse nature of this material however posed an enormous challenge to me when I began research on this topic.

Most of research on film labour is Hollywood-centric, and have generally engaged in analyses of modes of production, industrial structures, studio organization, trade unionization, and representations of social class in film narratives. However studying the available literature on organisation of film labour in foreign film industries is critical for understanding, if there has been any influence of these industries in organising Indian film labour. For the purpose of research two film industries, Hollywood film industry which has significant influence on the Indian film industry, and the British film industry considering the colonial legacy were referred for studying organisation of film labour, though there is limited literature on organisation of film labour, even in these industries.

In Hollywood, the movement for organizing film labour that started in 1933 is considered to be no different from the struggles in Detroit (automobile industry) or Pittsburgh (steel making industry). The unionization of film labour then had coincided with the rise of the labour movement in USA. But, the US government’s introduction of the National Recovery Act in 1933 to address the impact of Great Depression came as a relief to the film workforce. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was established to supervise the codes for fair competition for all US industries including the film industry. The NRA Act made it a policy to permit employees to organize and bargain collectively, demand for minimum wages and working conditions. This support from the government was the impetus for the organization of labour in Hollywood (Gomery 185).

Douglas Gomery (2008), in his book titled *Hollywood Studio System* proposes a method of “Industrial Analysis” to theoretically understand how the studio system came to be, and operated as a business. He starts by first asking who owned,
controlled and operated the corporations. With that established, he then analyses the corporations’ economic conduct. How did they choose how many films to produce? How did they distribute them around the world? What means did they use to present films to the public, at what price and in what order? In the context of my research, the section on labour unions is critical; the rise of labour unions draws attention to labour struggle within industry and how the labour organisation did not begin in a total vacuum and had a history of denial of labour rights, inciting the movement:

During the great depression, the studio leaders reacted the only way capitalists in crisis do - by cutting wages and firing unprotected workers. ‘Morale was already low’, stated Variety, as it observed the surge in unionization, ‘and the 50% cut to men (and women) who had already taken two or three cuts, seemed the last straw.’ As the Great Depression ground on, studios laid off more than one in five of their workers. The companies in bankruptcy court were the most ruthless. For example, Paramount shut down its Long Island studio, and laid off almost 5,000 employees who had been earning between $35 and $50 a week. The number of unemployed and underpaid extras in Hollywood became front page news. As a result of such economizing, the annual cumulative payrolls of the studio companies dropped from $150 million in 1931 to $50 million by 1933. (Gomery 185)

As in any industry, the film industry’s labour force, its location, and its wages all play critical roles in determining the quality and profitability of the product. In the contemporary Hollywood industry, three trends have emerged as a result of the global market place for labour and ideas: the outsourcing of labour, run away productions, and concentration of creative and intellectual control (King 387).Commenting on the role of producers in the capitalist film industry, Hollywood chronicler Leo Rosten says, “Each studio has a personality; each studio’s product shows special emphases and values. And, in the final analysis, the sum total of a studio’s personality, the aggregate pattern of its choices and its tastes, may be traced to its producers. For it is the producers who establish the preferences, the prejudices, and the predispositions of the organization and, therefore, of the movies which it turns out.” (Schatz 7)

The situation in Great Britain, which set the model for the organisation of Indian film industry and for the legislative enactments relating to cinema, was
different when it came to organising labour. In Britain, the workers and artistes in
drama companies and music halls had been organised into unions. When cinema
arrived and grew into an industry in Great Britain, these old trade unions
automatically acted as the foundation for the development of the labour outfits in the
film industry (Baskaran 98). In the British film industry, EQUITY, a trade union for
professional performers and creative practitioners was started in 1930 by a group of
artists. EQUITY has over the decades played an important role in addressing several
welfare needs of the cine-workers, such as - fair payment for artists, health and safety
regulation, pension and insurance schemes for workers etc.

Recently, “production studies” has renewed attention to the political economy
of global media industries, analyzing their organizational structures and the thick
networks of workers, markets, and practices. Noting the way in which cultural
production operates at the level of ‘both industry and ideology’, scholars have
examined cultural producers’ re-working social meanings and identities through the
interpellation of new subjectivities and markets through various kinds of media
production and circulation. Several studies have shown that anthropologists are also
increasingly turning to media producers and commercial culture industries as subjects

A few studies that have focused on film production labour in India are
ethnographic in nature. Majumdar (2015) highlights the presence of invisible work,
i.e., the work done by those who occupy low positions in the film production
hierarchy and calls for greater research attention to this type of work. Wilkinson-
Weber’s (2006) ethnographic investigation of the work performed by dressmen—the
Hindi film industry’s male wardrobe assistants—reveals the changes wrought by
globalization to their job security. The study on dressmen informs our understanding
of skilled workers in the film industry, and provides a semiotic approach to analysis
of costume. Booth’s (2008) work makes an invaluable contribution through an
ethnographic examination of film musicians in Hindi cinema tracks; his work traces
the changes in the way film music has been created over the past many decades and
the diminishing opportunities for film musicians. Tejaswini Ganti’s book, Producing
Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry (2012) gives an
ethnographic account of the Mumbai based film industry, describing dramatic
transformations in the Hindi film industry’s production culture, daily practices, and filmmaking ideologies during a decade of tremendous social and economic change in India offering valuable new insights into the effects of neoliberalism on cultural production in a postcolonial setting. Ganti’s work however is silent on the “invisible,” below the-line labour in film industry.

0.4. Sources for an Historical View of Junior Artistes in Indian Film Industry

The book *The Indian Film – A Review* by Y.A. Fazalbhoy published in 1938, though not an in-depth study, gives one of the earliest though peripheral readings of the film industry during the studio system. The author in the chapter on ‘Artistes and their Salaries’, restricts his discussion to “stars”; he says, “One of the major items of expenditure in film production is the salary cost of the acting staff. In production companies it is often felt that unduly high salaries are paid to the staff and some studios make it a regular policy to pay as little as possible. In my opinion those of the artistes who have a following, have a right of getting a good pay because much of the income from the pictures in which they appear depends on the personal popularity of the star” (42).

Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) Report (1927) is another early invaluable document. Until the ICC report there was no official information on the film industry and this is acknowledged by the then secretary to government of India, H G Haig at the council of states; he stated that ignorance of the functioning of the film industry, was the main reason for constituting the ICC committee. “We were not surprised to find the government of India had no information whatsoever regarding this industry; while the commerce department was able to supply figures only in regard to imports; nor were it any better with the provincial governments. And the trade themselves are hopelessly ignorant of the conditions of the industry. Even some of the most intelligent producers gave us figures of production which were merely conjectural and which do not correspond with the figures which we have been able to collect after laborious compilation from the reports of the censorship boards.” (GOI 1927, para 169)

For organizing the production section of the industry the “S.K. Patil Film Enquiry Committee Report” formed as early as 1951 recommended that legislative
action should be taken to declare the control of production side of the industry by the central government. This recommendation was accepted by the government and a Cinematograph Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 1956. However, the Bill was withdrawn as a measure of economy - a loss to government income (GOI 1951 para 557).

