CHAPTER VII

COLONIALISM, HISTORY AND NATIONALIST POLITICS: A study of films Grihalakshmi, Mahatma Gandhi, Palnati Yuddham and Yogi Vemana
COLONIAL MODERNITY: INDIVIDUAL AND GANDHIAN WORLD VIEW

Grihalakshmi is a Telugu social film produced and directed by a Telugu veteran H.M. Reddy. It is a propaganda cinema. Gandhiji's temperance movement is the underlying theme of this film. This picture is a mixture of many objectives viz., (I) anti liquor, (ii) anti-prostitution, (iii) chastity of housewife (pativratya dharma), (iv) upliftment of Harijans, (v) divine power is superior to human power and (vi) truth alone triumphs (satyameva jayathe).

There is similarity with Chintamani drama to some extent. It is also said that Grihalakshmi is based on Rangoon Rowdy, a drama in Telugu with a theme - prohibition of liquor. Social reform and patriotism are the messages hidden in Grihalakshmi. Harijan Ashram is portrayed on the lines of Gandhian Ashramas. Grihalakshmi is instrumental in propagation of Gandhian ideology.

Those were the days when Gandhiji's Harijanodharana was talk of the country. Anti-liquor program was on the agenda of most of the state governments. Exactly with this background, Grihalakshmi

1Sathiraju Venugopala Rao, "A Criticism of Grihalakshmi," in Andhra Patrika, 29 July 1938. Kallakuri Narayana Rao, Chintamani [drama in Telugu], first pub. in 1949, reprint Tenali, 1989. Chintamani is a popular play. The central concern is, institutionalised social evil, Prostitution, in contemporary society. Chintamani is a typical Vesya (call girl) because of whom many wealthy persons who go to her become paupers. The negative influence of prostitution on individual and family are shown in this work.
was produced. *Harijanodharana*, service to scheduled caste people and prohibition of liquor are the two issues taken up in *Grihalakshmi*. All the visuals used in this film show the consciousness of contemporary nationalist movement. National flags, volunteers, *charakas* (*spinning wheels*) and asharamites praising Gandhiji - all are indicators of nationalist consciousness. Radha, the woman ashramite, prays before Gandhiji's photo. Photos of many national leaders like Andhraratna Duggirala Gopala Krishnayya, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Kamala Nehru, etc., adorn the walls of ashram. In the end, Dr. Krishna Rao, the hero, after his acquittal from the prison, dedicates his life along with his wife and children in the service of country, with an offering of lighted camphor to Gandhiji's photo picture².

The flaw of this film is that there is no connection between the main story and Harijan Seva Samithi. In the beginning only some connection is shown. The benefit show of dance is made use of to introduce Madhuri to Dr. Krishna Rao. In fact the link ends up there. But H.M. Reddy brings a connection at the end. Dr. Krishna Rao finally dedicates his life to the service of Harijan Samithi. Main theme does not revolve round the Harijan issue.

The hero deliberately ruins his career by indulging in sensual pleasures. If we come across such a person in our daily life we don't show any sympathy at all. We consider him a careless and unwise person. In Gudipati Venkata Chalam's 'Adrushtam' there is a story of one Viswapathi who buys a girl in a circus for one night for rupees three hundred. Chalam's Viswapathi character outlives Dr. Krishna Rao's character in this film. Being educated, he does not find the lecherous behaviour of Madhuri till the end. Only when he was charged with murderous crime he realises what Madhuri is. It is out of place to believe that he has no conjugal happiness because in the beginning it was shown that he leads a happy family life. He was solely responsible for his own decline. Radha's character is also very weak. Any wise housewife questions the drunkard husband. But Radha allows him to continue his habit for long time and instead defends him as an innocent person when her brother brings the matter to her notice.

Similarly what is that she sacrificed for her husband? Tolerating a drunkard and debauched husband is her mistake. After her husband reveals his innocence in the murder when he was going to be hanged, any common wife will react the same way as Radha did. The intensity of the agony made her insane. She questions the existence of God. She at one point asks Lord Krishna that what else was in store for her as already much havoc has been wrought upon her. "All the epithets of God of more than one crore
are only hollow? Is there any defect in my way of praying you? What is my crime? 0! Lord Krishna," she expresses her anguish thus. The dominance of feudal ideology is hidden here.

The ruling class always takes the responsibility of extending and encouraging the ideology such as *pativratya dharma*. Madhuri, a Vamp, naturally attracts contempt from society. Any prostitute girl would behave the same way in squeezing the wealth of the man who goes to her. But why she should have so much vengeance to the doctor, is not known. Why should she join hands with a Marwadi in killing Viswasa Rao and conspiring to prove the doctor guilty? Only after she meets with an accident and on the verge of loosing life, she reveals the truth in sessions court. Hero was acquitted and thenceforth lives happily with his wife.

Throughout the film it is shown that woman is her worst enemy. Hero is womanizer, slave to his bad habits, irresponsible, neglected his wife and family, why to mention all this, he is solely responsible for his own doom. This picture gives an impression that Madhuri is responsible for the miseries of Radha, the *Grihalakshmi*. Even at the climax it is not shown that hero is repentant for all his flaws. The maker of the film gives the idea that Radha's prayers, either at the idol of Lord Krishna or, at the photo of *Gandhiji*, brought forth mental transformation in Madhuri
and whose evidence saves the life of hero. All this is part of ruling class ideology.

Indian woman through *Pativratya* can achieve any thing. The tradition bound housewife serves her in-laws *dumbfound* and always strive for the betterment of her husband. She prays gods and goddesses. *Punyam koddī purushudu, danam koddī biddalu* (Indian woman begets good husband according to her luck gained out of her prayers and begets children according to her charity towards poor people). *Pativratya* saves her husband from evil spirits.

