CHAPTER V

COLONIAL CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL VALUE SYSTEM: DISCOURSE ON MORALITY, SOCIAL CUSTOMS, VALUE SYSTEM, PATRIARCHY AND GENDER
The colonial conquest is not only an act of political *subordination* and economic exploitation of the colonised society but also a complex way of creating new convictions through colonial ideology and thus define the newly converted ambit of colonial culture. Colonial cultural processes also create a *stratum* of intellectual community hegemonized by colonial ideology and mentality. As Antonio Gramsci has rightly pointed out, "that culture is a mental self discipline' and culture is always organised to interpret 'a need': a need which could be of the ruling class or any subordinated social group or a subordinate society."¹ However, the ruling class, in any society, more so in a colonial society does not define the whole of culture, though, it tries to. In this situation, as one critic put it, "It is the task of oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded."² In this sense, the continual remodelling of cultural processes in the indigenous society, under the impact of contact with British/European traditions, should be treated as a typical strategy of colonised and dominated peoples' way of reclaiming their cultural space and autonomy. It is within this

context we must locate the process of Telugu intellectuals' act of organising culture so as to "interpret a need" of their people.

Right from 19th century, the intellectuals in Andhra have reflected on and worked for creating a new conception of the world. The boundaries of art under colonialism were very much conditioned by this intellectual perception of the new liberated world, i.e., the liberation from cultural yoke of colonialism. While literature and theatre were the early vehicles of the spread of new nationalist ideas and cultural regeneration, from 1930s the medium of cinema took their place. In 1930s and 1940s several Talugu movies were produced articulating new perceptions on morality, social customs, value system, patriarchy and gender. The most dramatic aspect of the cultural and ideological mediation of cinema was the conflict between the colonial culture and traditional value system, for the nationalist intelligentsia was neither prepared totally to subordinate themselves to colonial culture and western modernity nor were they willing totally to reject the indigenous traditional value system. In this chapter, we propose to study this cultural conflict as reflected in Vandemataram, (1939); Malli Pelli, (1939); Varavikrayam, (1939); Sumangali, (1940); Illalu, (1940); Devata, (1941); Pantulamma (1943) and Swarga Seema (1945).¹

¹For particulars of these films, see Appendix VI and Chapter III.
The issue of dowry was taken up in the films *Vajademataram* and *Varavikrayam*. The woes of daughter-in-law in a joint family were depicted in *Vandemataram*. Unemployment issue also was touched upon in *Vandemataram*. In the Hindu families, widowhood is a curse upon women. Widow marriage was the central theme of *Malli Pelli*. *Pativratya dharma* is an unquestioned devotion to one's husband. This theme is focused in *Grihalakshmi*, *Illalu* and *Devata*. The importance of turmeric and saffron powder (*Pasupu Kumkum*) and karma theory were dealt with in *Sumangali*. The body of a woman is considered to be the property of that man who first had sexual relationship with her. *Thali* or *mangalasutram* is the central relationship which gives social identity to a wife. *Pre-marital* sex and un-wed motherhood is a curse. Tolerance is the only solution for all family problems of a woman. It is with this virtue of tolerance, woman makes her life happy at the end. *Devata* is with this theme. Sacrifice, austerity and self deprivation are accepted in the Indian ethos as noble values. Woman's purity, faith and devotion to her husband are considered to be high values of Indian society. All these values are dealt with in the cinema *Swarga Seema*.

*Vandemataram* is not a political film as is suggested by its name. It does not represent India's freedom struggle. The issues found in this film are (a) dowry, (b) unemployment, and © the daughter-in-law's hardships in a joint family.
(a) Dowry!

A century ago, the predominant social practice used to be offering price to bride, i.e., Kanyasulkam. In this system, the bridegroom offers a price and buys bride. Perhaps the logic of commodity could be seen in this practice. But one cannot see any such logic behind varavikrayam or selling of bridegroom.

Gradually, the system has grown to such a proportion that taking dowry is being viewed as a prestige. The more dowry one takes the higher his social status will be. The bridegroom does not think about his belittling image and society too legitimizes this and thus the hegemony of males continue over females.

The third problem touched upon in Vandemataram is daughters-in-law's difficulties in joint families. This problem is closely linked with the first one. The dowry creates certain complexes. Daughter-in-law who comes with dowry is a cause of inferiority complex of mother-in-law. She thinks her authority over the family receives a set back and the son's love towards her diminishes. There is generation gap too. Closely on her heels, her daughter too misbelieves the new girl. Here, the problem being not generation gap but identity crisis. If a bride who does not bring sufficient dowry or if she could not fulfil the agreed amount her life in the in-law's house becomes miserable. Reverse is the situation in some cases where daughter-in-law with fabulous dowry wields head strong
behaviour, again a cause for differences between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and her daughters.

Thus one should view the socio-economic factors behind this problem i.e. daughter-in-law's difficulties in joint family living. For daughter-in-law's woes mothers-in-law are not responsible. The economic inequalities in the society are solely responsible. In patriarchal system mother-in-law is the second boss of the family. That is why mothers-in-law, forgetting about their probation as daughters-in-law, try to wield power now unmindful of their past.

In a society with full of feudal values, the ultimate goal of a girl is marriage rather than importance to self respect. Reverence to God, king, feudal lord and husband are some of the important characteristics of feudal society. To get their girls married parents offer dowry and also take dowry for their boys. If a father fails to get his daughter married at the appropriate time, it is considered as his inefficiency. When such perceptions are prevailing, there cannot be an end to this evil.

Now, coming to the second problem, namely, unemployment, it is so deep rooted. It is a legacy of the economic policies of the colonial rule. The colonial system of education results in unemployment to many. A great bane of our society is not giving importance to dignity of labour. In our social hierarchy Sudras are
meant for manual labour. Resting of few upon the labour of many is the system of the day. With the advent of the colonial rule, attempts at the introduction of capitalist mode of production started. Nevertheless the roots of society continued to be in the feudal mode (of production). Besides this change, the doctrine of karma rules over the psyche of Indians. This is another dominant ideology which comes in the way of the notion of dignity of labour. The general belief is that but for karma or past life, human beings need not do menial work. If one enjoys life in this world that is because of the credit of punya in his/her balance sheet of previous life. The solution to unemployment problem in this film is sought within this frame work. The hero's life in this film took a dramatic turn by winning Rs.5,00,000 in a Derby lottery. It's a melodramatic twist given to the unemployment problem by the director B.N. Reddy. It looks unnatural. Solution should have been found by making hero to do agriculture or any constructive work.\(^4\)

**Vandemataram** is the maiden film of Vauhini Pictures Limited of B.N. Reddy. Its phenomenal success brought both name and fame to B.N. Reddy and hero V. Nagaiah. For Nagaiah too, it is the first picture as hero. Those were the days of mythologica s. B.N. Reddy took the risk of producing social film like **Vandemataram**.

‘Criticism of the film **Vandemataram** in *Gribalakshmi* [a woman's journal in Telugu] [Monthly], May 1939, Madras, p.218.
The title of the film aroused some suspicion. Even the British censoring officers had to screen the film closely. In order to show that there was no political intention he gave the title *Vandemataram* or *Mangalasutram* making it clear that the film was a family drama and not a patriotic tract.

B.N. Reddy ran into another problem with censors. In a well-depicted scene, Nagaiah, in a moment of frustration and rage, throws the B.A. degree scroll and tramples upon it. S.E. Ranganathan, then a prominent educationist and later Sir Samuel Ranganathan, Indian High Commissioner in England, a member of film censor Board, objected to this sequence and recommended its deletion. He felt that B.N. Reddy had deliberately insulted University education. B.N. Reddy had to argue at length to convince him that he had only shown a person's reaction in such circumstances. Somewhat reluctantly, B.N. Reddy recalled decades later, Ranganathan yielded.

In Vandemataram, veteran stars like Nagaiah, Kanchanamala, Kalyani, Lingamurthy, Seshamamba and others acted. The hero, Raghu, showed remarkable determination in tying *thali* against the wish of parents. They wanted him not to tie *thali* because the agreed upon

---


6 Ibid., p. 22.
dowry amount was not fully paid. Janaki had to face the distrust of mother-in-law as her father failed to pay full amount of dowry. Janaki showed exceptional restraint. She is the personification of sati or pativrata. When Janaki and her child were thrown out of house, by her mother-in-law, she never lost confidence. She shifts to the town where she makes her living by selling garlands. She rook up life positively.

Vandemataram was based on an unpublished Telugu novel Mangalasutram, written by B.N. Reddy before he came to the movies. The story was built around an actual incident and agriculturalist family in his native district in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The film was a success and enjoyed silver jubilee runs in many centres, including some non-Telugu speaking towns.

