

**Effects on Filmmaking process and Film Artist, Crew  
Members, Backstage Artist while OTT Platform**

**Saurabh Dinkarrao Khawale**

(Researcher at OPJS University Rajasthan)

**Dr Vijaypal Singh**

(Associate Professor, at OPJS University Rajasthan Churu)

**Abstract**

The present study primarily intends to document how textbooks and reference textbooks on film studies written by Western and diaspora authors either belittled Indian cinema as masala genre or glorified the moniker Bollywood as a signifier of pan-Indianness, overlooking the significant contributions of the Telugu film industry, which is the twin brother of the Hindi film industry both in genesis and growth (since 1931) and even today runs neck to neck with Hindi cinema in the production of films and film remakes. The study argues that Indian cinema has never been examined at the modernist (foundation) level of its structural perspectives comprising innovations of production, cultural flows in the delineation of regional variations, and fine arts including aesthetics consisting of six arts and genres that are native, distinct, and unique. Drawing its support from de-Westernizing media studies, the article posits that lack of familiarity with the Indian cultural and linguistic traditions, together with its complex structure and semiotics rooted in religious classics, which are portrayed more effectively in Telugu cinema than in Hindi cinema, is the reason for the failure of Western academia to negotiate the complex meaning processes of these filmic communications.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, cinema, communication theory, cultural studies, culture

**Introduction**

The Indian cinema, one of the world's largest filmmaking industries, came into existence at about the same time the French and the American filmmakers began to create short silent films, or cinematographic exhibitions, after the invention of the motion camera by the Lumiere brothers in 1895. Since that time, it has undergone the same stages of development that film industries in the West have undergone. It has also contributed to the classical film communication traditions, which Hollywood held in high esteem (1908–1927) until the French New Wave, auteur and realism, pioneered by Jean-Luc Godard, collided with it (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 1998). During the silent era (1896–1930), India produced over 1,000 films, though few remain now (Kumar, 2004). Indian films are seen not only in South Asia and Southeast Asia but also in East Africa, Mauritius, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Britain, Canada, Australia, the United States, and the former Soviet Union (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 1998).

Despite all its credit-worthy performances, Indian cinema unfortunately did not receive the prominence it deserved in scholarly works by Western authors of film communication. Although some Western standard textbooks (Mast & Kawin, 2011; Nelmes, 1996; Thoraval, 2000) cover Hindi cinema as Indian cinema or Bollywood,<sup>1</sup> and described its fragmented narrative as an unrealistic masala genre, the other reference texts produced by the Bollywood zed academia<sup>1</sup> interpreted Hindi cinema as Bollywood, while embracing the entire cultural industry by expanding it beyond the Hindi cinema industry from postcolonial, postmodern, and postcritical perspectives. The latter even tried to equate Bollywood with Hollywood in terms of crossover, transnational, and diasporic films (Ashcroft, 2012; Athique, 2012; Dwyer, 2007; Dwyer & Pinto, 2011; Gehlawat, 2010; Paranjape, 2012; Roy, 2012; Roy &Huat, 2012; Vasudevan, 2000, 2011).

However, a keen study of the articles and books about Indian film studies, which began to surface in post-1980s, reveals that at no time in the past

was an effort made to situate the Indian film industry in its legitimate modernist or foundationist perspectives (Smith, 2001). For instance, all the Western authors, including those cited above, have treated American cinema first at the modernist or structuralist level to show the superiority of mise-en-scène and their messages in the filmmaking processes of early films such as *Stage Coach* (1939), *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Crossfire* (1947), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960). These studies have not only laid the reference frames for further studies but also offered philosophical foundations for film studies. We strongly believe such studies are essential to have a holistic understanding of Indian cinema, and unfortunately they have not happened in respect of Indian film studies to date. Indian society is largely a traditional and modernist one, despite its four and a half century-old history of slavery under the Mughals followed by the British. Logic demands that the film production, which began during modernist/ foundationist times (the first silent film in Hindi was in 1912 and in Telugu in 1921), should have been thoroughly studied first from their structural and cultural (including semiotics) perspectives before attempting to interpret it from postcolonial, postmodern, and postcritical theoretical perspectives (Murthy, 2012). Having said this, one might think that we are ignorant of the arguments raised with regard to the applicability of nation-state to India by any postcritical theorists like Rajadhyaksha and Willemsen (1999) and Vasudevan (2000, 2011). At the same time, we refuse to accept the critique of postcritical theorists describing Indian folk and mythological films as revivalist and in poor taste (Abbas, 1961; Bruhaspathi, 1949; Prasad, 1998). In the present study, we sought to show how both Western authors and Bollywoodized academia have missed highly important and culturally significant contributions from the Telugu film industry, which is the legitimate twin brother of the Hindi film industry and was born in the same sets that shot the first talkie film *AlamAra* (1931) to the larger frame of Indian cinema.