Radha’s madness is not a solution for the crisis of Dr. Krishna Rao's family. But, actually, Madhuri’s change of mind is climax. Only car accident brought this change. The dialogues through the mouth of the mother of Madhuri are obscene. Thus the images shown in this film are the sacrificing and persevering wife and the self centred erotic woman.

Through the propagation of *Pativratya* dharma patriarchy is perpetuated. This film is a living example of this ideology. Woman is believed to be a commodity and male has right over female is a concept of feudalism. This has origin in private property. Monogamy is a feature of this society. Prostitution is also part

*Kodavatiganti* Kutumba Rao, *Grihalakshmi* a good film despite many flaws,* in Andhra Patrika, 23 March 1938, p.11.
of it. Monogamy and prostitution continue as long as system is dependent on private property.* Cinema is a tool which help bringing about national integration. From 1938 to 1947 many songs in Telugu films contributed to the spread of nationalism and patriotism with Congress flavour. In *Grihalakshmi* cinema, contemporary nationalist ideology is well portrayed. Patriotism, Khadi movement, *Harijanodharana*, Hindu Muslim unity, *Anti-liquor* movement, *Pativratya dharma*, are all touched upon in the songs. Gandhiji is elevated to the status of God through songs. A few songs portraying these issues are given below followed by a brief analysis.

**Songs:**

**A Secular Song**

1. *Vande Vande Bharatamata*  
   (Mother India, Hail, Hail)  
   
   *Varna Vibhedam Kalpitamaina*  
   (Created are caste differences)  
   
   *Andaru manavulokate Aina*  
   (Though all men are one)  
   
   *Makikarmamu Tappadidela*

(Can't our fate rid off)

Muslim Hindu Harijanamata
(Harijan, Hindu, Muslim Mother)

Samastha Jagati Gita Mata
(Mother, all world one)

Sahodara . . . .
(Brother)

Sahodara . . . .
(Brother)

Sahodara Dikshanu Gaikonara
(Brother do dedicate)

Malala Meluku Pranamulira
(Prepare to sacrifice for the welfare of Schedule Castes)

Dasya Vimutha Margamidera
(It's the way of liberation)

Harijana Seva Hari Sevara
(Service to Harijan is service to Hari the God)

Avasyakaraniyam Bidiera
(This is the path to be followed).

A verse axing by Gopinath encouraging the Harijans

(2) Uttama Kulala Durnayammulaku Longi
(No need to bow your heads for upper castes oppression)

Miru talayettarani dusthiti gatinche
(Gone are the bad days)
Viswabharathi madhura swagata mosanga
   (Viswabharathi heartily welcomes)
Yuga mahapurushundu Mahatma Gandhi
   (Mahatma Gandhi epoch maker)
Midu samskaramunakai Nadumu Gatte
   (Determined for your culture)
Lendu! Mi Bhagya rekhala didukonaga
   (Arise! Evaluate your fate)

Anti-liquor
(3) Lendu Bharata veerulara
   (Awake heroes of India)
Niduralevandoi! Meeru Nidura
   (You Awake from slumber!)
Il lu Vallu Kooladose
   (Houses and bodies destroyed)
Ka llumanandoi Babu
   (Stop consuming toddy sons)
Kallu Teravandoi
   (Open your eyes) || |||||Lendu|||

Kuduva kudu Toduga Valuva
   (Food to eat, cloth to wear)
Leni Pillala Godu chuchi
   (Plight of child without)
Niluvu Nirou Satini Ganchi
(Seeing depressed wife)
Tagakandi miru tage
(Don't consume toddy,)
Kalladi vari raktame sumandi
(No toddy, but their blood only) || Lendu ||
Bidala Pilchitine mahammari
(Epidemic that eats the children)
Prabhurlu Kolchukone Pinjari
(Pinjari worshipped by rulers)
Desa Daridratakha Rahadari
(A highway for country's poverty)
pama pisachamu paradoli
(Drive away the drunkard demon)
Bharata Kirtini Nilpaga Randu
(Come, establish the glory of India). ||Lendu||

Virtues of Housewife

(4) Badha Sahaname Satitwamu Badha Sahaname
(Tolerance of pain is virtue of housewife, Tolerance)
Badhalo korchi Sadhana jesi
(Through tolerance and practice)
Samsarambudhi nidina vare
(Swim the ocean of family life)
Atarakamoui Kirthiganchiri
(reach the pinnacle of glory life)
Sailakumari sumathi Brinda

(Sailakumari and Sumathi)
Nadhuni seva mahimame kada
(with the blessings of Lord Krishna)
Saukhyamuchendi Riwla
(lived happily here)
Entati badhaku guri kani
(To whatever pain they are subjected to)
pramamaimaovalasima poni
(Let it be at the cost of life)
Sati ki nathuni Seva Dharmamu
(Housewife has to serve her husband)
Bharata Satiki Nathuni seva dharmamu
(Service to her husband is the dharma of Indian housewife).

Praise of Gandhiji

(5) Dina loka sarama jagadabharana
(Solace of the poor, ornament of the world)
Anuragamuna kanaga tagana
(am I not eligible for affection)
Swajanavanamunakai poritine
(fought for own people)
Satyamu sthiramani chatitine
(proclaimed truth is permanent)
satyagrahabalamu chupitive
(you have shown the strength of Satyagraha)
janulaku premanu bodhinchitive
(you have taught love to people)
Kadaleni vyadha nurumadagala
(to fight out the unending sorrow)
gati niva vina maridorakadura
(without you no way)
EDi Egatiaina mananura
(no stoping at any cost)
Raju jivanamaragamu Jupumura
(Show me the right path).