Critics lavished praise and singled out B.N. Reddy as a film maker destined to make history, a promise which was amply fulfilled soon.

In Vandemataram, the director created two minor characters who attained immortality. One is city bred cook Raja who cheats the hero. He speaks a mixture of Tamil and Telugu. He crosses swords

and words with the hero and one such expression, 'Poda Gongura,' attained wide currency and has since passed into colloquial Tamil as an euphemism for Andhras.\(^9\)

The other character is a rustic, dim witted, stage struck man who marries the hero's sister. Once he gets on to the roof, sets fire to it and goes into ecstasy over his realistic production of \textit{Lanka Dahan}. Eccentric sons-in-law began to be called Vandematharam \textit{Allullu} in Andhra.

Music played a significant role in all B.N. Reddy's films. Vandematharam was no exception.\(^10\) He had a fine ear for music, both Hindustani, and Carnatic songs like 'O....O Muralee', 'Poolo poolo', 'Belathanamu' and 'Talliniminchina' became popular hits.

\textit{Widow Marriage:}

The colonial conquest underlined the weaknesses of the traditional order and the need for reform and regeneration of its

\(^9\)Gongura\ is that iron-rich leaf vegetable Andhras love to eat day in and day out as a hot chutney mixed with ghee.

\(^{10}\)For the film, Vandemataram, the Lyrics were by Samudrala Raghavacharya, while Music was by Chittoor V. Nagaiah and Sound Recording by A.K. Sekhar. These three people played a significant role for the success of B.N. Reddy's other films, Sumangali, De vat a and Swargaseema.
institutions. Colonial hegemonisation tended to destroy the tradition itself. A cultural-ideological struggle ensued on two fronts simultaneously: against the ideological basis of the traditional order as well as against the colonial hegemonisation.\textsuperscript{11}

In the development of cultural ideological struggles the formation of a community of intellectuals distinct from the intelligentsia, cutting across regional, religious and caste barriers was of crucial importance. The early formation of intellectual community was around socio-cultural organisation and voluntary associations which reflected the initial intellectual ferment in colonial India.\textsuperscript{12}

Although widow marriage was not organised on an all India basis, the debate about it did assume an all India character. The discussion on widow remarriage comprehended the fundamental question of women’s emancipation and the methods to be adopted to achieve it. Although the movement was organised on regional and caste lines,\textsuperscript{13} the problem was perceived as common to all the


\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}The problem of widow remarriages, like that of infant marriages was not universal. It was mainly confined to the upper castes in society. We have discussed social reform in Chapter I.
Hindus. Naturally the intellectuals in various Presidencies borrowed arguments and counter arguments from each other in articulating a common discourse on women's issues. The debate on widow marriage also indicated an attempt to construct a reformed Hindu community at the national plane, drawing on the authority of common scriptures. Widow marriage was seen a part of the general issues related to the emancipation of women. The reformers emphasized the importance of female education, for they saw it as a suitable instrument of empowering women.

The intellectual community was the vehicle of the cultural-ideological struggle as well as the vanguard of the national liberation struggle. Although the intellectuals did not share common views on many social and cultural issues, their ideological premises were remarkably similar. The intellectual community in colonial India functioned within the parameters of bourgeois liberal ideology.

"The bourgeois-liberal premises," argues K.N. Panikkar, "had no direct correlation with the nature of the formative influences. Neither were the English-educated the exclusive carriers of this ideology; the vernacular-educated did not fall outside the pale of

\(^{14}\) On marriage of Hindu widows, see the celebrated treatise of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, \textit{Marriage of Hindu Widows} (Summary of Vidyasagar's Bengali Tradets in English), Calcutta, 1976.
its influence. The different strategies for social change, like ‘reform’ and ‘revival’, were also enclosed within the same ideological spectrum. Thus, a ‘reformist’ Rammohun Roy and a ‘conservative’ Radhakanta Deb, or a rationalist Akshay Kumar Dutt and a ‘revivalist’ Dayananda Saraswati, or an English-educated Ranade and a vernacular-educated Narayana Guru, had broad areas of agreement over several issues of ideological and structural transformation of society. This was because they were all ideologues of a developing bourgeois order and their social and political premises were liberal-democratic. In course of time, the liberal intelligentsia played an active role in the reproduction of bourgeois ideology and its eventual hegemony."¹⁵ The colonial cultural hegemonisation of which acculturation was an inevitable component tended to be denigrative of indigenous culture.¹⁶

The cultural defence implicit in religious response embraced almost all spheres of culture during the course of the 19th century, particularly during its later half when the consequences


of colonial cultural intrusion were more intensely felt. It was expressed in two ways: first, the creation of an alternative to colonial cultural practices and, second, the revitalisation of traditional institutions.\textsuperscript{17}

Social reform endeavours in Andhra were a part of the all India efforts and Kandukuri Veeresalingam was the first and foremost reformer in Andhra. One of the most glaring evils that beset the Andhra society in the 19th century was Kanyasulkam (bride price). Kanyasulkam produced, in its turn, evils such as infant marriages and cases of pre-mature widowhood.\textsuperscript{18} Child marriages and the consummation of the marriage at a very early age caused a number of problems—apart from early widowhood, stoppage of education of girls also. Premature consummation leads to early motherhood, weak progeny, maternal mortality, etc. The condition of a widow, mainly among the upper castes, was tragic. Among the upper castes, the widow's head was shaved and all ornaments taken off, the unfortunate woman was deprived of all pleasures of life. She was not even allowed to participate in family ceremonies as her presence was thought to bring misfortune.\textsuperscript{19} She became often an

\textsuperscript{17}This process is shown by K.N. Panikkar, \textit{Culture, Ideology, Hegemony}, \textit{Op. cit.}, pp.1-33.

\textsuperscript{18}V. Ramakrishna, \textit{Social Reform in Andhra 1848-1919}, New Delhi, 1983, p.11.

\textsuperscript{19}Veeresalingam gave a vivid description of the condition of widows in his novel \textit{Rajasekhara Charitramu}. A widow was treated as
object of contempt and maltreatment. This miserable condition drove some of them to prefer death to much tortuous existence; many committed sahagamana (self-immolation). Sometimes the birth of illegitimate children led to infanticide. Among the upper castes widow remarriages were almost absent. Veeresalingam, quoting Shastras, declared that infant marriages were not justified. Writing in 1884, he stated that 80 percent of the girls married quite early became widows. Veeresalingam wrote a satire Brahmavivahamu vividly portraying the evils of infant marriages. This social comedy popularly known as Peddayyagari Pelli (wedding of an old man) was staged several times. Veeresalingam quoting mainly from the Smritis stated that the cruel practice of enforced widowhood "is found nowhere in the world except in our country. Even in our country it is confined to the Hindus, and among them only to the three upper castes." The first widow remarriage was celebrated on 11 December 1881 and by 1905 the total number of widow remarriages performed was 63. In Andhra the Widow remarriage movement became fairly widespread in the towns. Besides

a maid servant in her parental home and her appearance was so detested that the word widow became a highly abusive term. See Akkiraju Ramapathirao [ed] Veeresalingam Rachanalu [Telugu], Vol.3, Navalalu, Hyderabad, 1985.

20 Ibid., p.11.
21 Ibid., p.104.
22 Ibid., p.114.
23 Ibid., p.123.
Rajahmundry, the headquarters of Veeresalingam, Guntur, Bellary, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Bobbili, Machilipatnam, Berhampur and Kakinada. It was a successful campaign against orthodoxy. It sanctified the individual revolt against traditions and made men more rational in their outlook and independent in action. Child marriages were thus a national malady and all, irrespective of caste colour, creed or religion, more or less suffered from it. The educated public started an intense campaign against early marriages. Thanks to the indigenous rationalist forces who worked for eradication of child marriages.

Their efforts led to the passing of Child Marriages Restraint Act, popularly known as Sarada Act in 1929 which fixed the marriageable age of girls at 14 and above and of boys at 18 and above.24 Though the Act was welcomed in Andhra by the provincial conferences of women and others, child marriages in fact, increased temporarily as parents feared its rigorous implementation. Ultimately the legislative protection, growth of education, changing public opinion growing urbanisation, economic pressures, etc., caused the slow continuance of child marriages among the educated and in the urban centres. However, in the rural areas the impact of these acts and the efforts of leaders was very limited.

The film, *Malli Pelli* was produced in this historical background. Weber says that the origins of *patriarchalism* are to be found in the master's authority over his household.\(^{25}\) The patriarch wields his power without legal restraints and unencumbered by formal rules. All that really circumscribes his authority over his subjects is the respect for sacred custom. Any master who repeatedly violated the boundaries etched by tradition would risk forfeiting his legitimacy. Patriarchs are willing to abide by custom but not conform to laws.