The study further points out that despite the attempts of Bollywoodized academia to extend the meaning of the term Bollywood (see our dissent with this term in our review of the literature) as a pan-Indian signifier in

terms of market, production, and distribution besides other postcritical theoretical perspectives (Roy, 2012; Roy & Huat, 2012), the truth is that none of the authors cited above make a reference to a single Telugu film in their lengthy works. For this reason, these authors have failed to note the way the Telugu industry vied with Hindi cinema for distribution both within India and abroad. Additionally, there seemed to be no consensus among these authors as to the precise definition of the term Bollywood (Dwyer & Pinto, 2011; Gehlawat, 2010; Vasudevan, 2011). The Telugu film industry has contributed immensely to Indian film by developing genres focusing on mythological, folk, and social themes while exploring innovative approaches to mise-en-scène. In fact, Telugu cinema became a role model in the modernist film era from costume and set design to narrative and innovations in editing, superimposing, and sound design (Murthy, 2013). The unique combinations of music, dance, art, painting, and sculpture in Telugu films created a niche for the film industry in Indian and Western markets (e.g., *Magadheera*, 2009 directed by S. S. Rajamouli grossed over US\$ 24,240,000 00 in India and abroad). This research examines the Telugu film tradition through a heuristic lens filling a gap in the existing literature on Indian cinema that has been dominated by discussions on Bollywood.

Furthermore, we propose in this study that both Telugu and Hindi cinema should be considered as Indian cinema from the modernist and structuralist perspective because these two larger industries have experienced parallel and common developments since the silent era. This research argues that the Telugu cinema may even eclipse the fundamental contributions of Hindi cinema to Indian film narratives and genres (see Table 1), contrary to the views that Dwyer (2007) expressed about Hindi cinema in her book *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*. The popularity of Telugu hero N. T. Rama Rao (NTR) was so high that his iconic image as Lord Krishna appeared on the front cover of the inaugural issue of the prestigious film study journal *BioScope* (published by Sage). A recent study concerning the “Greatest Actor of All Time” conducted by CNN-IBN television (2013) had shown that NTR is still the most admired actor by the majority of Indians.

**Review of Literature**

We have encountered a paradox while critically examining the standard text- books and reference texts (cited earlier) produced by Western authors and Bollywoodized academia. Most of the standard texts produced by Western authors (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004; Mast & Kawin, 2011; Nelmes, 1996; Stam, 2000; Thoraval, 2000) are usually prescribed for graduate and under- graduate students in universities both in the United States and in India. Although these books reflected a limited awareness of Indian cinema and its possible role in the global media from the perspectives of cross-cultural analysis and innovations in filmmaking processes, the other reference texts written by Bollywoodized academia inspired by postcolonial, postmodern, and postcritical theories began to circulate the myth that Bollywood cinema is assuming the stature of Hollywood and is becoming transformed into a global soft power in terms of production, distribution, and box office grosses (Roy & Huat, 2012).

**Important Findings of the Texts of Western Authors**

Nelmes (1996) openly stated that the “critical studies on Indian cinema, both in India and abroad, have been confined to just a handful of books and articles, and most of these have tended to concentrate on the work of ‘art’ film directors such as the internationally renowned Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak or Mrinal Sen” (p. 382), who aped the European realistic cinema as pointed out by Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998). The emphasis on highbrow art films has tended to distort the understanding of Indian cinema, where most of the films.

Table 1. Telugu Film Genres Versus Hollywood Film Genres.

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Genres of Hollywood film narratives

Genres of Telugu film narrativesb

Some popular Telugu filmsb

Westerns

Stage Coach (1939)

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

Mythologicals—based on Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavatam, Puranas

Lavakusa (1963)

PandavaVanavasam (1965)

Mayabazar (1957)

Musicals

The Broadway Melody

(1929)

Sound of Music (1959)

Chicago (2002)

Thrillers

Psycho (1960)

North by North West

(1959)

Sci-fiction

Star Wars (1977)

Avatar (2010)

ET (1982)

Noirs

Crossfire (1947)

The Maltese Falcon

(1941)

Folks—Janapad (dealing with kings vs. their people) hundreds of examples from Telugu than Hindi

Socials (fiction)—human relations versus Indian ethos—Melodrama, comedies, tragedies

Socials (fine arts)—dealing with innovative ideas to eliminate caste/economic barriers through music and dance forms

Socio-fantasies—mixed genre of social and mythological

Spirituals—Lives of saints/ eminent devotees of God

Spy films—Similar to James Bond series

Pathalabhairavi (1951) SuvarnaSundari (Hindi and Telugu) (1957–1958)

Bandipotu (1963)

Aggibarata (1966)

Devadas (1953)

Missamma (1955)

Gundamma Katha (1962)

PandantiKaapuram (1972)

Ghatotkachudu (1995)

SagaraSangamam (1983)

Sankarabharanam (1979)

Srutilayalu (1987)

SwathiMuthyam (1985)

Yamagola (1977)

Yamadonga (2007)

Aditya 369 (1991)

Eega (2012)

Bhakta Tukaram (1973)

Bhakta Jayadev (1961)

Goodachari 116 (1967)

Avekallu (1967)

MosagaallakuMosagaadu (1971)

are lowbrow and mass produced for multicultural audiences from varied

linguistic backgrounds within India (Nelmes, 1996). She described the fragmented narrative of Hindi films as masala genre and the songs as extended narratives.

Although Mast and Kawin (2011) recognized India as the largest feature film producer in the world, they had a very low view of Indian cinema. They were of the opinion that “unlike the Japanese cinema, Indian cinema offered no rich unknown cache of artistry” (Mast & Kawin 2011, p. 429). They traced the low quality and huge quantity of Indian cinema production to several forces that are unique to Indian society. They also pointed out that lack of a common language, such as Chinese, and proliferation of regional cinema in India are a few reasons for the poor quality of Indian cinema.