Song in praise of Gandhiji
(6) Jaya Jaya Mahatma Gandhi ji He
(Victory to Mahatma Gandhiji)
Bharata Bhagya Vidhai
(Giver of Glory to India)
Patita pala prema sila
(ruler of vices and virtuous quality of prema)
Harijanabhayadata
(Fearless to Harijans)
Ni padankamulanti Naduva
(follow your footsteps)
Jayamu konguna muta kada
(victory is not near)

natajana badha pahari
(remover of pains of the poor)

Nijamu ni pada seva
(Your service is true!)

Song 1 gives the message that all human beings are one. “Let us be prepared to die for the welfare of Malas, i.e., Harijans.” Ramakrishna Paramahamsa said that service to humankind was service to God. Similarly in this, it is made known that Harijan seva is Hari seva, i.e., service to Harijan is service to God.

In Song 2, there is a message to Harijans. A clarion call is given to the Harijans to arise. In order to improve their condition an epoch maker Gandhiji has come.

Song 3 is the highlight of Grihalakshmi. The relevance of this song is much more in present days in the light of anti arrack campaign launched in Andhra by women of Andhra. A tremendous movement originated in Dubagunta village went on thanks to women activists of the movement, ban on liquor is achieved.5

5Contrary to the public mood, recently the ban on liquor was lifted in Andhra Pradesh.
The message in song 3 is so powerful that independent India introduced prohibition in many states. It is urged, to open the eyes and recognise the harsh reality of liquor consumption. It is made clear that the habit of consuming liquor toddy spoils health, drains wealth, robs off the peace of housewife who cannot take care of her children who were malnourished and maldressed. The song warns the addicts that what they consume is not toddy but the blood of their family members. The evil habit is compared with an epidemic.

The rulers perpetuate it for financial benefit, but it is a sure road that leads the country to astute poverty. So Indians, drive out the devil and implant Indian glory. This song was a rage which made the film a box office hit.

In song 4 however the dominant patriarchal ideology is propagated. Female's birth, living, giving birth to children and her dying are all seen in relation to their benefit to a male in family and society.

In short, woman is created, shaped and explained by the male world and is to be understood in terms of this world. Popular sentiment is, “woman's honour is like a clay pot, once broken it cannot be mended.” So, only a man protects her honour. Pativrata is her honour. Thali is her honour and her husband is her
everything. The happiness of her husband is her happiness. She should say no to her husband. Only God can save the situation and mend her husband. As a housewife she has to suffer silently and be tolerant. The great Satis like Anasuya, Sumati are role models of Indian women. Even at the cost of loosing her own life, service to husband ought to be her ideal. By quoting the tales of Satis male order legitimizes its sway over females. This is cultural hegemony.

In song 5, the spirit of Gandhian ideology truth and non-violence are mentioned. Radha prays before the photo of Gandhiji. She prays for the needed courage to continue the path of truth and nonviolence. At any cost she decides to continue the right path. She thinks excepting Gandhi none can guide her. Through this song the film maker endorses the Gandhian ideology.

Song 6, shows how the hero and heroine are united at last. The reformed and transformed hero, the Gandhian worker Gopinath, the heroine who has utmost faith on Gandhiji and many other inmates of the Ashrama praise Gandhiji. They say Gandhi is giver of wealthy India, saviour of Harijans and works for the upliftment of downtrodden. They wished victory to Gandhiji.

Grihalakshmi: A Political Propaganda
Charlie Chaplin attacked the evils of capitalism not politically but through films showing humanitarian values. American imperialism could not tolerate even this subtle reference and chased him out of America.\(^6\) The Kid \([1921]\), The Gold Rush \([1927]\), The Circus \([1927]\), City Lights \([1931]\), Modern Times \([1936]\), The Great Dictator \([1940]\) and Monsieur Verdoux \([1947]\) were the films of Charlie Chaplin, produced between 1920 and 1947. Chaplin through his films criticised the social system. He never gave any political plan. The naked picture of contemporary society was well depicted by him.\(^7\) Contemporary political situation finds a place in cinemas. In India, national movement was intensified by 1935. As a result the need for historical films has arisen. They acted as morale boosters by reminding ancient glory of India and enhancing the old value system. The great historical films like Pukar \([1936]\), Jhansi Ki Rani \([1936]\) and Sikandar \([1941]\) were produced to instil feeling of 'pride of motherland'. In this process a mild communalism was encouraged, e.g., Pukar. Telugu film industry did not lag behind and in fact is even more conscious. Social reform, patriotism, conscious recognition of the plight of contemporary India, right reaction to the existing situation and giving message

\(^6\) Rahi, "Cinemas – Political Propaganda," in Praja Sahiti, August 1987, p. 34.

were all the themes of early Telugu movies. *Mala pilla* is the pioneering social cinema of Telugus. The speciality of *Mala Pilla* is that social standards are better defined in this film. (A critical study of *Mala Pilla* is done in chapter four). *Grihalakshmi* was released immediately after *Mala Pilla*. Gandhiji's political activities find a place in *Grihalakshmi*. Though *Grihalakshmi* is a social movie about a man who doomed his career through vices it is better used as a propaganda film of Gandhian politics. *Kallumanandoi* song is replica of the picketings done at the toddy shops in the national movement. As a matter of fact, the specific feature of Telugu films from 1938 to 1945 is the inclusion of patriotic songs, verses, symbols, etc., all echos of Congress ideology. Jashuva, Tummala Sitarama Murty, Garimella Satyanarayana and a host of others penned the glorious past of Andhras and thereby created self respect among the people. Cinemas of the time *Mala Pilla*, *Ryotu Bidda* and *Grihalakshmi* also propagate this ideology.  

**Historical Films**

Next to the myth comes history and its related types: biographies of well known saints and other great people, historical legends, films with wars as a background and the sagas of patriots and freedom fighters. Being non-fictional, they are supposed to be based on the truth, but the Indian cinema has mostly acted under the presumption that they need not be strictly factual.