Janardhana Rao in *Malli Pelli* is a practical example to this patriarchal ideology. He is a reputed lawyer. In order to escape from Sarada Act, he conducts marriage of his only daughter, Lalitha when she was six years old. Unfortunately she becomes a widow in her very young age. Janardhana Rao is a tradition bound man. His blind faith in traditions and his orthodox nature were exploited by one Kaliyugananda Swamy, a fake sanyasi. He is a tyrannical husband. He never feels for the sorry state of her daughter's life. He thinks that it is the fate of Lalitha but not a consequence of his misdeed of marrying her as a child. He wishes that her fate might be better in the life if she takes the *prasadam* of Kaliyugananda Swamy. Even though the dominant customs are irrational they fear to violate them lest they loose legitimacy.

The father and aunt's characters express this anguish for fear of societal norms. Lalitha's mother blames her fate, for she has to witness the disgrace meted out to widow Lalitha.

The sister of Sundar Rao, the hero in the picture, in one occasion makes Lalitha to wear coloured dress, grooms her hair and decorate with flowers and, on the insistence of Sundar Rao, applies saffron powder on her forehead in order to show how beautiful she is. Dumb found Sundar praises the beauty of Lalitha and ridicules the customs of the society which robbed away the happiness of Lalitha. Exactly on this comment, Ramudu the servant of Jagannadha Rao, reacted by saying that Brahmins were responsible for these things. He gives clarification by saying that seventy year old Brahmin Sabhapathi is going to marry a teenaged girl. This is his fourth marriage. Ramudu belongs to fourth caste and the evils of child marriage, taboos of widowhood, etc., are strange to him. Fourth caste was not Sanskritized yet and hence these problems of Brahminical families are beyond his understanding. Maru Manuvu, i.e., remarriage of woman is not new to the fourth castes and hence there will be no forced widowhood. Similarly caste customs are not very rigid. They are not hypocritical.

The varied forms of patriarchal system and the influence of tradition on social life were exposed through a series of events and encounters within the main story of the movie, Malli Pelli.
Religion and tradition were repeatedly used by the orthodox brahmins to legitimize the customs like female child marriage and enforcement of widowhood.

Through the encounter between the marriage party of seventy year old Brahmin Sabhpathi and the educated enlightened youth in the village, a powerful critique of female child marriage was offered. We reproduce this encounter in the movie:

It is a big street in that village. Sundara Rao, Venkata Rao and other friends are coming from one side. Slowly coming from the opposite direction are Brahmin Vakil [Janardhana Rao] Kondu Bhattu [Sabhpathi] and the other Sanatanist group.

"There they are coming! Accompanied by the Bride-groom .... But, why that Bride-groom is shaking his head like that .... Is he saying I don't want to marry?" said Sundaram.

"Not that. Yamadharma Raju came calling, but he is shaking his head saying 'I have to marry, no I will not come ... no I will not come' ..." replied Venkata Rao. The group of youth laughed aloud.

In the course of this encounter, Janardhana Rao loses his temper for mocking the marriage and tradition. He scolds Venkata Rao, his nephew.

"Oh! .... By learning few butler vocabulary [traditionalists' pun for English educated] you are roaming as social reformers. What is our religion, what is our tradition, what is our Sanatana dharama? ...." saying so Janardhana Rao looked back at his group.

"What a pity! Sanatana dharma! Marrying children with old rascals and cutting their throats, is it the Sanatana dharma?

26 This is our English translation of Telugu script published in Vijayachitra, Feb. 1978, pp.64-5.
... what a Sanatana dharma! Your faces are really looking Sanatana [pun for traditionalists], whatever is the position of dharma!" retorted Sundaram looking at his group.

The critique of tradition and religion by the youth is not a total negation of Hinduism, but the degeneration in it.

In one scene, lamenting on the harassment meted out to the widow Lalitha, Venkata Rao asks Sundara Rao, hero, "In any case, where is the tradition of harassing misfortunate widows in our religion?" The hero replied "Oh! ... The actual religion is relegated to the background. What we are left with are hypocrites like your uncle [Janardhana Rao], this 1939 type Avadhanulu and Venkamma [another widow] type round heads [clean shaven widow, who strongly adhere to Sanatana dharma]. The religion blessed by these people is the religion for us! Their offerings [cooked food and sacred water given by the priest after offering to the God] are our tickets to Heaven!"27

The operation of patriarchal system, the exploitation of gender and the sexual attitude towards female is also sought to be exposed. The attempt to molest Kamala, the sister of the hero Sundara Rao by Janardhana Rao is shown as the operation of patriarchal system which wields power without any restraints. He thinks that as he fixed her brother in a job, she fears his

27Ibid., December 1977, p.33 [translated from Telugu].
authority and yields to his sexual desires. Kamala resists the sexual pass at her. Yet Kamala pleads her brother to forget what had happened fearing harm to his job. In the spur of the anger Sundar Rao however injures Janardhana Rao and eventually lands into police station. He was imprisoned for six months.

How repressive a patriarch in a family could be, if noticed a threat to his power, is shown in a moving encounter. Janardha Rao loses temper when his authority started weakening under the symptoms of rebelliousness seen in his wife's behaviour and daughter Lalitha's outlook. For instance, on seeing Kandukuri Veeresalingam's book and a photo of Sundar Rao in the pages of the book in the room of Lalitha he gets mad at her. His anger knew no bounds, for he was opposed to the widow marriage movement and other reform activities of Veeresalingam.

In a patriarchal family, it is not only the female but also male who is sought to be subordinated. The mechanisms of male subordination is through property relations in family. This is shown in another event. One Ramajogi gives shelter to Kamala when Sundar Rao was in jail. Venkat Rao, the would be husband of Kamala expresses his inability to give shelter to her, as he is not economically independent. The poor people like Ramajogi are better than millionaires, for 'they have at least mercy,' he says.
Whenever female rebelliousness takes the form of threatening, the most brutal method of the suppression, adopted by the traditionalists, be it male of female, is through scandalising the virtue of woman. The same strategy is adopted in the case of widow, Lalitha. Rumour spreads that Lalitha is pregnant. Brahmin patriarchs in the name of abiding by customs decide to blackmail Janardhan Rao with the threat of boycotting him socially. However, the fake Swamy comes to the rescue by advising him to tonsure his widow daughter as a punishment. The fake Swamy even argues that "Veedas and Sasthras are advocating that freedom for women is not useful."

Lalitha on hearing this, particularly the suggestion of her tonsuring, becomes ferocious and confronts emotionally. "What? You are going to tonsure? Forth marriage for Sabha Pathi, who is about to die! Have you thought about what would be her fate tomorrow! . . . I am getting furious. Is it not this way, thinking that Sarada Act is coming, you have married me off and cut my throat. Males can marry any number of times and also can commit atrocities. But marrying off the woman today and making her a widow tomorrow, is it not to make to serve the family like a slave? Why are not the girls like you? Do we not have aspirations like you have? I am not concerned with your restrictions and meaningless traditions. The marriage done to me was not a marriage at all. I am not a widow. I did not loose my chastity." The fake Swamy heckles at
Lalitha comparing her with Kunthi, the mother of Karna. She retorts calling him a cheat. Lalitha breaks down questioning the God. "Why did you give me this female life?" Her mother also weeps seeing the plight of her daughter.

Janardhana Rao with the evil advise of Swamy got Sundar Rao, the hero rearrested on a charge of theft of his wife's gold bangles after his release from Jail. In the court, Janardha Rao's wife prepares to give evidence defying the dictates of her husband. The citadel of patriarchal fort cracks. Janardhana Rao threw the last dice declaring his wife mad. But the Judge allows her to depose the evidence. As a consequence Sundar gets acquitted. Judge warns Jagannadha Rao for initiating the false case. Moreover the Soon Swamy was also arrested as he was not only a fake but an accused in a Bank fraud case. Sundar Rao prostrates on the feet of Subhadramma, the wife of Janardhana Rao. She says she did what was right. Nothing more than that. In turn she said she is grateful to him for having saved the life of Lalitha.

All through the picture Subhadramma believes in destiny (karma). But in the end she was prepared to defy the patriarchal authority of her husband. She even deposes in the court of law. Crossing the boundaries of Hindu home for a Brahmin house wife was

\[28\text{Ibid., June 1978, p.61 [translated from Telugu].}\]
indeed a revolutionary step. This is because, in her perception, Janardhana Rao lapsed into the hands of evil force Swamy, who has been poisoning the ears of Jagannadha Rao. He has become immoral and thereby loses his authority. Subhadramma knows that she herself has given bangles to the hero and so he is innocent. She has two tasks: one is to get the innocent released and the other is to get her husband liberated from the clutches of evil Swamy.

It is the patriarch, Jagannadha Rao who is shown violating the boundaries of idealised tradition and thereby forfeited his legitimacy in family. Subhadramma though appears to have questioned patriarchal authority by deposing against her husband actually shown as saving his honour by pleading before Judge that her husband is innocent.