Till date the only exclusive study on labour in the film industry was the one conducted by P G Kher Committee, constituted by the Maharashtra state government in 1965. The P G Kher Committee report on the employment condition of the film industry blamed the star system for adversely affecting wages, employment and working conditions. With the lion’s share apportioned to artistes, a large number of technicians and craftsmen were reported to be receiving wages not commensurate with their skill. Since the work culture had been influenced by star system, the film shootings had to be scheduled on Sundays and holidays to utilize the few available dates of stars and also late attendance of these artists on the set was largely responsible for much of the irregularity in working hours and overtime (GOI 1966, para 2.3).

According to K S Karanth Committee (1980) report, “In the 80s there were large number of associations of the industry of producers, exhibitors, distributors, directors, laboratory owners, other film employees and exporters etc. Some of them had large membership but there was still no effective, all India body, to which all the associations could affiliate. Attempts had been made to bring all Associations under a single umbrella like the one provided by the ‘Film Federation of India’ but have failed due to assertions by different Associations of their own importance on regional or sectarian considerations”(GOI 1980, para 16.23).

The committee insisted that unless government in dealing with the industry insists that it shall deal with only a single representative association at different levels, the formation of proper trade associations in the industry is unlikely. In fact, P G Kher, appointed by the Government of Maharashtra, had recommended that only those persons who are members of registered crafts should be engaged in film production and also suggested that new members to the union should be selected based on certain criteria. The P G Kher report on an Enquiry into the Condition of Labour mentions, that by 1955 most of the hiring of the Junior Artistes was done
through “extra suppliers”. These agents then received 10-25 percent commission from the artiste. In placing the order for the extras, the producer customarily specified one of the various grades; the supplier were informed based on requirement for an “ordinary girl” or a “decent girl” – this category was subdivided into classes A, B and C – or a super decent girl. Rates for the categories were standardized. A super decent girl was one who would seem acceptable in a high society or court setting, whereas an ordinary girl might appear in a crowd scene.

The then prevalent system of “ordering extras”, was said to lead to abuses. The P G Kher report stated that the Extras Suppliers “have little social and cultural background”. When an order is received from the producer for a decent ‘A’ class girl, the agent would supply that category of artiste and receives payment accordingly from the producer. But while paying wages to the artiste, the Agent usually paid artistes the wages of a “B class girl”, on the plea that the producer required an artiste of the latter category, and that he had done her a favour by securing her the day’s work. The difference in wages is pocketed by the Agent. The artiste is helpless, as she has no access to the producer. The total earnings of the ordinary girls averaged Rs 17 per month; whereas the decent class ‘C’ girl earned Rs 33 per month; the decent class ‘A’ girls earned Rs 120 per month; super decent girls, earned Rs 175 per month. Those who could dance earned on an average Rs 194 per month. And newcomers had to forego their wages for the sake of a mere appearance on the screen (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 168).

There are not many documents or articles that provide us information about film workers in the multi-lingual Indian film industry. Literatures on history of regional cinema are largely limited to chronicling the history of regional films and its individual stars; no attempts are made to document the film labour in regional cinemas. There are not many documents or articles that provide us an idea of the condition of workers of the regional film industry in the 1940s. In this background, the fictional writings of Tamil writer Ashokamitran ii comes in handy. He worked in the administrative side of Gemini Studios and was able to observe the workers and others with the keen eye of a writer. At least six of his novels are set in the background of the film industry and he introduces characters from the world of films. Junior Artistes and stuntmen figure as characters in his works. In his novels he
describes the working conditions of film workers, their lives and their interaction with the bosses. Particular mention must be made of the novel *Karaindha Nizhalkal* (The melting Shadows) in which the main protagonists are workers from the film industry. In a short story titled ‘Vannangal’ (The colours) he specifically deals with the plight of car drivers in the film studio and their struggle for fair wages.

Even the film trade organisations have not documented or preserved materials that can help trace the social history of film labour. But also unionisation is of recent phenomenon, it was only in the 1990s that the workers of various crafts have been organising themselves into unions and have started setting up regular offices. S Theodore Baskaran, in his book- *History through the lens* has a chapter on -Trade Unionism in Film Industry.

The South Indian Film industry is more than ninety years old. From small, tentative beginnings, it has grown into a major industry, with viewers from all over the world and employing millions of workers. For decades these workers remained unorganised and unprotected. It is only in the last twenty years that substantial progress has been made in getting these workers organised and getting them to form a trade unions (Baskaran 88).

The available literatures on early regional cinema have some scattered information about working conditions in film industry. In the article “Two Decades of Telugu Cinema” by Dr Arudra, in *Telugu Cinema – an anthology of articles* edited by K.N.T Sastry, there is a fleeting reference as to how early film workers had to travel to various places for film shooting:

Even though by 1937 nine studios were existing in Madras, most of the enterprising Telugu businessmen were still producing their films either at Bombay, Kolhapur or at Calcutta. They would gather the required artistes, writers, musicians and take them to well equipped places where sound recording facilities were available. Out of the 38 talkies produced till 1937, only four were made in Madras. (Sastry 11)

A book on Kannada cinema, *Cinema Yana* by Dr K Puttaswamy also ignores the struggle of film workers. In the chapter – ‘Salam Madras’, he writes about early Kannada film shooting in Madras, where for reducing the cost of production and since
studio charges were low for shooting in night hours, early Kannada films were mostly shot in the night. In the article, he mentions about the co-operation extended by Tamil film industry for Kannada film production in Madras, and how this relationship soured in 1972 due to inter-state conflict on Cauvery water sharing issue. Here, K Puttaswamy does not go into the detail as to how this impacted regional film labour (Puttaswamy 251).

The existing large scholarship on stars and stardom has been an important source for understanding the significance and also to unpack the existing hierarchy among the screen workers. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation I have dealt in-depth with the topic of star studies. The biographies and autobiographies are important sources to understand the work culture in the film industry. There are biographies of stars, artists, directors, detailing their insights into their work life, experiences and observations in the film industry, but even in these works which are personal narratives, there is no significant mention of Junior Artistes, or anecdotal reference, but for some rare exceptions, indicating the ‘othering’ and invisiblization of the Junior Artistes.

In the memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza *A Woman of Substance*, the Begum who came from an elite upper class Muslim family and was daughter of Sheikh Abdullah and Waheed Jahan Begum the founders of Aligarh Women’s College, recollects that she worked in cinema industry only with people who were either friends or relatives of friends, and since her husband Akbar, was a police officer no one dared to take advantage of her. She says that even producers and directors were deferential in the presence of her husband and treated him with such respect that it made her position quite unique in the film industry (Kazim 151).