Two books written by Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (2004) and *Film History: An Introduction* (2009), of which the latter had some discussion of Indian cinema, are nothing but a regurgitation of what we mentioned above. However, Stam (2000), while expressing appreciation for the greatest traditions of Indian filmmaking, stated that “In India, a two-thousand year tradition of theatre, which has impacted Indian cinema, circles back to the classical Sanskrit drama, which tells the myths of Hindu culture through an aesthetic based less incoherent character and linear plot than on the subtle modulation of mood and feeling (rasa)” (p. 21). Stam considers that Third World cinema has engendered its own Third World alternative aesthetics.

Thoraval (2000) is another author from the West who explained Indian cinema in greater detail in his epic book *The Cinemas of India*, which still ended up as a mere aggregation of historical facts about the mainstream industry. Thoraval’s understanding of the regional cinemas, however, was very disappointing and often erroneous, and, like many others, he also suffered from lack of a clear grasp of Indian cultural diversity, ethos, and its complex structures rooted in semiotics. As such, most of these authors had no way to understand, recognize, and project the supremacy of Telugu cinema.

**Important Findings of the Reference Texts of Bollywoodized Academia**

Most of the works that have been reviewed here have focused on the

richness of Bollywood since post-1990s and on the implications of extending the term Bollywood to the entire Indian cinema, including regional cinema (Rajadhyaksha, 2003). In fact, in India even today, the moniker Bollywood refers to the Bombay-based Hindi film industry only. Dwyer (2011) noted that the definition of the term Bollywood is still unsettling with the contradictions stemming from within India among most popular postmodern, postcritical, and postcolonial writers such as Rajadhyaksha (2003) and Vasudevan (2011).

Vasudevan (2011) suggested the restriction of the extension of the term to the commodity function of high-profile, export-oriented Bombay film, which according to him is branding India rather than representing it as an aesthetic form. Vasudevan comprehensively reviewed all the interpretations of the term Bollywood, right from Rajadhyaksha (2003) through many others, including his own. Although he overlooked the conspicuous absence of any analysis of the potential of other Indian cinemas in the discourse on expanding the term Bollywood to the entire Indian cinema, he strongly refuted the suggestion, claiming that in doing so the power of regional cinema has been undermined.

Simultaneously, he also concurred with Dwyer (2011) that no definitive meaning can possibly be ascribed to Bollywood at this time. In effect, he states that “A marked absence in these attempts to diagnose Bollywood, whether by Rajadhyaksha or the British and US based criticism, is any substantial reference to the form, storytelling practices, actorly and star economies and even on- screen performance cultures” (p. 24).

Roy and Huat (2012), who mostly focused on transnational and diaspora films, noted that no formal studies of films in other Indian languages have begun. Paranjape (2012) made an unqualified statement that Bollywood refers not merely to the Hindi film industry, but rather, in a fuller and more nuanced sense, to the multicultural, multilingual, and heterogeneous domain of Indian cinema itself, all of whose filmmaking machines are already integrated in complicated ways, even if they are relatively autonomous as far as production and distribution are concerned. Before making such a statement, Paranjape needs to examine in depth filmic productions and structural meanings of other languages, especially the

Telugu film industry.

Athique (2012) argues more or less on similar lines that were churned out by Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1999), Rajadhyaksha (2003), and Roy and Huat (2012) based on transnational and diasporic contributions and cross-cultural flows of Bollywood. Gehlawat (2010) too discussed the various connotations offered to the term Bollywood but leaves it unsettled with the statement, "My underlying concern, then, is in identifying Bollywood as a nationally (and globally) dominant cinema without it necessarily functioning as the national, i.e., 'Indian' cinema" (p. xii). He seeks to justify his using of the term Bollywood signifying popular Hindi cinema rather than Indian cinema, so as to avoid a struggle to develop a nationalizing discourse. Simultaneously, he is content with putting at rest the contentious term by concluding: "Suffice to say, the question of whether this term 'Bollywood' is 'a pejorative or subversive description' as opined by Gopal and Moorti (2010), it remains unresolved" (p. xii). At this time, it is sufficient to put to rest the multiple and divergent voices heard on the moniker Bollywood by quoting Sarkar (2008):

From kitschy invocations to the more weighty and careful ruminations, such engagements have been frequently complicit in the reduction of all of Indian cinema to Bollywood: the myopia that reduced "Indian cinema" to the oeuvre of Satyajit Ray in an earlier period continues in a different guise (p. 35).

From a comparative reading of both the standard texts written by Western authors and the other reference texts produced by Bollywoodized academia, one can clearly see a disjuncture between these two sets of authors in interpreting Indian cinema. First, there is no response to the critique of Western authors regarding the poor quality of Hindi cinema, which they tended to describe as Bollywood or Indian cinema. Second, no attempt has been made to exemplify the uniqueness of the *mise-en-scène* of Hindi cinema, let alone Telugu cinema, both from modernist and structuralist perspectives. Third, both classes of authors totally overlooked the potentially powerful Telugu industry, which is equally competitive and even more technically sophisticated, besides cross-culturally more varied and richer than Hindi cinema.

**Methodology**

The present study is primarily descriptive and analytical based on moving image analysis of Kracauer (1960). Grounded in heuristic practices coupled with hermeneutics, the study tends to situate the Telugu films in modernist (foundationalist) cultural theory (Smith, 2001) using structural perspectives of Telugu films that comprise innovations of production, cultural flows in the portrayal of regional variations, and fine arts including aesthetics consisting of six arts and genres that are native, distinct, and unique.