The degeneration in traditional values and religion is shown through a fake sanyasi, Kaliyugananda Swamy, who sells the idea to the villagers that he is Lord Krishna's incarnation. Though he misbehaves with one religious minded widow, Venkayamma, the gullible villagers think that she is Radha. Swamy invokes Vedas to deny freedom to women.

The condition of contemporary degeneration of society is also seen in Ramajogi's tatvas [the simple poems with hidden meaning].
Ramajogi who is a beggar singing tatvas comes to the rescue of Kamala when her brother was in jail. To quote one of his tatvas,

Achara Matisayincha  
[Traditions come forefront]
Adarsa Mantarinche  
[Ideals died]
Adambarabu Minche  
[Vanity grew]
Ajanna Mavarinche  
[Stupidity occupied the place of wisdom]
Nirjivamayya Jati  
[nation becomes lifeless]
Swarthambu Lagglinche  
[Selfishness grew]
Dharmambu Tavalinche  
[End of Righteousness]
Tantralu Daparinche  
[Irreligion in Society]
Atyasa Lellahadase  
[Greediness grew]
Satyambu rupumase  
[Truth disappeared]
Sanghama urmatambu  
[continued sin].

Lalitha is the heroine of Malli Pelli played by Kanchanamala and had lived up to the mark as a young widow. Her acting skills ftade her a popular artist. The conflict between Lalitha and her father; between Lalitha and society, between Lalitha and superstitions were exquisitely displayed by Kanchanamala. Rumour spread that Lalitha became pregnant. She was ill treated by all. She met Sundar Rao in Jail. She was taken aback when even Sundar Rao suspects her. Disheartened Lalitha decides to commit suicide.

Translated into English by me.
in the process she falls and becomes unconscious. Hero admits her in hospital and saves her life.

Malli Pelli's hero is a man of progressive ideas. He criticises orthodoxy. He doubts the bonafide of Kaliyugananda Swamy. He pities Jagannadha Rao, who being educated falls prey to Swamy. Hero questions irrational religious beliefs of illiterate young widows. 'Hypocrites like Jagannadha Rao, fake Swamy and widows with shaven heads are order of the day,' hero says. He also says 'Hinduism is filled with superstitions and irrational traditions.' Hero admires the beauty of Lalitha. He tries to drive away the inferiority complex of Lalitha. Heroine is conscious of her chastity. She urges to honour her chastity. Then Sundar Rao says: "Do not misunderstand my love. I do not see your external beauty. I love your internal beauty. It is my duty to save your honour. I want to have legitimate family life with you." These words show the culture of Sundar Rao. He wants to revolt against the system. He tells Lalitha, "What is Society? You and I can marry. Society cannot boycott us. We both will boycott it. Let us prove that our marriage is an ideal event."

The deeper operation of patriarchal consciousness and the male attitude towards women and marriage is exposed through rather a strange and contradictory attitude of the hero. The rumour about heroine's pregnancy makes the hero behave like any other ordinary
man. It appears that the so called progressive hero loves Lalitha so long as she was chaste.

The movie narrative seems to have aimed at throwing a pertinent question at the audience: "how many young men were ready to marry widows with earlier conjugal experience?" In Malli Pelli, the heroine happens to be the only daughter of an advocate. This economic background too might have been the reason for hero's desire to marry her, as it is the hero is an unemployed graduate. A respectable Brahmin young man with sound financial position may not marry a destitute without property and who earlier led a family life. The widow remarriage movement therefore was like any other issue, linked with the traditional notions of chastity and virginity and the contemporary longing for material prosperity, even if it is acquired through a widow marriage.

The most significant sign posts in the movie Malli Pelli are the transformation of female consciousness and the attitude of the untouchable caste towards the whole issue of widows in society.

Varavikrayam

Varavikrayam is a film with message of social reform. The evil of dowry is focusses in this film.\(^{30}\) The film is relevant even today.

\(^{30}\)Ogirala Venkata Subba Rao, "Criticism on Varavikrayam," Andhra Patrika, 12 May 1939, p. 3.
Unlike in *Vandemataram*, the heroine of *Varavikrayam* demands that as she paid *varasulka* the bride groom should go to bride's house. *Sometime* there used to be *Kanyasulkam* (bride price) and for some other time *varavikrayam*. Both are social evils. In both systems male chauvinism continue.

In Indian society feudal values are so deep rooted that woman is considered a commodity over which male ownership is established. As long as private ownership of property continues, so long as this feudal ideology also continues. Ours is a feudal system. That is why whether it is *varakatna* or *kanyasulka*, husband's control over wife continues unabatedly. Traditions control our psyche.

Dyta Gopalam played the role of father of the girls in *Varavikrayam*. Kochcherlakota Satyanarayana acted as bridegroom. Kalindi character was played by Bhanumathi. The credit of introducing Bhanumati to film field goes to C.Pulliah. Pushpavalli played as Kamala.

*Sumangali*

The hardships of widowhood and that too, woes of a young widow are too many to describe. In *Sumangali*, these are vividly portrayed.

The ever green hero of Telugu films, Akkineni Nageswara Rao learnt the art of dialog delivery from Dyta Gopalam.

*Pushpavalli* is the mother of veteran Hindi film star Rekha.
Sumangali is a triangular love story aimed at social reform. Saraswathi is a child widow, whom the hero marries going against social norms and tradition. Parvathi, the second heroine who also lives in hero's house wishes to marry him. But later ends her life to make the way for her fiancee, who loves only Saraswathi. This character attracts the sympathy of society. "To oppose the dominant evil traditions of society the sacrifice of Parvathi is necessary at all?" Is the question of critics. Is there not any other way? Vauhini productions titled the film Nara Bali (Human Sacrifice) at first. They later on changed it but the sacrifice of Parvathi remains in the picture.

**Sumangali** begins with a dedication in English to `young Hindu unfortunates made to live a living death by a freak of fate, and the curse of society.' B.N. Reddy in his second film *Sumangali* takes up cudgels against Hindu society to bring home the evils of child widowhood. In the thirties of the present century, as already discussed, it was a serious problem and the position of such widows, prohibited from remarriage was miserable and **painful**.

Social reformers all over the country, especially Kandukuri Veeresalingam Panthulu, a leading Telugu writer and scholar fought hard for a change in social mores and attitudes. In fact the

---

writings and teachings of Veeresalingam Panthulu had inspired B.N. Reddy to make the movie.\textsuperscript{34} He even had a character called Panthulu in \textit{Sumangali} a kind hearted, elderly social reformer played by Nagaiah. B.N.Reddy had Nagaiah wearing a white silk Wig, specially imported from Paris. The hero of the hit film \textit{Vandemataram} was not exactly amused to do the minor role of a n old man in a white wig, even if imported, especially when he had to shave off some of his real hair in front of fit in the Paris made wig. However, his performance was remarkably impressive and prompted Baburao Patel, then making a mark in film journalism with his Film India, to describe Nagaiah in his review as the \textbf{`Paul Muni of India'}, high praise indeed. Many people praised Nagaiah as the best character actor. Baburao Patel compared Nagaiah with \textit{Saigal}. \textit{Saigal's} song has only melody but \textit{Nagaiah's} song has melody merged with emotion – he said.\textsuperscript{35}

Technically \textit{Sumangali} is perfect and far ahead of its time, thanks to Ramnath who wrote the story and screenplay, shot and edited the film. A camera wizard, his photography is not only brilliant but also breath taking.\textsuperscript{36} His creative lighting, effective use of spot lighting to create meanings and \textit{camera}


placement are even today worth detailed study. The most impressive sequence takes place in a moving train where the heroine comes to know about her widowhood, from her aunt accompanying her. Through the windows, the passing landscape is seen in sharp focus. And in 1940s, there were no process screen (rear projection) facilities in Madras. V. Shantaram, who saw the movie in Madras was so astonished that he asked, how on earth it was done. B.N. Reddy recalled, forty years later. `Ramnath got an old projector, fixed it with a clock mechanism, and he used a screen made of organdie which he dipped in glycerine.... and it worked. He sat with K.V. Reddy and planned it almost overnight.

B.N. Reddy, fond of visual metaphors and symbols, made use of the crucifix as a symbol of sacrifice, perhaps for the first time in South Indian cinema. The heroine after leaving home meets a lecherous rich man who tries to seduce her. He locks up all doors to trap her, and the camera lingers on the doors which form the pattern of the crucifix.\(^{37}\) *Sumangali* flopped at the box-office and almost wiped out Vauhini's capital. It was an expensive film - its cost was Rs. 1,20,000/- as against Y.V Rao's *Malli Pelli*, a similar film on widow marriage, released around the same time and a super hit, which had cost only Rs. 50,000/-. B.N.Reddy was never a fast worker and took ten months to complete *Sumangali*, while Y.V.Rao

finished Malli Pelli in four months and was able to release it earlier.