The treatment of labour, the power relation and hierarchy at the workplace in those days is evident in the memoir of Begum Khurshid Mirza:

While working in Lahore, I noticed with dismay the disrespect with which the rich producers treated the artistes, especially the extras. The chaperones as well as the studio hands bullied the girls equally because they and the madam, who accompanied them, were desperate to get into films to earn a regular income. My aloofness, along with Akbar’s stern presence,
terrified them and apart from wishing me a very respectful ‘good morning’, they steered clear of me. I suspect they were afraid of annoying me because of my husband’s police badge” (Kazim 146).

Some of the biographies about film personnel also draw attention to artistes starting their film career as Junior Artiste and growing to be a star or producer. For example, Mehboob Khan, well known producer and director had started his career as a Junior Artiste. This has been documented by Bunny Reuben in his book *Mehboob, India’s DeMille: The First Biography* (1994). These memoirs have been a vital source of information in the construction of film labour history.

Junior Artiste have been important characters in popular fictions on Indian film industry. Kiran Nagarkar’s, novel *Ravan and Eddie* (1995) and the sequel, *The Extras: Starring Ravan and Eddie* are some of the popular examples of such novels. *The Extras* is especially focused on Bombay film industry, Junior Artiste working in Famous Studios, their provisional lives and about those Junior Artiste who became stars. The novels depict a Bombay chawl, relationship between film and underworld, the growth of the Hindu Right wing in Maharashtra, the lives of Goan Catholics and Anglo-Indians in the metropolis, and the popular culture from the 1950s to the 1970s.

The online literature on Junior Artiste or the extras was available more from western context such as in Hollywood and British film industry but even there, there have been no substantial and full- fledged studies of extras over time. The Union websites of EQUITY in UK and Screen Actors Guild (SAG) in USA, though were informative on the organization of the film workers in the west; print and web articles on movie extras and especially, the casting website, gave an insight into the profession and the significance of social networking site such as twitter, facebook and blogs in recruiting them and about the work of extras.

Though these materials both text and video, helped in gaining macro understanding of the issue, but there is little about practices on ground or their impact at micro level. Therefore I had to adopt ethnographic approach for collecting data which included interviews and non-participant observation.
0.5. Research agenda

My review of existing studies on Indian film industry provided me with scarce information about the production practices on ground and its impact at the micro level. Hence the primary focus of my research is to understand how the film industry works at a micro level, referring to the workers at the bottom of the pyramid of the film industry. The Indian film industry is not a homogenous industry; it comprises of multiple language industries, which are unique in their production process, audience taste and fan base. Though there are similarities, but any generalisation is misleading and harmful; hence I have chosen four different film industries for the study. Several studies do recognise the existence of different language film industries as separate entities, but do not probe further about how they have emerged over time, and how they are divergent. According to Madhava Prasad, starting from the 1950s, Madras film industry, threw-up the generation of stars, namely the star troika comprising MGR, NTR and Rajkumar, who gradually emerged as authority figures on screen and representatives of their linguistic communities off-screen (Prasad: 41). Prasad focuses on the formation of particular kinds of star-based or star-propelled linguistic communities that arose post the Linguistic Reorganization of States in 1956. Prasad describes the phenomenon of ‘cine-politics’ in the three southern states (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) of India as constituting a separate historical event, making a significant difference to Indian political history(Prasad 2014). Both Prasad and S.V. Srinivas, have consistently argued against the assumption that cinema of a region constitutes an exception to other regional language films and also against Tamil cinema seen as representative of South Indian film industries, highlighting the existence of parallels across film industries (Prasad1998, 2014; Srinivas 2009). I revisit these assumptions to understand the process of unionisation among the Junior Artistes, because these Unions and Associations distinguish themselves on the lines of language, locality and region. Through my research I want to understand the role of unions in establishing a language based film industry, and the synergy between workers’ union and the language based film industry. Such a research agenda required me to adopt qualitative research method, using ethnographic tools, which I will be discussing in detail in the next section on methodology.
0.6. Method of data collection and analysis

The heterogeneity of research objectives inherent to this study necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the Junior Artistes. Borrowing from Aeron Davis, I look at methodological approaches for researching cultural production of the category called the Junior Artistes, through three approaches - political economy approach, textual analysis and ethnography.

As a researcher, while collecting data I did go through three broad phases of research: a curious phase, a confused phase and a clarity phase, and I feel my subject of study (artistes) on the field, also seemed to have gone through similar transition in their approach towards my research. These three phases have a significant impact on the data collection process. The first phase was the ‘curious’ phase: who are these unknown faces on screen and why are they usually casted-in or for the background; how do they mobilize such a huge crowd for film shooting; are they artistes; what is the mode of employment - permanent, contracted or as casual workers and with many such questions I started my research; this curiosity and quest to find an answer to these questions made me explore diverse methodologies in research. The first phase or curious stage of data collection comprised: analysis of screen images, online search for resource, preliminary library visits, interaction with film experts and a pilot study.

The research began with reading of films that had introduced me to the research subject – Junior Artistes and films, continued to be an important source of data all through my research for understanding the Junior Artistes. The analysis of screen images, has influenced my off screen engagement with Junior Artistes and vice-versa. Some of the initial questions were answered, but more questions arose and I entered into a confused phase, with my fieldwork unsettling many of my assumptions. Although I cannot claim to completely inhabit the third phase of clarity, the writing of this dissertation took me somewhat on the path of clarity.

Methodology:

The choice of which method to employ is dependent upon the nature of the research problem, as Morgan and Smircich have argued; the actual suitability of a
research method, derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored. And, like many social and cultural phenomena, film workers' lives are a sensitive research topic because it is characterized by a mixture of popularity, glamour, secrecy and stigma in contemporary context. Because of the existing social order and system of classification in the film industry, the Junior Artistes are systematically marginalized and stigmatized making them invisible and voiceless in the film industry. It has long been acknowledged that, when studying non-mainstream groups in society such as the marginalized and the stigmatized, researchers must tailor their data collection methods to both the sensitivity of the research topic and the vulnerability of research subjects (Goffman, 1963; Hobbs, 2002; Lee, 1993).

In order to understand this significant craft, I employed integrated ethnographic data collection methods, non-participant observation, in-depth interviewing and documenting life histories. As a non-participant observant I have tried to engage with the social world of the film industry by observing and interacting with the people within it. Thus for my research I spent a lot of time on the film sets, film workers’ Union offices, studios, outdoor shooting locations, and other sites of production, along with home visits. I carried out informal and focus group interviews; apart from that the daily conversations and interactions that I had with industry members also provided critical insights in understanding the Junior Artistes. Apart from extensive field work in different locales, I used multiple data sources and methods of data collection to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. The research is designed to examine the circulation of cultural meanings and identities in diffuse time-space. To sum up in the words of anthropologist, James Spradley, ethnography help us to understand as to how other people see their experience; rather than studying people, it helps in learning from people. Strictly abiding by this talisman, I tried to adopt a research methodology, which could facilitate a learning process, an attempt to learn about the film industry through the lens of Junior Artistes.
Technology: Significance of presence/presenting to a camera, (tools used for data collection)

On the field the digital camera and audio recorder vastly extended the powers of observation. Technology complemented my passion, and was useful in the enterprise of producing a written and filmed ethnography of artistes. Though initially, I was sceptical about using a camera on field, in the course of my field work, I observed that Junior Artistes who share the least screen space and time among the screen artistes, felt important when the camera focused at them during the interview and they participated enthusiastically in the research; a female researcher handling technology, also influenced them to take me and my research seriously.