In the early silent years the motivation was to show the heroic quality of kings like Shivaji, whose exploits against the Mughals had a strong nationalist impact too. Another episode, *Kalyan Khajina* (Treasures of Kalyan) where Shivaji honourably protects a woman belonging to the Mughal enemy camp produced by Saburao Painter, gained wide popularity. These two were a few to be mentioned. In the talkie period Sohrab Modi set the tradition for grand historical. *Pukar, Sikander* and *Prithvi Vallabh* were a massive success. Straight biographical pictures like *Light of Asia* (1925-26) on Buddha, *Prabhats Sant Tukaram, Dr.Kotmis Ki Amar Na ha ni* acted by V.Schantaram are legendary. *Sant Tukaram* becomes the first Indian film to win a Venice festival award. The saints on the screen are loved and worshipped and the actors playing them have the not so deserving honour of feet touching obedience and their

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photos and posters being garlanded in the smallest of towns and villages.\textsuperscript{10}

With the same spirit in Andhra also some films are made. The cinemas of such nature taken for our study are - \textit{Mahatma Gandhi}, [more than a documentary], \textit{Palnati Yuddham} and \textit{Yogi Yamana}.

Song 1 : Chittoor V. Nagaiah and Smt. Rajyaratnam

\textbf{Vandemataram Vandemataram}

(Hail mother, Hail mother)

Song 2 : Smt. Tanguturi Suryakumari

\textit{Padave ratnama pranavabharatagiti}

(Sing spinning wheel the song of sacred Bharati)

\textit{Edu divulalonu eparu ni khyati}

(Your glory spread to seven islands)

\textit{Adave kadura ni ataye makota}

(play of spindle is our fort)

\textit{Veduuke ni nulu leta vennala chalu}

(Your thread is delightful like early moonlight)

\textit{Nikovaye maku Nijamu mukthi ki trova}

(Your path is our real salvation)

\textit{Ni sevaye maku Viswamanawaseva}

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid., p.28.}
(Service to you is service to humanity of the world)

Ni darame Jivanadharame dhatri
(Your thread is the life string in earth)

Ni sutriye maku nityamangala sutri
(Your twine is our perennial sacred thread.)

The importance of Khadi is sung in a **metamorphory** way. Religion is mixed with the manufacture of Khadi. Gandhiji's economic ideology is that through cottage industries India's economic growth can be achieved. Spinning is selected as one of the cottage industries. He practised it apart from preaching.

The song continued further like this -

Kaduradi nannallu **karuvule** levaye
(No famines as long as spindle moves)

Kaduragipogane Kadagallu lavaye
(the moment spindle stops miseries grow)

**Mudakapatalkaina Millugatiyaye**
(Even for coarse cloth, mills are needed)

**Modati** pallela jivaka **masipoye**
(the beauty of early villages gone)

**Viswasodarabhava** Vijnana **Vibhavambu**
(the ideal of universal brotherhood)

Velayinchi Khandanta **Vilayambu** manpane in continents lost
(Edu sandralalo **Vadavadalalona**)
in villages far of in seven seas
(padave ma Gandhi kalyanamayagiti)
(Sing the sacred song of our Gandhi.)

Song 3 : Srimati Rajyaratnam

Vara Gandhi karuna kanara
(Look the mercy of blessed Gandhi)

Maseva mahatma birama
(Service of Mahatma)

Ni seva chala lila Anandamosagu maura
(The miracle of your service)

Ni tyagamahimambe
(Your sacrifice give happiness)

Ahimsa sakti maku nira kripaluvega
(Give us your kindness and power of nonviolence)

0 tyagi Udara Sudhira Mahatma
(Mahatma oh the giver sacred liberal.)

Ni to Ide Swadesa Seva Seyagalamu
(We serve motherland alongwith you)
Bapu Nidu Mahasrama Niyyara Matak
(Bapu give us your laborious quality)
0 tyagi Udara Sudhira Mahatma
(Mahatma oh the giver sacred liberal.)

Song 4 : Smt. Pasupuleti Kannamba
Anta Santi Kada
(Is not all peace)

Santi Kanti Satya Ahimsa
(peace, light, truth, non-violence)

Puja Vidhiga Seya
(do the daily ritual)

Ramanamamu Harijana seva
(Name of Rama service to Harijans (untouchables))

Manava dharmamu kada
(Is not the work of Humankind.)

Song 5: Smt. Rajyaratnam

Endu chuda Nive Gandhi
(Gandhi you are everywhere)

Edesakega Antata
(Wherever we go everywhere)

Ni mahimega GAndhi
(Your miracle Gandhi)

Bharata Sobha Bhuvilojupi
(You have shown the glory of India on earth)

Santisamaramuna Sadhana chesi
(Tried in the battle of peace)

Matri seva Mahima chati
(You have propagated the service to motherland)

Santa Hridaya mahita sadaya
(Oh heart of peace on earth)

Hotalulona Edouro Gandhi

(Gandhi you are to be seen in hotels)

Calendar pai Mohana Gandhi

(The beautiful Gandhi on Calendars.)

The Telugu film Mahatma Gandhi, as stated, is not a mere documentary. This film's running time is more than two hours, something like a short feature film. The commentary and songs in the film have made this almost a regular feature film. Particularly, the songs are in very easy telugu and were sung by popular singers like Swarajya Kumari and others. The lyrics have the flavour of Gandhian ideology. Particularly the Charaka song is appealing. The story of Mahatmaji is better understood as the commentary is written by noted writer Tapi Dharma Rao Naidu who has already made himself familiar with the cine going audiences in Andhra.