Why did movie goers reject Sumangali? The film appealed to the head and not to the heart, that's why masses did not like it, commented the hero of the film, Giri, forty two years later, recalling the past. Some scenes were indeed shocking to the audiences. For example, the most abominable procedure followed to break bangles of the wife of the deceased and rubbing of tilak on forehead. Some junior artistes even refused to act in this scene. 'That was our society in those days,' B.N. Reddy recalled analysing the film. But to our mind Malli Pelli is a direct message giving picture. The issue was tackled straight forward. The harsh conditions of a young widow are given much importance, for example KumKum mark on forehead, though not deliberate attracted much criticism in the conservative circles. Seeing a widow case in their very amongst one little girl is married to a seventy years old Sabhapati. Like all the events in Malli Pelli are powerful. Whereas in Sumangali the scenes created are artificial. Saraswathi is brought up in modern environment. Since she lost her father and along with his death she has become orphan, she has to bear the brunt of the attack from Kapileswaram people. Had she been left

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
with some bank balance, her owes would have been different. She was prepared to do the manual work out of her dependence only and not that she was a widow. Her way of living is different from that of the villagers which might have been the cause of their criticism. Apart from all this, Parwathi's character was given a sad end just for uniting Saraswati and Giri. It's more a triangular love story than of a story directly with reform theme. All these factors counted for its failure at box-office.

However, critics liked *Sumangali*. They said, it was purposeful and timely and congratulated B.N. Reddy for his bold stance. The film soon became a Telugu classic and is still screened at Seminars, Film courses and Festivals. *Sumangali* is considered today as a milestone in Telugu cinema and a fine example of purposeful film with social content and significance.

Dominant Ideology

*Karma Anubhavinchaka tappadu*

(One cannot overrule destiny/fate)

*Sastracharalu marchataniki vilu ledu*

(One cannot change conventions/tenements of Sastras.)

The picture questions this ideology:

*Saraswathi's* earlier wedding was like marriage of toys

Sastras, religion and conventions are creations of
selfish men; why she should lead a slavish life? Saraswati is not puppet in the hands of society, Pasupu kunkuma Niku chala Janma hakku kada; purushunivale stri puttaleda. (Is the birth of woman different from man?) Andaru Devuni Santati (All are children of God).

Turmeric and Saffron powder are your birthright, is the idea that has been propagated in the film. The duet in the film "Mabbu Ṭunakala Doma Tera Chatu Lona" is a romantic song. The period from 1938-1950 is considered as romantic age in the history of Telugu film lyrilcs.⁴⁰

Pasupu kumkuma nosatana velige
Ada Bratuke Madhuram
(She, who has turmeric and Saffron on her forehead, her life is sweet).
Pasi koonaku palosagusu Murise Talli Bratuke Madhuram
(She who suckles milk to her baby her life is sweet)
House wife who with flowers, turmeric, saffron powder, blessed with children, leads lovely life with husband is called Sumangali. This is the dominant ideology of Hindu society. And Illalu is a film with the message of pativrata dharma.

The Sati concept is continuously patronised in cinema. Sati means unquestioned devotion to one's husband. Some sati films of earlier days are, Sati Savitri 1932, Sati Anasuya 1933, Sati Seeta 1934, Sati Anasuya again in 1943, to name some. The ancient Hindu concept regarding the dual function of woman is that - a woman is the incarnation of either of two forces - a gentle, pious, docile, benevolent and submissive creature, always sacrificing for others, especially her husband, and Shakti, the representation of a kind of female brute force striking terror in the hearts of men. Enlightening this second aspect Nadia films were produced. e.g. Hunterwali, Jungle princess, Lady Robinhood, etc. Illalu glorifies the first theme.41

Devata

Vauhini Picture's Devata was released in the following centres on September 11, 1941.42

Bezawada : Saraswathi Picture Palace
Bundur : Minerva Talkies
Rajahmundry : Jaya Talkies
Secunderabad : Rejeswari Talkies
Eluru : Ramakrishna Talkies
Visakhapatnam : Purna Theatre
Vizianagaram : Sri Krishna Cinema


42Krishna Patrika, 6 September 1941.
Kakinada  : Cinema Majestic  
Guntur   : Bombay Talkies  
Bellary  : Royal Picture Palace  

The above ten centres considered to be urban places and at present some of them emerged as cities even. They were centres with considerable political activity during the time of study, i.e., 1941. Considering time and place, one can assume that consciousness of the people is dominated by elite ideologies. According to Gramsci, common sense is the ensemble of cultural presuppositions by which the subaltern classes make sense of the world they live in.43 The subaltern class has for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in normal times, that is, when its conduct is not independent and autonomous but submissive and subordinate.44 The dominant cultural value is "love between man and woman should be a noble one, not just lust."

In Devata film, Lakshmi loses her chastity to her master. She determines to remain his wife, even if he does not marry her  

43M.S.S.Pandian, The Image Trap, Delhi, 1992,, p.31.  
44Ibid.
openly. In order to save her disposition she has to lose many things she lost her father. Circumstances have driven her to a prostitute's house. Society branded her a woman of vice. Heroine character reminds us the satis of epic age. This upper class cultural value, pativrtya, is well received by the middle class spectators. In the above mentioned semi urban centres, in early 1940s, the spectators are mostly drawn from this class only. Viewing of films by the rural folk has not yet gained momentum. The middle class always look for the values of the class above them. The educated among the lower class, i.e, subaltern class is familiar with the stories of Sati Anasuya, Savitri, etc. The spectators belonging to this group also should have appreciated the film.

The film Devata propagated this dominant ideology (utmost value to pativrtya) and produced consent among the subaltern classes. The body of a woman is considered to be the property of that man who first had sexual relation with her is a feudal value which continues till today. That man will have the legitimate right over her sexually, economically and culturally. Wedding gives that legitimate right. Thali is the central cultural symbol. Such relationship without Thali is looked upon as prostitution in the society. Man's right over woman is thus hegemonised.
The heroine of this film desired for this social identity, a housewife. The hardships what she faced are harsh realities. Premarital sex and unwed motherhood is a curse on Indian woman *Devata*, considered as a daring movie in its day, because of its theme. This film turned out to be a big box office success. One of the many who liked *Devata* was none other than the founding father of Indian Cinema, Dada Saheb Phalke.45

The trouble of mind upon what he had done is nicely shown by hero of *Devata*. This character is in resonance with Gandhian morals of the day. The hero could not resist falling in lust with the serene country beauty of Lakshmi. Venu, the hero, is a London returned man. Hero without socialising Lakshmi fulfils his lust on a fateful day. It is a clear case of male domination. In the process he neither gets her consent nor much protest from her. Lakshmi's passive attitude brings repentance in Venu. He recognizes that he robbed her chastity. He tries to console Lakshmi. He even promises to marry her. But afterwards his marriage was fixed with some other girl of his rich uncle who stays in Madras. There, Venu tries to do away with Lakshmi by offering money. She retorts saying she is not a commodity to be sold. Lakshmi requests him to allow her to treat Venu as her husband at least mentally. Heroine corners Venu every time through her calm

behaviour. Venu drowns further in guilty conscience. Venu thinks that the song of Vimala: *Rade Cheli Nammarade Cheli, Magavarinila Nammarade Cheli* (don't believe men folk) directly hits him. It made him guilty.

Venu's indecision made Vimala to elope with Sukumar. Now, Venu comes to know that Lakshmi is pregnant and abandons home. All this made him sad and finally he decides to search for Lakshmi. Restless with guilt he reveals the secret that he was responsible for the sad life of Lakshmi. Venu, in search of Lakshmi, meets one lady. She praises the character of Lakshmi and she said that she was responsible for Lakshmi's jail life. This event further belittles Venu and finally he meets Lakshmi in Jail and seeks her pardon. Mangamma, the mother of Venu, accepts Lakshmi as her daughter-in-law.

The hero's character warrants much of acting talent. It's a mental exercise. The scenes before seducing Lakshmi have to be picturised carefully, because the seducer is a highly educated man. Nagaiah's facial expressions as Venu are good, after all Venu is not a rowdy who rapes girls. Similarly, hero is restless with guilt and remorse. These feelings are delicately shown by Nagaiah. This character is of a typical Victorian morals. Nagaiah did his role exceedingly well.
Impressive Scenes:

Seeta is the dearest sister of Venu. Venu gives Telegram stating he was coming back home from abroad where he did his Bar-at-Law. Seeta with full of nostalgia fails to get sleep that night. She explains the intimacy between her and her brother. "Lakshmi, we were eating our supper (milk food) in only one plate during moonlit nights. I was pinching brother as he eats all food. Do you know how much my brother loves me. Lakshmi see the moon, he does not move at all."