During my field work, camera was not just a mere a tool for documentation but was an instrument of exploration within ethnographic research. The camera was employed to elicit discussions, provoke meaningful performance and to reveal what Margaret Mead referred to as the ‘intangibles of social life’. Such intangibles may be better represented through the observation of body gestures, facial expressions, nuanced glances, tone of voice, and pauses in speech, which usually escape the written ethnography.

In field work I have come to understand that camera can capture much more than simply visual reality by playing a role of observant. Deprived of screen space and time, when camera zoomed on them the kind of enthusiasm and participation showed by the artistes highlighted their subdued aspirations and desires. Their knowledge about the technology or the usage of film production sector jargons, made the documenting process participatory and joyful: Junior Artistes would ask if the lighting was proper and suggest camera angle and would invite me home so that they can be interviewed in the presence of other family members. Some would also ask for a copy of their interview to show it to their family members. They understood the significance of the presence of camera and presenting themselves to the camera. Here is a sample of some of their response when I trained the camera on them:

Junior Artiste Lydia, “Am I looking good? Is my dress okay? Do you need more light?”
Junior Artiste Ameer, “Take a long shot of the Union office board, pan it over with a close up on my face”.

Junior Artistes Vijaya, “You want my photo? I will show you my earlier photos; I was young and good looking”.

Junior Artistes Sakuntala: “I am not dressed for the camera, can you just audio record the interview”.

(An in-depth interview with some of these above mentioned Junior Artistes is presented in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, as also in other chapters).

Usually, dismissed off by the film industry personnel as unskilled work force, in front of camera they were eager to show their skill; some would start reciting dialogues and songs; some would start talking at length about their sharing screen space with stars.

Occasionally, camera was a distraction and to be in the frame artistes would interrupt others being interviewed at union or shooting set. Technology also brings in a relationship of power, and when I would approach any artiste for an interview, they would refer me to meet artistes who are educated, especially those artistes with knowledge of English language. Deprived of any kind of recognition and usually being misrepresented by the media and film industry, Junior Artistes were keen that I spoke to the most experienced artistes who can share authentic information about the past and present, so that the history of Junior Artistes is written from their perspective. Worried that I was talking to random artistes, leaders at the Junior Artistes Union and Junior Artistes’ Agents at shooting place would depute or suggest people to be interviewed and usually, it was the senior-most person in the profession. For example - Late Balan, former president of Thenninthiya Venthirai Saha Nadigap Ninthai Sangam (TVSNS), Junior Artistes association in Chennai introduced me to N K Swami as the senior most artiste and founder member of the Association and authentic source on anything related to the craft; when I visited the Stunt union, there too, they wanted me to interact with the senior-most (experienced) in the profession and was introduced to Thyagarajan, stunt master.

Presence of camera also made artistes conscious and at times would create awkward situations like at the Mumbai Mahila Kalakar Sangh, an exclusive women
Junior Artistes Association, where women artistes gamble in the evening; they were not comfortable with the camera presence and I was sternly asked not to shoot them, while they were playing cards. Some would request me to use only the audio recorder. Presence of camera and recorder at times also made artistes conscious of what they were saying and how much they should share with a researcher and also since most often media has represented them in sensational, vulnerable or sympathetic mode they would feel insecure to divulge any information. Only assurance that the conversation will not be recorded in any form would encourage some of them to open up. These unrecorded conversations have been important sources of information to understand the artistes, their everyday challenges, negotiations and their agencies.

Fearing piracy and instant uploading of film making video/picture or leakage of footage, even mobile camera are not usually allowed at shooting place and therefore at film shooting place I was allowed to takes notes and on some rare occasion could only use the audio recorder.

During my field work across different sites, artistes were also at risk by disclosing information about their working lives. In my research, I was particularly concerned about the risk workers might incur in talking with me about their work. Most of these men and women occupied low-wage, low-status at work, and they often reminded me of their precariousness in the workplace. In order to avoid any risk of their losing their work I maintained their anonymity and recorded conversations after detailing to them about my research and the ways the data provided by them would be used, and went ahead only after they gave their full consent.

Field notes

If ‘the field’ is anthropology’s version of both the promised land and an ordeal by fire, then field notes symbolize what journeying to and returning from the field mean to us: the attachment, the identification, the uncertainty, the mystique, and, perhaps above all, the ambivalence (Roger 33).

To keep the conversation free-flowing, and also to avoid sceptical reactions from artistes, I consciously avoided taking down field notes on the spot, and took the refuge of technology for this purpose and made my field notes at the end of the day, with the help of the recorded data Field notes are critical for qualitative studies, but
after spending whole day on the field, sitting up to write field notes has never been a pleasant task. To put the predicament that I often faced in the words of anthropologist Annette Lareau:

I made one very serious mistake in the field; I fell behind in writing up my field notes. Writing up field notes immediately is one of the sacred obligations of field work. Yet workers I have known well all confessed that they fell behind in their field notes at one time or another. Researchers are human—we get sick; we have an extra glass of wine; we get into fights with our spouses; we have papers to grade, due the next day; or we simply don’t feel like writing up field notes immediately after an interview or a participant-observation session. On top of that, at least for me, writing field notes is both boring and painful: boring, because it repeats a lot of what you just did and it takes a long time to write a detailed description of a fifteen-minute encounter/observation; painful, because it forces you to confront unpleasant things, including lack of acceptance, foolish mistakes in the field, ambiguity about the intellectual question, missed opportunities in the field, and gaping holes in the data. (Lareau216)

Field observation in the form of non-participant observation helped to get a ringside view of the work culture of the Junior Artistes, and field notes were an important source of documentation.

Mapping the field

As mentioned earlier, multi-sited study was important for researching a mobile work force like the Junior Artistes. The construction of multi-site fields included the selection of sites; the quality of relationships with artistes in such fields; the temporal aspects of field work and of the sites themselves. The data collected in multi-site studies helped in engaging with the construction of dichotomies such as the so-called ‘regional’ and the ‘national’ film industries. This multiple-site ethnographic study is essential in order to understand the labour relationships, language and response, from the perspective of regional and relative power positions, association and connections it suggests among the sites. Also the agency, symbols, and every day practices continue to be expressed on a differently configured spatial canvas.
With Chennai and Mumbai historically known as centres of film production, the initial idea was to focus on the study in these two regional film industries, but some of the questions raised in these sites necessitated the need to look at the other regional film industries, to have a comprehensive overview and comparative point of references for the study, leading to the inclusion of Telugu and Kannada film industry. I had begun my research with a pilot study in Hyderabad (Telugu film industry) and later undertook research at Bangalore and Mysore locations (Kannada film industry). Since the focus was on Chennai and Mumbai, substantial time was spent on these fields; so a significant part of data collected is also from these two centres. While discussing the cultural positioning of Junior Artistes, place acts to constitute social relations and in the light of this observation, I suggest that the strength of film labour movements have been rooted in recognizing their role in the creation and maintenance of regional film industry. How the labour decides to position itself in relation to the region/language is at the crux of my investigations in this thesis and with regional film industries located mostly in the capital city this political economic investigation places urbanism at the centre of analysis of the visual cultural economy. Also, I interviewed Junior Artistes at their union office, shooting places and homes to elicit information, and the kind of response derived in each of these locations also varied accordingly, underlining the embedded politics of these spaces and relationship with their work.