The life and contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to India is visualised through this film. The vast illiterate innocent mass of Andhra who could not read newspapers were delighted to know who

\(^{11}\)Tanguturi Swarajya Kumari was a very popular and melodious singer of yesteryears in South India.

\(^{12}\)The story is given in Chapter III.
was Gandhi and what was the role being played by him in their emancipation.

Palnati Yuddham is a historical film. A historical film would be one where history itself is the subject of the films, and not merely the background of a plot that could be transposed into any other context.\textsuperscript{13} The aim of a historical film is to give the average spectator who may not know much history. Today, with cinema and television, history experiences a new form of expression; what asset does this bring to its intelligibility? The example of the Battleship Potemkin is linked to the preceding problem: The images of the Revolution of 1905 which dominate our memory are by far those from Eisenstein's work.\textsuperscript{14} The contribution of cinema to the intelligibility of historical phenomena varies according to the degree of its autonomy and its aesthetic contribution. Whether they deal with the history of great men (Napoleon) or highlight the action of groups (Pudovkins Mother, Renoir's La Marseillaise, etc.) these films reproduce dominant (or oppositional) currents of thought. Similarly, historical films in Japan can make use of

\textsuperscript{13}Frederic Vitoux, "Cinema and History," A Symposium in Deep Focus, [Film Quarterly], November 1988, Bangalore, p.15.

\textsuperscript{14}Mark Ferro, "Is there A Filmic Writing of History?," in Deep Focus, November 1988, p.28.
traditions and structures which are still to be found in contemporary Japanese life and mentality.\textsuperscript{15}

In India, \textit{Death of Narayana Rao Peshava}, produced and directed by S.N. Patankar was the first historical film (1915). In 1926 Himanshu Rai produced, in collaboration with a German concern, \textit{The Light of Asia} directed by Franz Osten, starred Himanshu Rai as Buddha and narrated the life story of Buddha. It is even today considered to be a classic. The first historical talkie feature film was produced by Imperial in 1931. Directed by Ezra Mir, it recounted the historic romance of Nurjehan and Jehangir. \textit{Pukar} was the most spectacular historical made in India. It recreated the pomp and glory of the Mughal Empire. The legend of Anarkali was a great success. So far the best historical feature film is \textit{Gandhi}, produced partly by National Film Development Corporation and directed by Richard Attenborough.\textsuperscript{16}

Coming to \textit{Palnati Yuddham}, it is the foremost and the first historical film in Telugu. It is a story of Telugus which really happened in Palnadu in Guntur District. It's very popular as story and ballet. It was released in 1948. In fact Gudavalli Ramabrahmam


had conceived it in 1937 itself, but it was postponed. After filming 3 sets, Gudavalli Ramabrahmam became ill. L.V. Prasad continued it. Gudavalli Ramabrahmam extensively read books relating to *Palnati Yuddham*. He specially organised ballads on *Palnati Yuddham* and was instrumental in giving programmes in Bezawada, the sole aim is to create awareness among people by this story. Srinatha's Dwipiada gave him much historical understanding. The script was completely prepared by G.Ramabrahmam only. Later L.V.Prasad proceeded strictly in accordance with the script. According to Associate Director K.J. Mohan of the film, all the weapons used in the film were manufactured on seeing the original ones preserved in a temple in Karempudi. The battle scenes were produced in Madras. But mostly there were original scenes of the battle which were already produced in a Marathi war film "Chandarao More". The *Palnati Yuddham* roles were superimposed on these battle scenes.

The most significant feature of the film is the character of Brahmanaidu. Brahmanna lived for one religion, one caste and one God. For him there were no caste barriers. He organised community dining. Harijans were allowed to enter temples. The social reform activities of Brahma Naidu attracted the spectators more than the war scenes. The film ran to packed houses.\(^17\) *Palnati Yuddham* was

\(^{17}\)Sukumar, "First Historical Film in Telugu: *Palnati Yuddham*," in *Vijaya Chitra*, January 1989, p.47.
a musical hit. It won the praises of critics. The success of Palnati Yuddham became a trend setter in the history of Telugu historical films.

In the beginning of the eleventh century, the Andhra region with its fertile coastal tracks was still under the political sway of Eastern Chalukyan dynasty. Later, sandwiched between the two rival neighbouring dynasties, the Western Chalukyas and the Cholas of Tanjore, the rule of the Chalukyas of Vengi turned out to be a shortlived one, for they were effectively replaced by the regional feudatories. The political destiny of Andhra, till the end of twelfth century, was marked by the internecine warfare among the mandalikas or feudatories; the prominent among them were Velanadu Chodas, Kota chiefs of Dharanikota, Kondapadmati chiefs of Nadendla Parichchedi's for Omerumarga and Haihayas of Palnadu.\textsuperscript{18} This political rivalry among the Chalukya Chola feudatories reached a flash point in 1182 A.D. in a battle at Karempudi (Palnadu) in Guntur District. This war was immortalized in several folk ballads and also in Srinatha's Palnati Vira Charitram (the history of Heroes of Palnadu).\textsuperscript{19} While the political consequences of the war was clearly the establishment of Kakatiya 'overlordship' in Andhra,

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{K.A. Nilakanta Sastry, Th\textsuperscript{o} Cholas, Vols. 2, Madras, 1937.}

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Srinatha, Palnati Vira Charitram,} written in Telugu in the 15th century - between 1400-1420 A.D. It was a beautiful Manjari Dwipada metre and reads like a war song. Akkiraju Umakantham [ed.], Madras, 1955.
the social and religious ramifications were not so important. One can, however, discern a broad pattern of social and religious changes that preceded and followed the Palnad war. In Palnati Veera Charitram and Kre edabh iramamu the events that led the feudatories into a destructive battle were suggestively linked to the radical, social and religious reforms initiated by Brahmanaidu within Vaishnava tradition. Though the rise of militant Virasaivism in Karnataka, under Basava was contemporaneous to Brahmanaidu's Vaishanava reform, the influence of the former on Andhra events was suggested in the oral and written tradition at the level of hostility, for Nayakuralu Nagamma, who said to have brought war on Brahmanaidu, was an ardent supporter of Saivism.