The car in which Mangamma and Seeta travel develops a snag. Driver tries to repair it but in vain. Then the car was tied to a bullock cart and the bulls pull the car. It creates ovation in the audience. It's a natural scene.

A teenaged girl's life is very gayful. Seeta sings a song "Ugeda Uyyala Toogu tuyela tarapathamudanuka uyela, Rachilukala venuka egiripoyeda," which means I will swing in a cradle, a swinging cradle up to stars up above in the sky. I will fly behind parrots.

The influence of Western literature, especially theatre, on Ramnath, a Madras university graduate responsible for the story, screenplay and photography is seen in this movie.
Devata is cinematic in form and content when most movies of the day were filmed plays. Stagy set ups, steady moving camera, narration through spoken word - all these are absent in Devata. There is a liberal use of over-the-shoulder-shots in this film, something very rare in South Indian films those days. Some of the close ups of Suryakumar (Seetha) a wonderful talent, beautifully framed and lit are highly artistic.

Ramnath's use of his camera and lighting are remarkable. One particular scene is impressive. The hero with guilty conscience comes to meet his mother in her prayer room. While he confesses, Nagaiah is at the edge of the frame, totally in the dark, as if hiding in shame and guilt, and his mother, at prayer, her heart kind and pure, dominates the frame, bathed in light. The scene in which Nagaiah seduces Kumari is shot with restraint and sensitivity. The director, B.N. Reddy conveys the impact with cut-outs of erotic sculpture, wall pictures, and foreign film magazine covers. B.N. Reddy, a Victorian prude in matters of sex, relies on suggestion, rather than direct presentation.

It is interesting to think of a picture of that theme. The theme and the very idea of having an Indian film hero seducing the maid were worse than blasphemy. Everybody with access to B.N. Reddy

"Ibid., p.28.

"Ibid., p.29."
began to advise him against the making of such a movie. But critics and crowds loved Devatha and its success gave B.N. Reddy enormous confidence in himself. Cinema is a medium of entertainment for middle class. Hence middle class cultural values are mediated through this medium. 1940s are the years in which audiences from working class started increasing. A servant maid who at last got married to her master is a tremendous moral boost to that class. Those were the days (or for that matter even today) when 'lower' class girls are deserted after fulfilling their sexual pleasure. In Devatha the life of one servant maid is mediated who ultimately rises to a higher social level.

In two ways the picture is successful, one, because of the Victorian values and Gandhian philosophy of repentance, introspection, etc., of the hero, and, two, labour class wish of attaining higher social status.

Thus Devatha was liked by both middle and labour classes, i.e., the subaltern audience. B.N.Reddy was indeed, a creative genius.

Ibid., p. 30.

Music, as usual for a B.N. Reddy film, dominates the picture. There are many songs, most of them sung by Nagaiah and Bezwada Rajaratnam, a fine singer, with a silvery lilt in her melodious voice. B.N. Reddy gives top most importance to nativity. Peasant activities with farm works are depicted in the song "Rytu Janamala pandaga dinamu Idira, Karuvumasi Chaniyera".50

Sita sings a song "Vendi kanchalalo Vedi Buvvandoi Pamidi Kancha la lo pala Buvvundoi" is very popular.51 The piano song "Adigo Andhiyala Ravali" by Vimala is catchy. Her other songs are "Radhe Cheli Namma radhe cheli, magavarinila namarade cheli", and "Evaru makinka sati vere ila satileni janta madi." "Lokamanta Lobhula, Kavare Nirupedala" is a song by the brother of Lakshmi. He carries the child and asks for alms. It's a super hit song and even today after forty years, one can hear this song being sung by mendicants in remote parts of Andhra Pradesh.52 "Anandam Anandam Rave Rave Sangaru Papa" is a song sung happily after the union of hero and heroine. Nagaiah and Bezwada Ratnam were the singers.

50Lyrics by Samudrala Venkata Raghavacharya. This is a harvest song. 'Harvest day is a festive day in the life of ryots. The rich Harvest drives away famine.'

51Mothers while feeding their kids usually sing this song.

52Randor Guy, B.N.Reddy, p.29.
The Lakshmi character in 'Devata' is not mere Lakshmi. She is really a Devata (Goddess). Lakshmi's woes are many and miserable but she forgives the man who is the root cause for all her miseries. Her tolerance is the secret of her victory. Devata film proved the fact that even in working class there were virtuous persons like Lakshmi and similarly in the so-called civilized upper class there could be vicious person like Venu.

Devata is the story of an unchaste woman. Can any traditional bound man call her Devata? Mr. Adinarayana was harsh at criticising Devata. Marriage is to a man and woman relation, what clothes are to human beings. Unless one becomes a beast he will not shun clothes. Lakshmi utters, 'you!' only, when hero seduce her she does not protest at all. She has to reap what she has sown. Devata is a film which does not deserve to be seen by children and women. Devata is like "washing our dirty linen in public. This picture is lowest in art."

The above criticism of Adinarayana is countered by B. Rangayya, as follows: 56

Mr. Adinarayana called Lakshmi an unchaste woman because she does not possess thali or mangalasutra, the secret simble of a s'jmangali. Further, Adinarayana continues to harp upon the argument that such women do not enjoy the support of the society as her act is against the so called established norms of the society. For this the critique Mr. Rangaiah puts forth the argument and questions the very basis of the societal norms and the so called ethics. He says the norms have been prescribed by a few wealthy and also tradition bound people. Hence, the rules formed could benefit their vested interests. It is another matter that the general public made to follow these rules as they are bound by the religious scriptures. Also there are double standards, one set of rules for men and the other for women. Men are permitted to practise poligamy and it is not considered as a grave crime whereas women are told to follow strictly monogamy. The critic draws the example of Kunthi who was an un-wed mother and who was not punished. Therefore, drawing a parallel, he states that why should Lakshmi be punished. The norm that a woman who had the first sexual experience with a man should be his wife only. Following this norm Lakshmi remained chaste till the end and therefore to call Lakshmi a bitch is unjust. Vauhini

56B. Rangayya, "Devata an unchaste Woman?," in Zamin Ryot, 8 Key 1942, p. 2.
pictures with this offbeat theme created the film *Devata*. Their attempt is praiseworthy.

Patriarchal ideology is taught by this film. *Mangamma* makes her daughter and Lakshmi known, how a girl ought to be. Seeta reads Bhajan song. The essence of the song is about the duties of a woman.

Santa *sahanammulu*: (peace and tolerance)

*polatalaku Devudichina Bhushanamulu*: (Jewels given by God to women)

Sirulu Galgina vela Mai *Maruvaradu*: (Do not overjoy when you are rich)

*Kashtamulalona* Dhairyamu Kalgiyundu: (Do not loose confidence when in troubles)

*Nathudamuragamosaginadu* *Novva Madinappudu pongaku Alugakamma* (Do not get overjoy when husband loves)

(Do not be angry when contrary happens)

*Attamamala Tallidandrulattu Lenchi* (Treat your in laws as your parents)

*Attavarillu Puttiniti Yathi dahachi* (Treat in laws house as your parents' house)

*Mama kutumbala Kireeti Mnupavamma* (Bring fame to our families)

*Anuchu Ganudri Nasruval Chinuka Balike* (Likewise said with tears in his two eyes)

*Janikammamu sampuchu Jankaraju*
Similarly, in another song which Seeta reads:

Poorva punyambu koladi purushudaneda

(Husband according to Punya of past life: it's said)

Rata Devaraina Ethivadaina Gani

(Whatever his character be and whoever by)

Padatikihapara Daiva ma patiye talli

(He is her God in this world and also in the life after death)

pati padambhoja sevaye paramatapamu

(Woman's duty is to worship him and that is her ideal)

parama sukhadayammu, saubhagyakari

(That gives her happiness and wealth)

Sakala Bhayavaranammu, Bhusanam, Dharmam

(It removes fear, gives money and its ornamental.)

Pati manobhishtamuna Katma Baliyonarchi

(For the sake of husband devote your soul)

Purnakamuni Chesina Polatiminna

(who gives full joy to husband, that woman is great)

Annapurna Samanalai amaravinata charitalainaru

(They become martyrs like Annapurna and others)

patibhakti maruvakunda Janaki Maravvakundu

(Janaki don't forget to worship your husband)
Varidharmapadana janumu

(Go in the path of Satis)

Anchu Anasuya Sita Divchipalike

(Thus spoke Anasuya with Sita, by blessing her.)