I conducted interviews of Junior Artistes, Agents/Suppliers and office bearers of Unions, in all the four selected sampling sites – Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, and in the Hindi film industry. All the four sampling sites being located in four different state capitals. – Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Mysore, Mumbai, though these film industries are located in these cosmopolitan cities, but most of my subjects of study, were conversant only in their local languages viz. Kannada, Tamil and Telugu, however though the Hindi film industry is located in Mumbai – were Marathi is the local language, but my subjects were conversant in both Hindi and Marathi. In the interest of the methodology adopted, it was important to conduct the interviews in the language familiar to the subject of the interview. Though I was familiar with these languages, but one of the major field work preparation, was brushing my language skills in all the required local languages, from being familiar to be able to converse. Thanks to all the regional films that helped me in this endeavour. Getting a grip on
the language was what built my confidence encouraging me to pursue research in four different states, in order to explore the craft comprehensively.

**On field:** As David Fetterman wrote, ‘The most important element of fieldwork is being there – to observe, to ask seemingly stupid yet insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard.’ (Fetterman 19).

Once I entered the field, due to the unpredictable nature of the field, I had no control over the social settings such as what would happen and whom I would get to meet. I am not able to underpin concretely now, but maybe it was my petite appearance, my casual student like looks, or maybe I simply looked out of place; for whatever reason, at the beginning of my research, I was stopped several times, at studios, shooting spots, union office, by security to check my identity card. Surprisingly, some artistes I met in the field mistook me as a media representative, or a government officer.

Also, everyday social realities are unpredictable, and often unforeseen circumstances were produced by the people whom I came into contact on field. As such, I had no choice but to solve many on-site problems encountered in the research process there and then. Given the uncertainty and complexities of field social interactions, with experience, I learnt to adjust levels of involvement and participation on the field.

Months on field had passed before I came to understand that uncertainty was a fundamental part of the ethnographic method. Much more time passed before I began to feel even slightly comfortable fumbling with the unfamiliar terrain of the film industry. Dilemma was a dominant feeling those days, I constantly asked myself such questions as, is this appropriate site to do research? Should I be spending more time there instead of here?

Initially, Junior Artistes did not want to participate in the research because they were afraid of exposure and judgment; hence I consciously spent substantial part of time on field to win the trust of the artistes and to make them understand the purpose of the study and significance of conducting a detailed research on Junior Artistes. And, the initial reluctance was also because Junior Artistes, were upset with the wrong portrayal of them by the newspaper/media, and also hopelessness that no
matter what is written about them their lives, their status within the industry will not change. Because I was using camera, audio recorder and making notes of what they were saying they would mistake me as reporter and I had to convince them that I’m not from media and would not write anything against their consent and if they don’t feel like answering my questions they don’t have to. Hence my main focus while collecting and analysing data has been to ensure, that I would not hurt their sentiments and safeguard the information that they have entrusted me with confidence, and represent them without any bias or favouritism.

As I got familiar with the field, for the rest of my fieldwork, I did not encounter awkward situations or experience emotional uneasiness and discomfort. At the field entry, occasionally my interactions with artistes ended in uncomfortable halts; those encounters helped reveal that film industry stories different from public perceptions and stereotypes.

I made several field visits to the five selected sites – Bangalore, Mysore, Mumbai, Chennai, and Hyderabad - over the course of five years. My research methodology and data collection was tailored to meet the information need of the study. To sum up the long process I video/audio recorded their conversations and life histories, visited their families and befriended them, engaged in informal interviews and intimate dialogues, conducted focus group discussions, conducted in-depth interviews of Union leaders, attended several Union meetings and actively transcribed and translated the wealth of interviews; I also spent several days observing Junior Artistes work at film shooting sites – outdoor and indoor (studio); interviewed film historians, and other authorities on the issue of film labour, collected relevant materials and documents, maintained regular field notes and a huge collection of field photographs – all these methods helped me to make my journey confidently on this less travelled road, and have contributed immensely in shaping this story of the Junior Artistes.

**Interview and life histories**

Fetterman wrote, “Ethnographers use interviews to help classify and organize an individual’s perception of reality” (Fetterman 50). Here, in this research attempt is made to document the artistes’ perception and experience of working in the film
industry. While recording these oral histories there was no rationale in selecting participants on the field. I randomly spoke to artistes on the field, and it was during some of these random informal interviews that I encountered some very interesting life narratives; among these narratives, I pursued a few for documenting as life histories of artistes and the other of in-depth interviews also hold a lens to the Junior Artistes working lives.

As anthropologist Michael Agar wrote, in an informal interview “everything is negotiable. The informants can criticize a question, correct it, point out that it is sensitive, or answer in any way they want to” (Agar 90). The ethnographic interviews were a friendly conversation. A few minutes of easygoing talk interspersed here and there throughout the interview helped with developing and maintaining rapport with the artistes. Listening instead of talking; expressing interest in understanding their working lives from their perspective because of which some of interviews ended as a lengthy conversation were my mainstay. The adversity of some of these long conversations I realized only while transcribing the interviews. The unstructured interview process provides deeper meaning to my observations (Bodgan and Biklen, 2003; Seidman, 1998).

The choice of informal interview was employed because it offers sufficient flexibility to the approach. The interviews were recorded to be able to transcribe an accurate account of the conversations and avoid losing data since not everything can be written down during a qualitative interview. While preparing for the interview, questions were a mix of descriptive and structural questions. While the descriptive questions helped in documenting their work experiences, daily activities, and people in their lives, the structural questions were more specific, allowing me to find out how the informants have organized their knowledge. Sometimes, even if I was aware or heard it before I would express my ignorance to make sure that I show interest in what they wanted to say and to know more and also repeated their answers, to make sure that I understood well; and consciously avoided making my own interpretations.

Also, I abstained from seeking every detail of their lives and getting mired in theoretical application and connection; the study focuses on those details that are pertinent, related to the central theme that enriches our understanding. The objective
of the study is to establish a contextual framework that is rich in description and relevant, yet thematically constructed and clear.