Bauman (1991) in his book *Modernity and Ambivalence* formulates that modernity is all about the control of contingency (chance and diversity) and will exhibit a dream order obsessed with controlling, ordering, and classifying. It attempts to create order through regulations, institutions, laws, and moral codes, which will enable identifying universally applicable standards for truth, justice, and reason, besides eliminating relativism, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Modernity will invariably lead to forming legitimated hierarchies of oppression (Bauman, 1991). Furthermore, it will establish the binaries of opposition as part of cultural conventions and signs in social systems (Smith, 2001).

Early film history and research on films as culture and communication in Western and European cinemas had uncovered these modernist and structuralist components of society by frequently referring to films like *Stage Coach* (1939), *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Broadway Melody* (1929), and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Theoretical frameworks for this research have stemmed from the research of Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), who developed Proppian elements that formed a model for film analysis using Russian folk tales. Inspired by Propp's work on *Morphology of the Folktales* (1968), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) developed binary oppositions (*Structuralist Theory of Mythology*, 1978) and Roland Barthes (1915–1980) attempted to interpret the role of signs in semiotics, which were collected into a contribution called *Mythologies* (1972). In the process of relating the above theoretical concepts to Western cinema, Western authors have developed a rich cache of information on the

supremacy of Western films. Yet, despite having a highly equivalent philosophical and traditional history, we have failed to project the grandeur and richness that those modernist traditions embedded in Indian filmmaking processes and mise-en-scène (Murthy, 2012, 2013). By going back to these native modernist traditions and by subsuming the cross-cultural indices that the Telugu film industry achieved as a connection between North India and South India, ascribing itself a national role that befits it an entitlement (together with Hindi cinema) as Indian cinema (Murthy, 2013), we venture to propose the following assumptions in the present study.

### Primary Assumptions Behind the Term “Breaking Western Filmmaking Models”

The basic assumptions underlying the present study are as follows:

Both Telugu and Hindi film industries, the twins born together (since the talkie era in 1931), constitute Indian cinema and would reflect the following characteristics:

Indian cinema, as defined above, has its own native filmmaking techniques (both in terms of narrative and genre) distinct from those used in Hollywood, and Telugu cinema has demonstrated more innovations in the technical and symbolic elements in the production of folks, mythologicals, and fantasies compared with Hindi cinema.

Aesthetics of Indian cinema, especially Telugu cinema, draw from cultural and religious traditions of the lover-beloved relationship, akin to the romanticism versus atma-paramatma (soul and Universal soul) relationship, as depicted in the Indian holy scriptures (Upanishads, epics, poetic treatises of Kalidasa, etc.), and individual relationships versus family relationships, as described in the epics (Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Bhagavatam). These traditions are deeply embedded in these writings as well as films as metaphors.

The Indian films’ texts, especially Telugu film texts, reflect a degree of difficulty for deconstruction/semiotic analysis unless one is familiar with the native ethos of the Indian culture, such as the Indian manner of

expressing emotions through a variety of symbols/signs, including classical dance and music traditions.

The modernist and structuralist interpretations, using examples of Telugu cinema to Indian cinema, offer better meaning to Indian cinema than positing the term Bollywood as Indian cinema or as a pan-signifier of Indianness.

The contributions of Tamil cinema or other cinemas are currently not included in this article but will be surely dealt with in future publications.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Film as Communication in India: Contextualizing Its Social Relevance

As with any media, the primary objectives of film media are to inform, educate, and entertain. The film covers a broad range of purposes, from practical (as atechanical invention, it is an important scientific tool) to environmental, from pictorial to dramatic, and from narrative to musical (Monaco, 2009). The film offers a relationship between the artist and the work, which leads to the production of art, while the analysis of the relationship between the work and the observer gives us theories regarding its consumption. Roberts and Wallis (2001) have identified five important functions of film: (1) cinema is an essential part of popular culture; (2) cinema is a national, multinational, and global institution; (3) film is a lasting medium of messages and values; (4) film is a language to communicate; and (5) film's textual and contextual analysis is a transferable skill.

It is therefore clear that cinema provides insight into a culture and that its study brings us intimacy and immediacy that are unavailable in most other forms of media (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 1998). Cinema effectively captures the socioeconomic and political conditions, whether it succeeds or fails at the box office. The multifaceted ability of cinema as explained by Monaco (2009) in his "Spectrum of Abstractions" and "Rapports de Production" revolves around a set of determinants that involves social-political, psychological, technical, and economic elements. Culture has multiple definitions: To Williams (1988), "it is a whole way of life" (p.

30) and to Geertz (1975), “it is the webs of significance that human beings spin around themselves” (p. 5). By studying a culture, we acquire a deeper understanding of the customs, behavioral patterns, values, arts and crafts, and the practices of everyday life of the people inhabiting that culture (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 1998).

Cinema does not only reveal the culture of a civilization but also shapes the culture. By discussing the ways in which Indian films revolve around the core and peripheral cultures, which are also intercultural communication domains, one may better understand the ways that Indian cinema has promoted national integration and reflected social changes in the lives and livelihoods of the people at various times (Chakravarty, 1998; Murthy, 2012, 2013; Murthy & Das, 2011). One would also understand how Indian cinema has preserved traditional values and beliefs while allowing for the processes of modernization, Westernization, secularization, and urbanization, along with new ways of life and a sense of trans-Indianism (Gokulsing&Dissanayake, 1998).

Indian cinema could also be understood from a range of analyses, involving texts, production, contexts, reception, and technology. The common core areas that one should know to understand and interpret Indian cinema are as follows:

(1) celebrated epics (The Ramayana and The Mahabharata); (2) classical dance traditions (including Bharatanatyam and its regional variants such as Kathak, Kathakkali, Kuchipudi, and Oddissi); and (3) the traditional folk theaters (The Harikatha, Burra Katha, Oggu Katha, Street Play, and Yakshagana—a dance- opera ballet) with regional variations.