Similarly, Mangamma reads another song which enunciates Karma theory:

Enno nomulu nochinagani Ee narajanmamdorakadu

(After many a prayer only you got this human life)

Eejanmambu chesina karmaye mundati janmaku moolamu

(The deeds of this janma (life) becomes origin to next life)

Satyamu dharmamu premamu karuna uttamagatiki sadhanara

(To get higher order practise truth, dharma, love and deed).

Paliki bonkina padimeerina bratukenasanamaunura

(life gets ruined if you go back on your word,)

Moodurojula muchchata koirakai budidaseyakura bratuku

(life is after all three days tamasha, don't waste life)

Budida cheyakura Eenarajanmamu Cherapakura

(Do not destroy human life)

Cherapakura Enno nomulu nohina phalamidi

(This life is result of many worships, don't destroy)

Eenarajanmamu Cherapakura

(Do not destroy this human life.)
The underlying philosophy of this human life is that one's deeds decide one's life. If one's deeds are good one will get a good life next. If anybody misbehaves in this life he/she will reap the consequences. Adhere to what is said and one should not go back on the given words. This human life is more valuable. This is the dominant Hindu philosophy.

**Pantulamma**

Gudavalli Ramabrahmam produced another film with social relevance. The problem faced by Nirmala as teacher is just one instance of working women's problems. We come across the character of Raoji in present times too\(^5\). Another issue touched upon in the film is that of inter-caste marriage. Sastri expressed his human values by giving shelter to Nirmala. One has to withstand against many social hurdles. To keep a word is not that easy. It is a virtue one should inherit from our past culture. Sastri hails from an orthodox Brahmin family. In order to help orphan Nirmala, Sastri overcome all traditional barriers. The circumstances forced him to marry her. The orthodox father of Sastri had to concede at last because once the marriage was over one had to learn to live with. Hindu dharma insists this quality. Thus he legitimizes the inter-caste marriage.

\(^5\)In Mandal system of administration in Andhra Pradesh, the school teachers are kept under the supervision of Mandal Presidents.
Throughout the film, the hero character appears to be a man who stood for his word in helping Nirmala. It does not seem marriage was his intention. Circumstances forced him to marry her. Even after the marriage he remains at a distance from Nirmala, but she has expressed her conjugal feelings. Here, hero says that what all he has done that was to keep his word and save her respect, nothing more than that. This gives rise to the fact that inter caste marriage was not his aim. Only circumstances forced him to marry Nirmala.

The central point is given emphasis through a song of cart man.

**Saginchumura Yuvaka Dharmam**

(Young man continue your dharma)

**Jivanaramamuma jankaka Nipani**

(Do not fear the battle of life,)

**Karmamu Kalamu Kalisi, Nedu Ni**

Dharma Parikshaku Punera

(Due to fate you are subjected to severe test)

**Marmavedi Vai Dhiruda Vai, Ni Karma Rathammu Tolummura**

(Be brave, lead the cart of fate)

**Tanavare Tama kedurai rani**

(Even your own people oppose)

**Tanasakalammunu Dwamsamkani**

(Let all your own ruin)
Ranamuna Nilabadi Gelichina Vade
(Those who stand in the fight wins)
Manujudu purushudu charitarthudu ra
(Such man will make History!)

Pantulamma film gives more importance to karma yoga. One should do one's duty, at any cost. The film finds solution in individual sacrifice. It does not offer a solution to problems of working women.

Swarga Seema

Our cinemas are obsessed with Indian mythology. The obsession of our early talkie makers with mythology invites two major conclusions; one that screen adaptations of Indian mythologies was meant as box-office safeguard. Surely, no other works clicked nor broke through the immense class and caste barriers of this subcontinent more than the two dearly loved epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Also, putting together a mythology on the screen was one of the simplest means of reaffirming myths about our social values. Throughout the long history of Indian mainstream cinema we have seen new myths churned out of the old. Exemplary epic figures like Sita, Gandhari and Savitri keep returning, reinforced under different, often deceptive garbs. Thus playing around with the Sita Savitri images our prolific screenplay writers have produced
some interesting new myths. Women's portrayal in popular cinema is in the mould - woman as victim. It is interesting to note that sacrifice austerity and self deprivation are accepted in the Indian ethos as noble values (a point very well taken in Mahatma Gandhi's political credo). They recur as a physical reality and with a logical model in many myths such as Harishchandra and Nala Damayanthi legends, the latter at a romantic level. It is important that poverty and austerity are qualities recognised in the myths for what they are, and all sacrifices (like uma's for Shiva) are redeemed at the end.\textsuperscript{58} Vauhini's Swarga Seema is within this framework.

\textit{Swargaseema} connotate a simple meaning 'Sweet Home' or a place of paradise. 'Your home is a paradise and you need not search for it anywhere outside. You are its creator.' This idea is the central theme of this film. \textit{Swargaseema} was a great triumph for B.N. Reddy. The film was inspired by Bernard Shaw's \textit{Pygmalion} and the famous movie Blood and Sound. B.N. Reddy vaguely conceived the plot and worked on it.\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Swargaseema} is a family drama.


Woman's purity, faith and devotion to her husband, considered to be high values of Indian society, are better picturised in this film. India had its own heritage of cultural and social relations based on a feudal order. The social milieu of the time of Swargaseema demands such qualities of woman and anything against this would become an anti-establishment film. The Indian mind has inherited the value of emotional security from a docile husband worshipping wife. This stereotype is readily acceptable to the Indian spectators. Swargaseema is a male cinema. Male cinema depends on a woman figure to restore balance and order into man's world spoilt by himself or by other woman who is responsible for much of his misery. The constant use of the figure of the woman as the metaphor either for man's desires or ambitions or for his failures is a practice used in popular cinema. Popular vilification of woman is 'woman is the woman's worst enemy'. In this film for the fall of Murthy and for miseries of Kalyani, Sujatha is blamed. The dominant ideology of fate gives the needed tolerance to the wronged persons. A climate of blind belief in pre-ordained fate is a tremendous force for maintaining the status quo. The dominant philosophy of fate always served the privileged class. This also served the colonisers who were absolved of any responsibility for the poverty and lack of development of the


"Gayatri Chatterjee, Awara, New Delhi, 1992, p.48."
people in the colonies. The propensity of male cinema is to make women fall at their knees and cling to the feet of their fathers, husbands, lovers, to beg for protection, upkeep, love, etc. In *Swargeseema*, in the last shot showing the union of Murthy and Kalyani, Kalyani falls on the feet of Murthy. To a modern mind it look ridiculous because all through her life it was Murthy who wronged her.

Nativity: B.N. Reddy is well known for his aesthetic values in his films. He gives much importance to nativity. The day after the street play Mohini Rukmangada was over, Ganganna and Subbi came to the house of Murthy's father-in-law in that village to collect some grain. In rural areas of the times money played little role. Some measures of grain occupies the place of money. Professionals are paid in kind only. Donation of used garments was also in vogue. This situation of rural environment is utilised by B.N. Reddy.

The drama programme of *Sujatha* was propagated through carts. This is the old technique of giving publicity which is very native.

-Gayatri Chatterjee, *Awara*, p.49.
The influence of Puranas on Indian intellectuals is unquestionable. Ruling class hegemonizes the ruled through ideology. Indian woman made to understand that she should be a Sati Savitri, a Anasuya, a Chandramati or a Sumati. Marriage, bed room, kitchen, maternity and thali are the five cardinal features every woman is made to think of. The heroine of Swargaseema exactly fits into this mould. Kalyani and children await the arrival of Murthy at the gate of their home. The disappointed children ask their mother, 'don't father come?' "Yes he will come". She replied. In giving this reply she gives a sorrowful look. Again when she and children go to Bangalore to meet Murthy and get rejected by him the feelings revealed by Kalyani are marvellous. She looks at children so pathetically that she must owe the entire responsibility of children. Her motherly affection is visibly expressed. At this particular point it is not out of place to mention that Jayamma excelled Nagaiah with her action. In the climax scene, grief stricken Kalyani rests her head on sewing machine and slumbers. At this point Murthy enters the house and finds flowers on his photo. He takes the petals and drops them at the feet of Kalyani as if worshipping a Goddess. This event elevated her image to the highest pinnacle of glory. As a continuation of this scene there is one shot in which Kalyani comes to know that the man whom she thought a thief was no other than her

husband. She utters the word 'Swamy' and falls on the feet of Murthy. Here Jayamma's talent as an actress is superb. Perhaps this shot is created to satisfy the ego of males because the male centred society opposes at least psychologically to the previous act of worship of heroine by hero. Is it not perpetuation of patriarchy? Heroine tries to save the honour of hero till the end. Indian housewife always strives to save the prestige of her husband. She always conceals his bad character. Perhaps this may be the reason why bad husbands become more array. Kalyani in her attempt to conceal the movements of her husband was embarrassed at the fact revealed by papa her daughter. She slaps the child and later on repents. B.N. brought out this shot very naturally.