Being the virtual ruler, Brahmanaidu, an ardent follower of Vaishnivism started a radical social and religious reform movement in Palnad. This brought him in direct conflict with Nalagamaraju, who, like his ancestors was a follower of Saivism.

Meanwhile, the King's step-brother (Peda Malideva) and others, came under the influence of Brahmanaidu and actively championing the cause of reformed Vaishnavism. This conflict between the followers of two rival religions spread over 12 years, resulted in a civil war among the step brothers for nearly seven years.

years (1175-82), ultimately culminating in the destructive war at Karempudi in 1182 A.D. The role of Nayakuralu Nagamma was perceived in contradictory ways. Being a woman, a widow and a Saivite from the Reddi caste, she challenged Brahmanaidu's reformed Vaishnavism. A critical study of oral tradition and the texts produced on her, especially from the early decades of the 20th century, would enable us to comprehend the popular admiration and at the same time, hostility towards women's intervention in public life.

During the war at Karempudi, as per the version of Srinatha's Palnati Veera Charitra, the soldiers of Brahmanaidu drawn from various kulalu (professional classes) i.e., brahman, panchama, shepherd, potter and washerman were made to inter-dine (sahabantibhojanam popularly known as chapakudu or cosmopolitan dinner) in the battle field. Vallabharayudu, in his work Kreedabhiramamu, goes to the extent of suggesting that the policy of inter-dining adopted by Brahmanaidu to break the socio-cultural and religious barriers among the castes was the chief cause for the war. The intermingling of several communities through inter-dining had initiated a cultural change resulting in the formation of a very powerful middle level Padmanayaka peasant artisanal warrior

22Unnava Lakshminarayana, Nayakuralu, [Telugu], Machilipatnam, 1969.
community. However, the community of Padmanayakas, forged by Brahmanayudu was not devoid of internal fissures.

The *kulas* of the Malas and Madigas considered to be untouchables were also integrated into the Padmanayaka community, albeit loosely, for they seem to have remained on the periphery during the war at Karempudi in 1182 A.D. One Kannama, being a Mala completely devotes himself to Brahmanaidu. Today in Palnadu, the Malas and Madigas might very intensely relate themselves to the creed and tradition of Brahmanaidu as is shown by Gen. H. Roghair.  

*Palnati Yuddham* is compared with the epic *Mahabharat*. The parallels sought for are - (both are civil wars for kingdom)

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We find a close parallel between Brahmanaidu and Mahatma Gandhiji. Brahmanaidu was much against the division of Palnadu. He was a Vaishnavite and his belief for Lord Chennakesava was unquestioning. He was against the differences of caste, creed and religion. He never practised untouchability. He brought caste unity through cosmopolitan dining. But for him, depressed classes would not have dreamt of their entry into the temple of Chennakesava at Macherla. Balachandra had close friends from all castes. Brahmanaidu treated all of them as his children. Thus the maker of this film wanted to bring a parallel between Brahmanaidu and Gandhiji. The division of Palnadu reminds us of the division of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Gudavalli Ramabrahmam a thorough nationalist felt the pinch of proposed partition of India and he wanted to remind us that the division of India would bringforth the same evils as did the division of Palnadu wrought upon. 'United we stand, divided we fall' was the maxim which the director Ramabrahmam wanted to bringforth.

Generally, all wars in India were alleged to have waged in the name of religion. Palnati Yuddham also is in the same line. Brahmanaidu in the name of Vaishnavism brought depressed classes such as Malas and Madigas into the mainfold of society, but Nagamma protagonist of Saivism stood for traditions. She championed the cause of social hierarchy.
Mala kuduga mare mana matamu mana dharmamu
(Changed our religion and tradition in the name of
dining) with malas (the depressed classes)

Malalu palanati sima, manyamuga pondadvrata
(The land of Palnadu is going to be handed over to Malas)
(depressed classes)

Vinnara Samantulu, kannara Gandumagalu
(Oh feudatories, listen!, Oh! brave look!)

Rachapadi Nilupandi Randi! Randi!
(Come! Come! restore the valour of kings.)

This is the call given by Nalagamma to all feudatories to save
Palnadu from going into the hands of Malas. It's an attempt of
saving the social hierarchy against Brahmanaidu's attempts to bring
social equality.

The hero worship continued to date in Karempudi every year.
Their weapons are still preserved and worshipped. People from
Yadavas and Malas participate in this function in large numbers.
Members of Madigas are not allowed here, because it is believed
that Madigas fled from battle of Palnadu without fighting on the
side of Brahmanaidu.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24}Gopichand, “Palnati Virula Charitra, Tenugunati Bhratam,” in
Prajamitra [special issue], January 1939 (Pongal) pp.8-10.
The battle was a destructive one. In the end it was shown in the film that both Nagamma and Brahmanaidu got united. With repentance they sing a song in front of Lord Channakesava extolling the importance of peace.

Nagamma: Tanavaru Peravalarani, Tara Tama Bhavamulumani
(Let there be no difference between we and they
Let there be no difference between our ideas)

Brahmanna: Jagadanandame Paramartha Muga
(Divine bliss should be our goal)
Narulu Bratukarada......
(With aim let the human beings live)

Nagamma & Brahman: Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram
Tolerance is permanent
Love, Equality, peace be permanent
Peace is permanent
Peace is permanent.