Within a decade of the commencement of silent era of films in India (1912), films that were related to revolutionary ideas, such as fighting against the caste and feudal systems, had taken the lead among the themes of films comprising mostly mythologicals. Both the films *AcchootKanya* (An Untouchable Girl, 1936) in Hindi and *Malapilla* (The Untouchable Girl, 1938) in Telugu, produced to attack the casteist sections of Indian society, were shining examples of parallel trends in both industries.

**Broad Spectrum of Telugu Cinema**

It may not be an exaggeration to state here that the lives of Indians are either directly or indirectly influenced by the Indian cinema, no matter what his/her language or culture may be (Murthy & Das, 2011). There are about 13 film- producing languages in the Indian film industry; the Telugu film industry alone has produced about the same number of films as the Hindi film industry (Tables 2 and 3). However, Table 3 shows that the Telugu film industry produced a greater number of films (1439) compared with the Hindi film industry (1424) during 2005–2010. Unfortunately, an impression has been given by Bollywoodized academia that the Hindi film industry alone always produces the highest number of films in India. This apart, the films produced in Hindi, Tamil, and other regional languages by the Telugu film industry are conveniently glossed over by these critical theorists (Murthy, 2013). This observation further draws its support from the latest statement of KohliKhandekar’s (2013) book-The Indian Media Business- in which she asserted that ‘in terms of the

Table 2. CBFC-India: Details of Films Released After Censor: 2000–2010.

Year	Hindi	Telugu	Tamil
2000	243	143	157
2001	230	206	196
2002	218	167	178
2003	222	155	151
2004	244	203	130
2005	245	268	136
2006	223	245	162
2007	258	241	148
2008	248	286	175
2009	235	218	190
2010	215	181	202
Total	2,581 (38.41%)	2,313 (34.42%)	1,825 (27.17%)

Source: Central Board of Film Certification (2010; compiled from the data for Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil films only).

Table 3. CBFC: Number of Films Released Between 2005 and 2010 in Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil.

S. No.	Year	Hindi	Telugu	Tamil
1	2005	245	268	136
2	2006	223	245	162
3	2007	258	241	148
4	2008	248	286	175
5	2009	235	218	190
6	2010	215	181	202
Total		1,424	1,439	1,013

Source: Central Board of Film Certification (2010; compiled from the data for Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil films only).

numbers of films produced, the Telugu industry is the largest segment in India followed by Hindi films' (p.161; see Table 3.1 on page 218 for corresponding data).

We further contend that it is not only the numerical value that determines the national character of Indian cinema. To be considered as a representative cinema of India, the film industry must be more cross-cultural and rich in communicating cross-cultural as well as core cultural values. Toward testing this cross-cultural character of the Indian film industry, we have carefully developed a list of cross-cultural indices and applied them to both Hindi and Telugu cinema (Murthy, 2013). These indices tested which of the two film industries has a more national perspective, reflecting India's native religious ethos and cultural traditions such as dance, music, poetry/lyrics, and so forth (see Tables 4 and 5). Our survey revealed that Telugu cinema has more cross-cultural characteristics than Hindi cinema, particularly in terms of perpetuating classical traditions and the religious ethos. Based on our findings, we are not in a position to accept the views of Bollywoodized academia that Hindi cinema/Bollywood is the representative cinema of India (Murthy,

2013).

We have another strong reason to position Telugu cinema ahead of Hindi cinema in terms of the complexities of the industry and its multiple lines of transformations since modernist to postmodernist times without compromising the core cultural values and underlying modernist structures (Murthy, 2012). It is this aspect of critical study that is missing in the works of Western authors or Bollywoodized academia who theorized Bollywood as a pan-Indian signifier based on the analysis of the Hindi film industry alone from postcritical perspectives.

Although both Hindi and Telugu cinema started their early film productions with mythologicals and romantics using modernist and structuralist traditions, Telugu cinema had quickly taken the lead over Hindi cinema in making film

Table 4. Cross-Cultural Film Production—Some Prominent Telugu Filmmakers/Directors Making/Directing Films in Different Languages (Only Indicative Not Exhaustive).

S. No.	Name	Roles performed in the industry	Hindi/Telugu/Tamil	Period
	AdurtiSubba Rao	Director (37)	Hindi (10); Telugu (27)	1912–1975
	A. V. Subba Rao	Producer (26)	Hindi (5); Telugu (20)	1925–
	B. Nagi Reddy	Producer (20)	Hindi (6); Telugu (15); Tamil (1)	1912–2004
	H. M. Reddy	Director (19); Producer (3)	Hindi (5); Telugu (11); Tamil (3)	1892–1960
	K. V. Reddy	Director (16); Producer (4); Writer (5)		

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Telugu (14); Tamil (2)            1912–1972  
L. V. Prasad                    Actor (8); Director (30);  
Producer (30)  
Hindi (27); Telugu (21);  
Tamil (14); Bengali  
(4); Kannada (1);  
Malayalam (1);  
Oriya (1)  
1930–1990

Rama Naidu Producer (130) Hindi (17); Telugu (84);  
 Tamil (10); Kannada  
 (2); Oriya (1);  
 Malayalam (1);  
 Bengali (2);  
 Assamese (1) (excluding dubbing)  
 1936–

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Source: Murthy (2013). Copyright 2013 by Routledge.

productions in different genres such as folks, socio-fantasies, spy films, west- erns, besides retaining its grit and mettle in making mythologicals and spirit- uals till date. Between 1997 and 2011, the Telugu film industry has produced as many as 15 films comprising different genres from spirituals (Annamayya, 1997; Sri Ramadasu, 2006; Sri Ramarajyam, 2011) to socio-folk (Magadheera, 2009), socio-mythological (Yamadonga, 2007), and socio- scientific fantasies (Eega, 2012). All of them have been great hits at the box office. On the other hand, one would find none of this multiplicity of genres in Hindi cinema during this time.