Papa becomes ill and sick because of her father's absence/ Kalyani tried and tried to contact Murthy by phone. The agony of Kalyani when hero rejects her appeal wets the eyes of spectators. Kalyani's father enquires whether she was forsaken by her husband. Kalyani refuses to disclose the sorry state of affairs even to her father. On the other hand she pretends that 'all' the rumours that were spread were done with an eyesore. But she realises that situation was exactly the same as said by her father. The abandoned Kalyani goes to an unknown place with her children instead of going to her father in order to save her self respect.

Murthy's life can be divided into two parts. In the first, he is a respectable man who has full control over the events. He leads a happy life with his wife and children. In the second part, he gradually falls a prey to Sujatha and abandons his loving wife and children. Nagaiah who played the hero role is efficient enough in expressing feelings as the situation demands. 1st place - elegance; 2nd place - carefree and thus arrogant; 3rd place - total guilty consciousness. Nagaiah, as in Vandemataram, appeared a little too old for the hero, but his emotion drenched performance made amends. In the course of Murthy's fall towards Sujatha, the state of his mind is shown by visuals like Rama's idol, his wife's appeal not to become a prey to woman, etc. The director cleverly utilised the visuals like cobweb setting to depict hero's complete surrender to Sujatha.

Kalyani and children go to Bangalore where Murthy lives with Sujatha. Children on seeing their father run to him saying 'father'. Murthy does not acknowledge to their call. Nagaiah's facial expressions are dry and stale. He has to depict the mental struggle, his love towards kids and wife and his lust towards Sujatha. He miserably fails to show this conflict.

"Randor Guy, B.N. Reddy, p.32.
Murthy, from hospital, tries to contact Sujatha by repeatedly dialling the phone. At last she picks up the receiver from cradle and says "Why, what happened, what the hell is with you? You need not come to see the play I am meeting the medical expenses" and abruptly puts the receiver. This is a parallel event to what Murthy has behaved once towards his wife.

Sujatha under the spell of Naren neglects Murthy. Murthy without invitation attends the play and sees the vulgar performance of Sujatha and Naren. Disheartened Murthy was further depressed to hear Sujatha talking bad about him? Sujatha suggests to Naren, "In the name of art, Murthy abandoned wife and children and ran after me. Can we use this a plot for the next play?"

Murthy witnesses Sujatha's illicit relation with Naren. Wisdom dawns on him and searches for his wife and children. He chooses the occupation of selling country made fidels (Ektaras) and this at last unites him with his family. In the last scenes Nagaiah acted well, especially when he sees papa crying with tears. The guilty Murthy further becomes shy to reveal his identity. At night under the cover of darkness he meets his wife.

The bad woman in the film is termed by script writers as vamp. The term is, of course, borrowed from Hollywood of the 1920s. It is a shortened form of vampire and probably suggests that the
attitude towards the vamp is not only one of contempt, but also one in which is reflected the Indian males, and perhaps the Indian peasant cultures traditional fear of primitive femininity - natural as well as treacherous, active as well as aggressive, powerful as well as smothering. These feared aspects of womanhood are projected through typical characters on the screen who are all bad and, therefore, arouse hostility rather than ambivalence. Bhanumathithis superb in her role as Sujatha. She oozed sex - appeal, with her penetrating glance and coy looks. Her diction and her handling of the Telugu accent, changing with her name, were remarkable. B.N. Reddy made changes in her make up as she changed her name and accent which was an innovation in movies then. Subbi's rise to Sujatha is meteoric. She is extreme careerist and with her seductive looks and skill of articulation attracts Murthy. Her earlier state was that she has to wear the old saree contributed by Kalyani. After she became Sujatha she enters into the happy home or paradise of Murthy like Menaka. Bhanumati in the role of Sujatha did act extremely well. Herself a good playback singer she added flavour to the song: Ooooo... oooohohoho pavurama. The success of the film is due to this song. Mainly it created history. With this song Bhanumati scaled unprecedented heights of


popularity. She came to be known as pavurama Bhanumathi. Sujatha wears sleeveless blouse. By throwing the pigeon over to the table of Murthy she gave such a look that even Pravarakhya will be seduced into her trap. Her bodily movements made Murthy mad and since then he could not stop fall in love with her. Gradually Sujatha and Murthy moved together. With ‘Hai Skhi’ song Murthy completely lost in lust and thenceforth his Swargaseema became a Naraka. He stops going home and abandons his family. In the name of Kala Seva he started doing Sujatha Seva.

After some days Sujatha got fed up with Murthy and was looking for another man. She finds Naren. When Murthy met with an accident, Sujatha utilised this opportunity and gradually develops intimacy with Naren. They both started acting in new plays. Murthy was insulted and heckled by her. Thus Sujatha the nymphomaniac mistress ditched Murthy and started living with Naren.

Swargaseema provides both opportunity in allowing its audience to identify with wish fulfilling roles or fantasies - and balm, in expressing and resolving deeply felt emotional conflicts. Thus the

70 Ibid., p.33.

71 Bhanumathi played the role Sujatha on the model of Rita Haverth in Blood and Sound. So says N.R. Chandur, "Dr.Bhanumathi Ramakrishna," in India Today, Annual Number, 1995, p.189.
success of this film could thus be explained by the extent to which it met unconscious emotional needs of the people.

Swargaseema was a great triumph for B.N. Reddy and P. Bhanumathi who played Sujatha considered a modest talent with only a few movies to her credit who had serious thoughts of settling down as a newly wed housewife living in the shadow of her film technician husband. Bhanumathi rose to stardom with this movie - and one of the most spectacular careers in South Indian cinema began - actress, director, music composer, singer, producer and studio-owner.

B.N. Reddy brought in a new man into the Vauhini camp to write the story. This man, rustic and down to earth, had some reputation as a publisher and translator of Sarat Chandra's novels into Telugu. He had written dialogues for Dharma Patni some years ago. Little did he imagine that he would soon create film history along with B.N.'s younger brother, Nagi Reddy, whom he met frequently during his stint as screen writer. His name was A.V. Subba Rao, better known under his pen name, Chakrapani.

B.N. Reddy's engaged an Anglo Indian with a burning passion for photography, Marcus Bartley, to shoot Swargaseema. He rose fast and became one of the best cinematographers in India. The film is fast, crisp and cinematic. Orson Welles's classic Citizen
Kane had an influence on Bartley and this could be seen in the use of sets with ceilings, something unheard of those days. And the swan set picturised for the song around the episode of Rishya Sringa by Mayadevi is spectacular. Jayamma, a Kannada stage and screen star, doing her first film, fitted the role of the wronged, suffering wife with her bovine looks and fat body.

B.N. Reddy gave a break to another new comer soon to emerge as a major talent in South Indian cinema as a fine singer and music composer, Ghantasala. He made his debut in Swargaseema with a duet he sang along with Bhanumathi.

Music contributed much to the success of the film and one song in particular created history. Ooooo...pohohoho Pavurama sung by Bhanumathi. Inspired by Rita Hayworth's humming in Blood and Sound, B.N. Reddy had at first intended it only as a humming tune but the catchy melody fascinated all and it grew into a three minute hit.

Critics felt that B.N. Reddy had made once again a daring movie in the fashion of Devata in having the hero become an


“Ibid.”
adulterer. Widow remarriage, pre-marital sex, un-wed motherhood, adultery, what would B.N. Reddy think of next, some critics asked.  

Swargaseema enjoyed silver jubilee runs in many non-Telugu centres and it showed that a successful movie could be made in a South Indian language within 11,000 feet. Some like S.S. Vasan had thought it was ridiculous, and even suicidal to think of a movie within that length.  

Swargaseema is a melodrama presentation interspersed with songs and music. The happy endings of most of the films allay the anxiety of viewers by implying that the problems and contradictions of their lives can be resolved without effort. Melodramatic stories are excessively dependent upon coincidence. The accident on the stage seriously hurts Murthy. This is a melodramatic turning point in Swargaseema. Had the accident not happened Murthy would not have been hospitalised. Had he not hospitalised Sujatha would not have had contact with Naren. Had their relation not known to Murthy he would not have forsaken Sujatha and searched for the whereabouts of Kalyani. Again through selling the fidels only Murthy could find his papa. The decision to sell fidels was an  

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., p.33.  
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.
accidental decision. Thus B.N. Reddy in *Swaragaseema* melodramatically taken the cinema to a happy end.

Nalinikanta Rao's songs are easy to sing. Nagaiah was not only the hero of *Swaragaseema* but also its Music Director, particularly the title song *Grihamekada Swaragaseema* is marvellous. ooo... ooho..hoo pavurama song is very catchy which made *Swaragaseema* a box office hit. Personally it gave fillip to Bhanumathi too. The songs in the film are melodious.