Michel De Certeau, writes, “The stance on culture begins, when the ordinary man becomes the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development” (De Certeau 5). As there were no documentation on the subject of my study, I had to depend exclusively on oral history – the personal recollections of Junior Artistes have been an important source for tracing the work culture and evolution of this craft, and photographs shared by the artistes also formed an important source of information. At different stages of their narratives and the meanings that can be made of it, there posed a problem – the truth status of these of narratives; so, I did question myself most often that did it matter whether the narratives about their film world be true in the sense that they refer, in however mediated a manner, to an empirical world out there. Working with memory has not been simple. The verification of information continues to haunt me. Things were often remembered only by such temporal signposts as ‘I joined the film industry a few days before Anna Durai death.’ But, this collection of memories, individual and collective, familial and historical, are what make the reality of working lives of Junior Artistes.

Here I make an attempt to trace Junior Artistes’ narration of everyday life and show how memory can be a productive site for investigating the artistes’ engagement with the film work in day to day social relations. The evidence provided by memory, in interviews with artistes and groups, is also checked, as far as this is possible, against other documentary sources, such as union records, newspapers, and other reliable informants.

As Urvashi Butalia writing about the memories of the survivors of Partition, says,

It depends on who remembers, when, with whom, indeed to whom, and how. But to me, the way people choose to remember an event, a history, is at least as important as what one might call the ‘facts’ of that history, for after all, these latter are not self-evident givens; instead, they too are interpretations, as remembered or recorded by one individual or another (Urvashi Butalia 10).
Many of these accounts by artistes appear more “authentic” than third person accounts. The artiste’s (initial) reluctance to speak raised several questions such as why people were so reluctant to remember their working lives and also why there is selective recalling of certain events or incidents in their working lives.

Life histories of these artistes offered an understanding of film industry work culture; as much as possible, it is the artistes’ own story in every way, emphasizing on what he or she thinks was important to tell, rather than what I think was important to ask about. Thus, as soon as I was sure the artistes understand what is wanted in the interview, I began with such nondirective questions as, “Please tell me about your life before joining the film industry,” or “What was it like to grow up in Vadapallani?” Here the emphasis was placed on these casual film workers lived experience and in identification of this as a form of investigation as well as a range of resources for, firstly, charting the empirical changes in film culture and, secondly, inviting these same research subjects to reflect on how they lived through and how they make sense of their lives.

The life histories were collected in more than one session and over the years; it gave me time to think out questions raised in the first session and to clarify with them in the next session, or in a brief visit for final questions. These over the years’ conversation with artistes also made artistes comfortable to share their life histories.

**Questionnaire**

The need for questionnaire was felt during my field work in Mumbai. This was the confusion phase of my research. After the first round field work across the selected four sites, I was confused with several questions raised on field and in search of an answer, I was also including new tools of research such as questionnaires. Also, in Mumbai, the film industry is big business and unlike in other places like Chennai, Bangalore, Junior Artistes got regular work and because they were busy shooting all the time so many questions would be left unasked or unanswered; the questionnaire seemed an option to garner more responses in the limited time frame of research.

But, since questionnaire was qualitatively different from informal interview suddenly I felt a gap between the researcher and artistes as interviews had an interactive conversational nature, which the questionnaire lacks. On field most of the
artistes were reluctant to answer the questionnaire on their own as most of them were not literate in English. And, reading out questions and filling them up seemed a tedious process and time consuming and since the intention was to save on time by distributing the questionnaire to artistes, it did not work, and I finally gave up on using questionnaire as a data collection tool.

Also misinterpretations and misrepresentations are common with questionnaires. Many people present an idealized image of themselves on questionnaires, answering as they think they should to conform to certain image. Other problems include bias in the questions and to find answers to all the questions on field, I had ended up with a long questionnaire with 118 open ended questions. The questionnaire was a product of my knowledge about the system. I then compared the results of these questionnaires and tests with my descriptive findings. The descriptive findings were useful in explaining the questionnaire results; however the questionnaire results did provide some insight into the widespread prevalence of certain attitudes. Though I could not use questionnaire efficiently, the process of preparing questionnaire was helpful in organizing my own understanding of the field of enquiry and correcting my assumptions and opinions and to move to the clarity phase of my research on Junior Artistes (see Appendix V).

**Observation**

The process of ethnography is to observe how people negotiate their daily lives (Bogdan and Bilken, 2003). Derrida talked about daily negotiations with us and with others as tense, not relaxed but dynamic and shifting. I observed these negotiated interactions exhibited through behaviour patterns, conversations, and daily operations at the shooting spot. The process of observation is critical for building the framework for meaning. Interpretation is built over time and through multiple interactions and observations (Eisner, 1991; Naples, 2003; Reinharz, 1992). The observation method allowed observing what artistes do at work, not what they say, but what they do. Non-participant observation helped to uncover contextualized data, otherwise inaccessible.

The observation and interaction on field posed minimal risks to the anonymous informants whom I came across on the field. The observational technique I employed in this study allowed me to observe and document both physical settings
and social activities of artistes. However, the field practice of ethnography was much more complex and ethically challenging than what I had originally anticipated. The presence of unfamiliar technical equipment, such as light meter, boom microphones and reflectors was a challenge to document. Unfamiliar as I was with the nitty-gritty of movie production, it was often shocking and surprising that an apparently lengthy and cumbersome procedure would only result in a very short scene (as short as few seconds) in the final movie.

As Virginia Nightingale states, observation matters for cultural research because it brings researchers and research subjects into direct and immediate contact, providing opportunities for addressing and adjusting the asymmetrical relation to authorial power. In all male dominated place to be stared at is expected, but the counter-gaze (of the researcher) at an all male work place was not an easy task. Not used to being gazed at by a female, I could sense discomfort by the film crew members and most often, it was responded by hostility. But the most uncomfortable response was the questioning of the Junior Artistes who helped by bringing me to the shooting site; there were instances when the film directors stopped film shooting and I was asked to exit the location. It was always easy to spot an outsider, especially a female, when the entire cast and crew comprised of only men.

On big budget film sets, where more than four assistants are deputed by Agents to control the Junior Artistes, these Agent’s assistants would also give instructions to me, that I am here to talk to Junior Artistes and should not disturb the other film crew members. They would give me a chair at the place assigned to the Junior Artistes on the set, and all my interaction was restricted to that place during the working hour.

I must say watching a film shooting is the most boring and tiring job and since Junior Artistes were usually called after the lead artistes shots, which would most often be at the fag-end of the day, I too had to wait all day to see them work. I must confess that day-long sitting and watching film shooting was the most difficult part of data collection. But it actually helped me in understanding what ‘waiting’ meant for Junior Artistes, and the stress involved in it; without this experience, I might have overlooked their regular comment on ‘waiting’. Among the screen artistes, Junior Artistes are the first to come to the set and the last to leave the work place.
I would interact with the artistes on the film set during their breaks and most often the conversation would be interrupted due to unavoidable work requirement and as they are a mobile work force it was also difficult to continue the interaction as the chance of meeting the same artistes the next day was unlikely; this was the case especially in Mumbai, where the scale of production is large. And, it was sometimes difficult to record the focus group interaction or interview because of the noise at the shooting place.