Another important feature of Telugu cinema, distinct from Hindi cinema, is that its films are based on identities, representations, and cultures living beside the sea (Bay of Bengal or Arabian coast) or rivers such as Godavari, Krishna, and Tungabhadra, which paradoxically can be interpreted both from modernist and postmodernist traditions. Films comprising the Marxist school of thought are still being produced to enthrall the rural masses of Andhra Pradesh.

Table 5. Cross-Cultural Indices in the Telugu Film Industry.

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Cross-cultural indices

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Other languages

(cross-culture) Films/Technicians/Actors

Singers from other languages

Actors from other languages

Film remakes from other languages

Hindi LataMangeshkar

Marathi Mohammed Rafi

Malayalam K. J. Yesudas

Tamil Vani Jayaram

Tamil Shivaji Ganesan, Kamal

Haasan, J. Jayalalitha

Malayalam Mammotty, Ashish Vidyarthi

Kannada Rajnikanth

Bengali Sarvadaman Banerjee, Kamalinee Mukherjee

Bengali–Telugu Devdas (1935)–Devdasu (1953)

Hindi–Telugu Bhabhi (1957)–Kuladaivam (1960)

Films on lives of spiritual saints

Film on sculptors/artist biography

Based on the life of Sanskrit poet Jayadeva from Orissa

Based on the life of SantTukaram of Maharastra

Based on the life of a sculptor of Konark temple

Bhakta Jayadev (1961)

Bhakta Tukaram (1973)

Amara SilpiJakkanna

(1964)

Stories/novel adaptations from other languages

Music directors from other languages

Bengali Devdas, Misamma (1955)

French AggiPidugu (1964)

English PalleteooriPilla (1950)

Tamil Ilaiyaraaja, A. R. Rahman,

M. S. Viswanathan, K. V. Mahadevan

Hindi Shankar Jaikishan, Bappi

Lahiri

Establishing standards of culture and lifestyles for North India based—  
Ramayana-, Mahabharata-, and Bhagavat-related film scripts

Culture, costume designs, character designing, orna- ment designing;  
prescribing manners

Bhakta Prahlad (1931),

Lava Kusha (1963),

Mayabazar (1957), PandavaVanavasam (1965)

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Source: Murthy (2013). Copyright 2013 by Routledge.

However, these trends completely vanished in Hindi cinema in the post-1990s, although Hindi cinema too could have represented these postmodernist trends. Unfortunately, most Hindi cinema productions are made for, as pointed out by Mazumdar (2007), the consumption of urban audiences/diaspora/transnational audiences by accommodating features of a luxurious urban style of living. At the same time, Telugu cinema has also met with these basic commercial trappings to garner huge grosses at the box once both in India and abroad.

Defining Indian Cinema: Telugu and Hindi Cinema Together Comprise Indian Cinema

Because of the cross-cultural values that Telugu cinema represented for nearly a century (since 1921, when the first silent movie in Telugu was produced), besides consistently producing on an average equal number of

films with investments exceeding those of the Hindi cinema industry, Telugu and Hindi cinema should be collectively considered as a representative of Indian cinema.

The beginnings of Telugu cinema parallel those of the Bombay-based Hindi film industry both during the silent era (1912–1930) and the talkie era (1931– 2011). Many Telugu actors/directors, including L. V. Prasad and H. M. Reddy, were associated with the production of ArdheshirIrani's first talkie film, *AlamAra* (*The Light of the World*, 1931). While L. V. Prasad acted in *AlamAra*, H. M. Reddy was the assistant director under ArdheshirIrani. Since then, the journey of the Telugu film industry has been one of nonstop cross-cultural integration and thus a unifying force in India (see Table 4). H. M. Reddy produced the first talkie Telugu film, *Bhakta Prahlada* (1931), followed by *Kalidasa* (1931) and *Luv Kusha* (1934), all of which were commercially successful at the box office. Incidentally, H. M. Reddy also produced and directed *Bhakta Prahlada* in Tamil. Thus, Telugu cinema was the second talkie film in India in the same year (1931). Eminent producers/directors like L. V. Prasad acted, produced, and directed films in different languages such as Telugu, Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, and Tamil. Rama Naidu has acted and produced films in more than 13 languages in India. This tradition has been followed by many other producers/directors from the Telugu industry (see Tables 4 and 5) till today. Furthermore, Telugu cinema has more Guinness Book of Records entries to its credit (see Table 6) than the Hindi or any film industry.

#### Telugu Film Models: Unexplored Frame of Communication

As mentioned earlier, Telugu cinema has been perpetuating modernist traditions of film productions, while allowing transformations in its productions from modern to postmodern along the lines of multiple strands of the filmic genres (mythological, folk, social, socio-folk fantasy, socio-mythological fantasy,

Table 6. Telugu Film Industry in Guinness Book of Records: Individuals.

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S. No.