Doctor G.V. Subba Rao as Brahman, Smt. Kannamba as Nagamma phenomenally contributed for the success of Palnati Yuddham. Akkineni Nageswara Rao, the romantic hero of Telugu films acted as Balachandrudu. Nagamma Talagotti Nalagamubatti song was sung by Akkineni Nageswara Rao himself. Nageswara Rao is all in praise for
Gudavalli Ramabrahma
t and he treats him as his guru. The scenes of Manchala (acted by S. Varalakshmi) and Balachandra were effectively picturised by G. Ramabrahma. Nageswara Rao says GR was encouraging him as this will bring him fame.

The moonlight scene is highlight of this film. The quality of director Ramabrahma is very distinctive. The shadows of clouds are portrayed on the face of Manchala - a high quality of technique.


26 Views of Sri K.S. Prakasa Rao, renowned film producer and S. Hari Purushothama Rao a noted film critic expressed during our interview with them on 21 May 1994 and 3 June 1994 respectively.
Yogi Vemana

Reformer Vemana's birth year: 1672

birth place: Moogachintala in Cuddapah or Kurnool or Chittoor Districts.

Vemana was a villager by birth belongs to Reddy caste. By no means a learned man, but a man of profound thought, of great reflective power and penetrating intuition into life and its secular and spiritual problems. His poetry is a spring, pure and undefined, entirely spontaneous and original in thought and in style. In three short lines he gives us a whole poem. If brevity is the soul of wit, perhaps there has been no greater wit in the world. All his smiles and metaphors are drawn from woods and fields and rural scenes. His deep intuition penetrated into the problems of life, secular and spiritual. It is the hypocrites whom he denounced, that pretend to spirituality while grovelling in sensuality. Vemana attacks with ruthless logic the different religions current in his time, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Lingaithism and Buddhism. Vemana's style ranges from bitter and caustic to mild sarcasm, gentle irony and sweet humour. Humour is his characteristic. It was Voltaire who laid down that most powerful

of all was that in dealing with superstition. There is no use arguing. For superstition is not amenable to reason. Sneer at it and make it ridiculous, that will have more effect. Here is an instance of voltarian humour of Vemana. Evils like social inequalities, gradations and degradations based on birth are attacked by him. There is not even a single aspect of Hindu religiosity which has not been the target of Vemana’s satire. To cite, “Can we get salvation by bathing frequently? Why, then, all the fishes must be saved! can we get salvation by smearing ourselves with ashes? Why then, a donkey rolls frequently in ashes?”

Historcity of Vemana:

The changes in the political economy during the 16th through 18th centuries brought certain changes in the social and cultural life of the people of Andhra. The recent historiography shows that there was expansion in internal material production and a progressive integration of this region into international maritime trade and commerce which undoubtedly had positive social consequences.29 The changes in production and the emergence and economic expansion of several artisanal classes brought pressures on the existing socio-cultural system, as it closed the internal


mobility. The basic characteristics of any system which is opening up economically needs an open, dynamic and fairly secular cultural system. It is in this context, one must locate the growth of critique of Vaishnavism cum Varna system by reformers like Potuluri Veerabrahamam and Vemana.

The Veerasaiva tradition of the transgression of traditional social order with its distinction of high caste, low caste and outcaste once again revived in the ideas of Vemana. He attacked everything which was held only and inviolable by the Brahmanical elite. In a way, Vemana replicates at a popular cultural level the pattern of earlier ideological critique of Varna, Jati, Kula, Vedic sacrifices and moral precepts, codes of law elaborated by Dharmasastras, mediation of priestly class, idolatry and Hindu religious beliefs. He did not even spare Veerasaiva's worshipping of Lingam. He affirms the need to honour different artisanal and other economic activities, as did Virasaivas. He sees God in human being and negates any mediation of gurus in real life.30

To quote Narla,

"It will be wrong to conclude.... that Vemana is irreligious. On the contrary he is very religious. He forsake everything mundane. His religion repudiates polytheism; it pours scorn on idol worship, it condemns all ritualism; it discourages

pilgrimage. Vemana's religion places man right in the centre of the universe. He affirms that man is one with God, may, is himself god, provided he attains perfect self realization. Because of this central place of man in Vemana's religion, even if one is not in agreement with its metaphysical connotations, it is basically humanistic."^{31}

K.V. Reddy has taken up this lively subject, the life of Vemana, a social reformer and a literary genius. Chittoor V. Nagaiah lived in the role of historic Vemana. There is slight distortion regarding story. The available theses on Vemana tell that he is married. His wife gave him lot of trouble. In the film Vemana is not married and indulges in womanization. Mohanangi, the courtesan, is his weakness. The earlier part of hero is happy go lucky type. He couldn't help falling a prey to Mohanangi's trap. Vemana's second weakness is his attachment to Jyothi, the daughter of his brother. We find a daring frankness in him. Vemana admits the guilt of taking away the necklace of his sister-in-law in order to present it to Mohanangi. Similarly, his will power is so strong that he determines not to see the face of his brother unless he procures gold through rasavada. His dearest Jyothi's ill health too never deviates his decision. He ultimately comes to know the harsh truth that the gold he created out of chemicals does not any

^{31}Ibid., p.2.
way bring back the life of Jyothi. This brought radical change in Vemana. After considerable search or renunciation Bhogi Vemana becomes Yogi Vemana.