I have spent considerable time observing and interacting with the artistes at the Union office. Their working hours are odd; it is either early in the morning or late evening, which is the same across all the four film industries studied. They would assemble as early as 5 am in the morning and 6 pm in the evening anticipating work or to get their work order, and most often those who did get any work would hang out at the Union office and these were the people who were available for having a conversation.

Observational research does not intervene in the activities of the people being studied (Alder & Alder, 2000), and provides rich, detailed descriptions about the unknown or the little known. Observing Junior Artistes at shooting set, union office and at their home - helped me to understand and interpret their everyday life and work through their lens; understand the links of the hierarchical division of labour in the industry – Junior Artistes’ relationship with agents; differential nature of work assignment and wages; the way they are treated and their status within the industry and the significance of having experienced Junior Artistes and new comers, etc. In understanding all these, ‘observation’ has been an important source of information.

**Archival/Library visit**

Lack of archival evidence has resulted in few critical explorations of the subject. For material collection I visited the following libraries: NFAI, RML, CSCS, CSDS, HCU, OU, OUCIP, EFLU, JNU libraries, NML, VV Giri Labour Institute, Anveshi (Hyderabad), National Archives (Delhi), FTII library, Madras Film Institute and Tamil Nadu State Archives.
Film workers Federations, Film Chambers and Union offices souvenir volumes and directories have been insightful to understand the organizational structure of the film industry.

**Gender of the researcher**

As a Social science researcher, while undertaking fieldwork, I experienced emotional difficulties in relating my own personal culture to the field culture. In order to make the behind-the-scenes of the ethnography more apparent, I am writing these gendered personal accounts of the trials and tribulations on the fieldwork experiences. What is my role as a female researcher and how does my gendered perspective affect my enquiry and outcomes of the research?

My petite appearance, attire (usually I was dressed in jeans pant, T-Shirt or kurtha and jacket), with a backpack, camera and recorder, my female gender, age, belief system, educational background, ethnic identity and class came under constant scrutiny on field. Multiple visits to the Unions and shooting place made me familiar with female artistes and like me, they were equally curious to know about my work and personal life.

On the field, though I introduced myself as a doctoral student there were several assumed identifies. At the stunt Union in Chennai, they thought I was a spy from Hyderabad stunt Union; some thought I was an aspiring Junior Artiste; because I was using a camera, recorder and taking notes, most often I was mistaken for a newspaper/TV reporter. Usually women were reluctant to speak even after being introduced by their colleagues because of the sensational media reports, such as the following:

Police arrest three women for running sex racket involving Junior Artistes of Bollywood from Mumbai's Mira Road…the Kashmira Police and Anti-Human Trafficking Cell arrested three women for operating a high-profile sex racket in Mira Road, Mumbai. One of them has been allegedly supplying Junior Artistes in Bollywood. Reports say that eight junior female artistes have also been detained (Mid day, 15 September 2014).
Research has documented the gross underrepresentation of women at various levels of work. It has been argued that intertwined sexist, patriarchal and phallocentric knowledge's and practices in workplace produce various forms of discrimination, inequality, oppression and marginalization. Women on field share the feeling of being invisible and retreating to the margins so as to avoid victimization and discrimination. Others have pointed to the tension between the ‘tenure clock’ and ‘biological clock’ as a source of anxiety. However, experiences of women are not identical.

I started my research endeavour with field trips to the film workers’ union and shooting place. Though I went prepared for embarrassing and disappointing situations, without first-hand field experience, I must confess I was psychologically unprepared for the challenges embedded in ethnography, until I actually began encountering problems in the field.

Usually, women are said to be more comfortable, but in the patriarchal and patron-client set-up, the women had to seek permission from their male colleagues to interact. At the Union office, it was male artistes who spoke, and Union leaders were usually men, and even the few women who were in the committee also asked for consent from their male colleagues to interact; even at the shooting place, female Junior Artistes spoke, only if the agent permitted. However unlike other places, in Chennai, women were part of the committee and seemed more assertive in claiming their work rights; but here too they took permission to interact.

In Mumbai though they had a separate Association, women were reluctant to speak because of the biased coverage in media, and also they functioned with a similar patriarchal attitude. May be because of my gender, though they were reluctant to share any information I was allowed to stay at the office and observe them play cards or gossip.

According to few sources, which needs more verification, the reason for reluctance among the Union leaders, was due to the corruption, nepotism and commission they would get from the agents, and were worried being questioned by an outsider on their activities. The women leaders would tell me in stern words, “Once I have said no, it means no, you can speak to whomever you want”; the tone would be so severe that the rest of the members would also refuse to speak.
Since these women were not willing to interact. I was unable to document as to what circumstances and forces had driven them to become Junior Artistes. However, to this day I still vividly remember these field trip encounters. I treasured this fieldwork experience and believed that these casual conversations that occurred in the field truly reflected the hearts and minds of these female artistes; on knowing that I am documenting the lives of Junior Artistes, some of their attitudes towards me changed accordingly from silence to sharing.

Timing:

How I wish nights were safer for women! Lot of shootings happen at night and my own fear of safety, transportation and also Junior Artistes Agents’ reluctance to inform me about night shooting, and even when they rarely did I was not prepared, was one of my self-imposed restrictions, which also turned out to be my limitation.

Film industry personnel were also not interested to talk to a researcher from an Indian University and most often I was asked – are you from a foreign University before giving appointment, and once they got to know I am from an Indian university they were usually reluctant to give appointment and would share very little information. Their perceptions about me did create a more awkward social space between me and them. Instead of actively engaging in personal interactions or substantial conversations with them, I mainly recorded the activities I observed, and the spontaneous conversations I overheard during my field trips to shooting location.

In the film industry, the significance of kinship and the role of nepotism are historically recorded. This study also documents the importance of existing personal and social resources, prior experience, having mentors and role models etc., in the negotiation of inequality and discrimination. I document the narratives of both men and women who are the first as well as second generation in their families to work in the film industry. These first-generation women are therefore least likely to have access to social and cultural resources and prior experiences that could have rendered the space more hospitable for the marginalised. Some of experiences on the field were daunting and unsettling. Understanding the social capital of the Junior Artistes in the industry was one of the objectives of the study. The unique context of the lives of these artistes demands a re-definition of the conventional constructs, to uncover
unheard stories of troubled lives, so as to prevent a perpetuation of the stereotyping, stigmatization, and marginalization they face on a day-to-day basis. Many ethnographers, predominantly feminists, have also written about how the researcher’s gender informs the way subjects of a study participate and interpret the field they are studying. There are also significant studies done on the role of gender in the film industry.

Contemplating on some of the field encounters, I did think on what motivated these male and female artistes to share their lives stories to a complete stranger. I do acknowledge the accounts as partial, yet felt they were valuable in uncovering the complex ways in which women and men make sense of their gendered lives. In representing and constructing the lives of Junior Artistes, like feminist ethnographers I did try to move beyond the dichotomies of victimhood or agency.