Prominent filmmakers/  
directors      Hindi/Telugu/Tamil      Period

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Dr. D. Narayana Rao      Directed 150 movies      1947–

Vijay Nirmala (woman director/producer) in postindependent era

Directed 47 movies, highest among women directors

1950–

Rama Naidu      Producer of 130 movies      1936–

Dr. Brahmanandam      Best comedian who acted in

more than 650 movies

Ch. Ramoji Rao      Ramoji film city and producer of over 50 films in  
different languages

1956–

1936–

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Source: Murthy (2013). Copyright 2013 by Routledge.

spy, westerns) for over eight decades. These pictures have been replete with more rituals, observances, and conventions embedded with semiotics than in Hindi cinema.

Semiotic models constitute the core of cultural communication as a form of social interaction through messages. Every culture is full of signs, and each sign is assigned meaning using a meaning system in which a single sign refers to a single meaning or multiple meanings that vary according to the context. It is the unique distinction of Telugu directors that produces filmic scenes entwined with symbolism and aesthetics as part of the narrative (e.g., *SagaraSangamam*, 1983 directed by K. Viswanath). Directors like Bapu, Vamsi, and Jandhyala have enriched these traditions, which first began with AdurtiSubba Rao and his predecessors in Telugu in the South.

**Cultural Communication:** Elimination of Caste and Economic Social

### Barriers Through Music and Dance Forms

In the early Indian films, film themes have been woven around the love between kings and their court dancers or between the citizens and the subjects of royal families. This was the scenario in both Hindi and Telugu films during the first few decades of the silent and talkie eras. It used to be very difficult to classify the genre of such films except to state it as a folk (for a comparative analysis of folk vs. socials, see Srinivas, 2001). This theme soon found its echo in the socials with the arrival of new wave directors (Jandhyala, Vamsi, Babu, and Viswanath) who tried to combine the art forms such as classical music and dance, which was on a decline by the 1970s, with the narrative to usher in new ways of thinking for social change among varying economic groups, for example, Viswanath's films—Sankarabharanam (1979), SagaraSangamam (1983), SwathiMuthyam (1985), Sruthilayalu (1987), and Swarna Kamalam (1988).

For instance, semiologically the term SagaraSangamam (means uniting/merging with the sea) refers to the Upanishadic statement that all kinds of worship lead to one Almighty just as all rivers plunge into an ocean. Now semiologically interpreted, the term SagaraSangamam implies that all forms of arts (songs, music, dance, etc.) ultimately merge into one broader aspect of human life—the divine, the spiritual, and the ultimate (the infinite).

Building on this universal theme that all arts lead to the divine form of the Almighty (music is divine, dance is divine) and cause no end, Viswanath weaves his narrative around a poor boy (played by Kamal Haasan) who strains every nerve to learn all known variations of dance in India. In his unique masterly directorial technique, he combines the traditional dance forms with the swift movement of the story toward a tragic ending, but in the process he proves that dance and music forms are capable of transcending social barriers as entertaining media. Sankarabharanam (the name of a musical Raaga meaning an ornament adorning Lord Shiva) is a film that tries to get rid of caste distinctions and distinctions of music between the East and the West. The film also offers a reconstruction of the traditional gurukul (teaching) system of learning, which the teachers

of ancient India practiced in respect of general education as well as fine arts (as defined in the Upanishads).

Likewise, Sruthilayalu (named after two important aspects of classical Indian music—Sruthi and Laya—whether of Hindustani or of Carnatic) and SwarnaKalam (Golden Lotus, considered the seat of goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and symbolically, the seat of yogic realization at Samadhi/Moksha called the liberation from cycle of birth and death, spiritually) tried to reinforce the supremacy of these fine arts and the divinity they impart to human life if practiced from noncommercial ends. The plots are woven in such a manner as to eliminate both economic and caste barriers.

**Cross-Cultural Flows and Film Remakes as Investment Avenues**

Telugu films have been more cross-cultural than other language industries since the beginning. Murthy (2013) has described in detail how cross-culturalism flourished in the Telugu film industry since 1931, thanks to the secular mind of the then pioneers like L. V. Prasad and H. M. Reddy, among others. In 1955, LataMangeshkar was the first Hindi singer to sing a song in the Telugu film Santhanam (1955: meaning Children) produced and directed by C. V. Ranganath Das. The Telugu industry has also engaged a number of film technicians and directors from other regions for many of its classics (Tables 4 and 5). This cross-culturalism not only resulted in cross-cultural flows across India but also led to intensive film remaking between Telugu and other industries

Table 7. CBFC-India: Details Showing the Dubbing of Films From One Language to the Other During 2010.

Language	Mum	Kol	Chen	Ban	Thi	Hyd	Del	Cut	Guw	Total
Hindi	3	–	7	4	–	3	–	–	–	17
Tamil	16	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	18
Telugu	18	–	32	7	–	11	–	–	–	68
Bhojpuri	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2

Chhatishga rhi	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
English	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Oriya	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Malayalam	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Bengali	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>117</b>

Source: Central Board of Film Certification (2010).

(Table 7). It has thus become an area of heavy film investments, and it is the Telugu film industry that took the lead to produce films both in Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi simultaneously. Telugu film producers like Ramoji Rao and Rama Naidu showed extraordinary business acumen in producing films in other languages such as Bengali, Assamese, and Punjabi. A number of Telugu actors/ actresses migrated from the Telugu to the Hindi film industry and vice versa. Furthermore, film directors like Ram Gopal Varma and Puri Jagannath have demonstrated extraordinary deftness in producing and directing films both in the Telugu and Hindi film industries.