Idena Intena Jivita Sara Midena
(Is it, This much only Is this all life)
Antuleni Ii jivana vaibhavamu Antayu
(This unending glory of life))
Tudaku nasinchutakena Intena
(Is to perish at the end, is it).
Atapatala nalarinchusu selayetiole
(Like a stream, promising in games)
Veligare bratuku Idena
(life is closed, is it.)
Kilakila navvenchu Tolakarivalapula
(Laughing like monsoon showers - love life )
Olakavoyu javarali oyaram idena
(of the love's youthfulness is this,)
Dachukunna Vayasantayu maganiki
(All the hidden youth sacrificing)
Dochi ichchu illalugati idena
(to husband - is this fate of housewife)
Puritipapa Chirupedavulatakuna
(On the touch of infant's lips)
Murisipoiru Balenta bratuku idena
(Liking mother's life is this much only)
Tamabalagamu dhana dhyananulamugani

(Looking at the riches of grain and wealth and ones own strength)
Tanise mudusali perasa phalamidena

(The desire and proudness of the aged man is this)
Sakalasastrastramula parachadivina, akhila desamulakraminchi na

(Though read all vedas and conquered all countries)
Kattakadaku Ti Kayamu Vididu

(At last leaving this body)
Mattigalisipovalena, Mattigalisipovalena

(Should end in crematorium, end in soil.)

Vemana thus understands what is life.

Vemana's philosophy as seen in film

This body and this wealth are not permanent. Only virtues are permanent.
The charity with pomp and show is bad. Charity with kindheartedness is good both here and in the outerworld.

Do not get entangled with wife, children and all. Lead virtuous life. That is permanent.
Shun violence. Love all the living beings.
Lord Shiva does not like those who indulge in violence. Shiva is in living bodies.

Show no difference to you and me let there be no differences. The spirit is universal in all beings.

In the end there is praise of Vemana thus:

Vedateetudu Vemana **Sumandi**
(Vemana is above Vedas)

Vemana bodhalu Vinarandi
(Come listen the teachings of Vemana)

**Matamula** Perita - **Matsaralato**
(Divisions in the name of religions)

Manava **himsalu manandi**
(Stop harm to humankind)

Anni **matalaku Airthamboka te**
(The central theme of all religions is one)

Anta cheruta Achatenandi
(Know all reach there only (crematorium))

Bahu **punyajitham narajanmam**
(the existence of this human life is the result of many a past virtue)

**Vyartham** cheyuta tagadandi
(wastage of this life is not desired)

Janana **maramamula marmamerigina**
(Those who know the secret of birth and death)
The poetry of Vemana is like air and is all pervasive. It is said that 'there is no one who do not wet in rain and who do not hear about Vemana'. So, Vauhini pictures through K.V.Reddy immortalised Vemana by producing Yogi Vemana. Everybody who is aware of verses of Vemana is attracted to view this film. Their appetite to know about the great man Vemana is noticed by K.V. Reddy and a grand feast Yogi Vemana is served. Nagaiah is already a rage among Telugu cine audience and this time they viewed him in the historic role of Vemana. The viewers well appreciated the film.

Vemana hails from a feudal family. The dominant feudal values found space in this film. Vemana's attachment to undivided family, respect to the male head of the family i.e, his brother, reverence to sister-in-law who extends motherly affection, fondness towards brother's daughter Jyothi and, apart from all, going astray are his qualities. His economic position and social status made him carefree and go astray. This is the society which gives less importance to manual labour. Prostitution as an institution continues in this feudal order. Kamalakara Kameswara Rao is a reputed film director who worked as assistant director for the picture Yogi Vemana. He says, Yogi Vemana for him is an ideal
cinema. He thinks that it is his fortune to work for such a film like Yogi Vemana.

Vemana preached in simple telugu for reaching common man is his objective. Vemana initially was Bhogi (who enjoys life to the brim of his heart) and later on turned a Yogi. Vemana a pleasure seeking man is unusually a progressive, an atheist and a humanitarian. The plight of shivering old poor lady made him to grab the cloth of goddess in the temple and covers the old lady with this cloth unhesitatingly. His carelessness never made him anarchic. He has every respect for his brother and sister-in-law.

In order to give a good treatment and maintain tempo, some new characters have been introduced although they are not found in the original life of Vemana, a historic person. The character of Abhiramayya is one such creation. Vemana questions, 'chavu nergugaleni chaduveti chaduvaya' i.e., 'the education which does not know what is death, is not education at all.' This is the central point of Indian philosophy and it is precisely the central theme of the film. Vemana master minded this philosophy. We cannot find a film so spiritually well made as Vemana.

How Vemana renounced worldly life is unknown in history. This gap was filled with the creation of Jyothi, the child character in the film, and the death of Jyothi brought radical change in the life of Vemana. Jyothi's death very much moved him and he began to think of the secret of death. In the process Bhogi Vemana became Yogi Vemana. He propagated the knowledge that he had acquired in easy Telugu verses. He had become people's poet. No ascetic person before him made known oneself to the people so easily as Vemana.

Vemana's story is most uncinematic but by using sequences and characters carefully Vemana is produced as a prestigious movie of Telugus. It's technically high quality picture. The well known writer and Poet, Samudrala Raghavacharyulu, penned the dialogues, laden with philosophy. In smasana, i.e., graveyard Vemana hits one scull which he picks up and sings "is it? is it the essence of life". The scene is highlight of the picture (The full text of the song is given in this chapter). Human life since infancy to old age is philosophically explained in this scene which earned the appraisal of critics and producers and directors of foreign films who attended International Film Festival of India in 1952."

Yogi Vamana brought many laurels to the music composer, singer and actor V. Nagaiah. His action is simply superb. Particularly in the scene where he is going to be buried alive (sajiva samadhi). Nagaiah's action is unparallelled. The picturisation of this scene deserves special mention. The photography of Marcus Bartley, the art direction of Sekhar, the acting skills of actors all merged into one and took shape as Yogi Vemana.\textsuperscript{34} It's creator is the great K.V. Reddy who is well versed with film techniques and also known for his managerial abilities in film industry. Yogi Vemana is the idol and K.V. Reddy is the sculptor.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.