With all the problems in the gender-segregated settings, as a female researcher I was able to form fruitful relations with women group members and develop fuller understandings of women's experiences. Secondly in the male dominated set-up, I was seen as less authoritative and also faced less opposition because the research did not appear particularly threatening. Of course, dealing with sexuality, in presenting self and negotiating other’s interpretations on field was a challenging issue.

The ethnographic method has been time consuming; like most ethnographers I too had difficulty leaving the field. Still, with all the confusions around in deciding when ‘sufficient’ data has been collected, I would like to disagree with what David Fetterman calls the law of diminishing returns. “The law of diminishing returns can determine that it is time for the ethnographer to leave the field. When the same specific pattern of behaviour emerges over and over again, the fieldworker should move on to a new topic for observation and detailed exploration (Fetterman 9). Because the research area that I have chosen has been less tampered or less explored, the naivety that the field brings-in makes any enthusiastic researcher reluctant to leave the field; in my experience every field trip has been productive, with the thought that there is ‘so much to know’ and ‘so much to say.’ But, unlike Fetterman’s statement, it’s not the repetition of pattern on field but the novelty the field demands to leave the field to return again with renewed questions that emerges from the collected data.
This labour-intensive ethnographic work has paid off with rich and informative data. At the end of the data collection process, I sorted through my entire observational and field notes and transcribed interviews in an attempt to narrate the story of Junior Artistes, through their lens. However, due ethical dilemmas, I could not include some of my field encounters. While collecting the material has been difficult, the decision as to what to include and what to leave out has been equally challenging. Over the five long years that I have been working on the subject, I have interviewed and interacted with several Junior Artistes, Agents, Stuntmen and other film industry related personnel; this helped me in having a comprehensive overview of the social world of Indian film industry and the role of Junior Artistes within this social structure.

I have learnt to interpret, translate, and represent film workers’ realities through what Marcus and Fischer call “engaged relativism” (1986; 166). Engagement is merely a tool of representation. Without romanticizing or idealizing the reality, I have tried to remain above the political implications of his or her engagement while representing the multiple possibilities and perspectives of Junior Artistes work culture, challenging the hegemony and homogenization of such work culture.

CHAPTERISATION

CHAPTER 1 - SPOTLIGHT ON THE BACKGROUND: SELF REPRESENTATION OF JUNIOR ARTISTES

Chapter 1 is an attempt to write the social history of the Indian film industry. The Indian film history has been chronicled from various perspectives but rarely from the vantage point of the film labour, working at the lower strata of film industry, and this chapter is an attempt towards filling that void.

The spotlight here is shifted onto the lives and experiences of the ordinary people of the film industry, who are both invisibilized and silenced. Unlike the traditional methods of historical hermeneutics, I adopt an analytical approach, as I want to historicize the ordinary people, the structures and trends that have shaped their art and lives in the film industry, thus resurrecting what they said and did. The life histories
of Junior Artistes illustrate the role of aspiration, kinship, and nepotism in the lives of these marginal screen artistes. With the film production practices, constantly evolving, the self narratives reveal how the Junior Artistes are negotiating with these technical changes, along with the exigencies of region, class, caste and gender dynamics at work place. This chapter is constructed largely in and through the narratives and oral recounting of the Junior Artistes, shared with me in the interviews and conversations conducted between 2010 and 2015. Hence here I share the life histories of six Junior Artistes, with whom I did an in-depth and longitudinal interview; the life histories of these artistes have been documented over years, in multiple sittings. These narratives not just help in rewriting the history of Indian film industry, but also redraws our attention to some of the major developments in the film industry, such as: the impact on film labour prior to and after the rise of language-based film industries in the decades after the Linguistic Reorganization of the States; the emergence of freelance system, the unionization and political mobilization of film workers; stardom and its influence on the film labour.

CHAPTER 2 - JUNIOR ARTISTES AND FILM STARS: UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE SCREEN WORKER

Chapter 2 seeks to understand the social world of film making and its construction of star persona through the lens of Junior Artistes - who are usually blurred in the long shots and their close-up shots are rarely noticed by the audience. The aim of the chapter is twofold - first is to understand key screen roles and the screen representation of Junior Artistes; second to understand the significance of Junior Artistes in the construction of the star. The Chapter is divided into four sections – the first section presents the key screen roles of Junior Artistes; the second section examines the film credits and Junior Artistes’ interpretation of their screen roles, the third section discusses the star/stardom’s relationship with Junior Artistes and the fourth section deals with films on Junior Artistes. To unpack the category of screen worker and to understand the aesthetic of positioning the Star and the Junior Artistes in the frame, I am using film as text and interviews with Junior Artistes to understand their interpretation of their role and stardom.

CHAPTER 3 - AGENTS AND ARTISTES: UNIONISATION OF CINE WORKERS
Chapter 3 traces the unionisation of Junior Artistes - the casual daily wage earning cine-workers in Indian film industry. Therefore I approach this chapter using the political economy perspective with emphasis on social change and history, providing a theoretical framework for addressing structural and institutional issues, within which Junior Artistes’ labour issues are located. The chapter is divided into three main section – a brief introduction to unionisation of Indian film labour; emergence of film language based unionisation of film workers in the decades after the Linguistic Reorganization of States; unionisation of Junior Artistes and Junior Artistes Agents. The study on unionisation of Junior Artistes is restricted to four Indian film industries - Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Hindi. Chennai and Mumbai have been centres of film production from silent era; hence the unionisation of film workers there also started as early as in 1950s whereas unionisation of film workers in Telugu and Kannada film industry started only in the mid 1980s, after the language industries shifted to their respective language states. Therefore Chennai and Mumbai model of unionisation of film workers has a significant influence on other regional film industries like Telugu and Kannada. Also, since each of them has a varied film market, organisation of film workers in each of the region has its distinctive characteristics. To bring out the parallel and distinctive characteristic of each of the film workers’ Union this section on Unionisation of Junior Artistes and Junior Artistes Agent will be presented region wise.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES FROM EVERYDAY WORKLIFE: JUNIOR ARTISTES ON FILM SET

Chapter 4 is an attempt to narrate on-the-ground analysis of the everyday life of Junior Artistes on film set exploring Indian film production culture. The Chapter highlights the prevailing work condition of the film industry drawing our attention to the status of daily wage earning casual work force like the Junior Artistes both in the society as well as in the social world of the cinema. I am using fictional ethnography approach, telling the stories of Junior Artistes’ work life from my narratorial
perspective - a convenient approach, to empathetically relate the lived experiences of Junior Artistes, which makes it both engaging and effective. Here the ethnographic fiction aims to craft conventional ethnographic materials - interviews, non-participant observation, field notes, photographs - into a compelling narrative. In the Concluding chapter I discuss the findings and observations of this research endeavour which is an attempt to foreground the social world of the invisible background artistes of the Indian film industry.