**Innovations in Film Productions**

A number of Telugu films belonging to the modernist era based on mythologicals have their own innovative film production techniques. The film *Mayabazar* (1957), directed by K. V. Reddy, offered a number of camera tricks and editing gimmicks that, even in the light of modern-day graphics, are very difficult to decipher. The wonderful camera work of Marcus Bartley has rendered the daytime shot song—*LahiriLahiriLahirilo*—as a night song shot in the moonlight with the moon glittering over waves of water (Figure 1(a)). Similarly, the scene showing demon Ghatotkacha entering the pantry room and eating sweets, which go up into the mouth of the demon in a vertical movement against the gravitational laws of force, followed by simultaneous enlargement of the demon’s body into a huge structure to eat as much as he can while his

weapon becomes a miniature object have been shot with innovative thinking of the director and cameraman (Figure 1(b)). They were not any imitations of the rest of the boat movement, flashes of moon-light on water waves, close up shots, mid-close up shots, long shots and the mid long shots which one sees in the song in the middle of the lake had been done entirely inside the studio. But, how Bartley achieved the illusion of having shot the entire song in the open in the middle of lake under moon-light is a mystery of editing even today.

b. Ghatokacha's eating laddoos looks like a miracle. Laddoos beam into the mouth of demon on their own without an external support. Again, the camera trick and editing techniques are a mystery even today. Source: The original black and white film was first produced by the Vijaya Productions, Chennai. However, the copy right for the colour film was owned by Goldstone Technologies Limited, Secunderabad.

Hollywood, as it is difficult to even imagine that Hollywood could have thought of such production processes in mythologicals.

In a scene in Mayabazar, the demon teachers having gone to enemy's court made arrangements of idols, utensils, toys, gifts in such magical way that it is difficult for us to conceive how the cameraman, Bartley, had done the feat (Figure 2). Furthermore, the arrow projections going on line into space each time with a different warhead spewing fire, water, flaunting a snake, or assuming different shapes shown in the film Mayabazar involved a lot of hard work on the part of the technical team besides camera crew and editing experts.

Similarly, scenes (Figures 3 and 4) from Bhakta Prahlada (1967), an another epic story-based film directed by Chirtrapu Narayana Rao, and a scene (Figure 5) from Pandava Vanavasam (Pandavas Exile Life; 1965), a film based on Mahabharata directed by Kamalakara Kameshwara Rao, have been very difficult to replicate even today despite the availability and advancement of graphics and animation (see the legends given at the bottom of these figures).

**Conclusions**

An in-depth reading of the scholarly texts of several Western authors, and the other reference texts of Bollywoodized academia revealed that all authors, except Bordwell and Thompson (2004), recognized the importance of Indian cinema, but none qualified the statement by properly interpreting its mise-en-scène, aesthetics, culture and religious ethos, and linguistic diversity and richness. The differences and the mismatch in the interpretations between these

Figure 2. Marcus Bartley's Camera works miracles-Mayabazar (1957).

**Note.** The sequence of camera clicks shows how difficult was this feat of arranging the idols in a show of order in a succession of shots. In Maya Bazar the demon Ghatotakacha and his demonic followers would enter the palace of the Duryodhana and perform these miracles to keep the bridegrooms party happy. If one sees the actual full clipping, it would be clear that Marcus Bartley had some clear markings as to how to proceed with such kind of shoot. But, this remains a mystery of shooting even today, unexplained.

Source: The original black and white film was first produced by the Vijaya Productions, Chennai. However, the copy right for the colour film was owned by Goldstone Technologies Limited, Secunderabad.

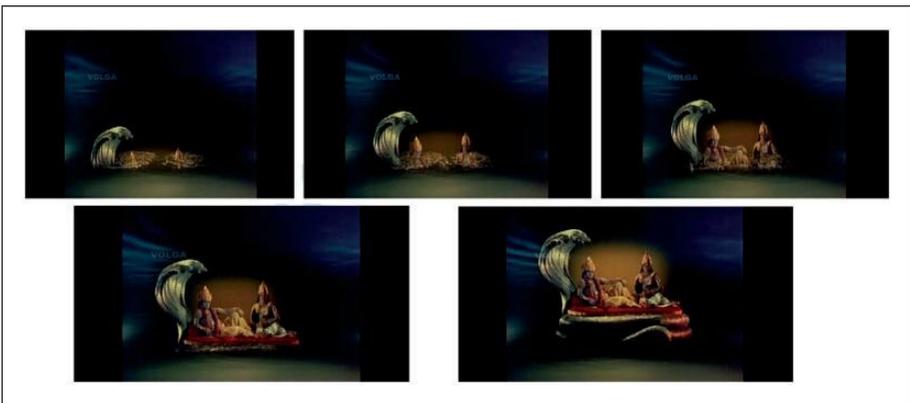


Figure 3. Scenes of Lord Vishnu and his holy consort Maha Lakshmi

rising from the middle of waters-Bhakta Prahlada (1967).

**Note.** High angle shots shown in tandem with water bubbles amid whirls of water. It is difficult to explain how this technique has been achieved with present technology even.

Source: Originally the Eastman colour film was produced by AVM Productions, Chennai. Presently

R. Satyanarayana, Guntur posses the copy right of the film.

Again the technique of shadow capturing in the foreground in a face to face confrontation is a rare application. It is not a natural shadow formation for such a shadow does not form in front of an object. There are two aspects to it. One is the technical element and another is the symbolic element. Where as the technical aspect is a mystery and remains a touch stone of the shooting/editing techniques employed by the cameraman and the editor in those days, the symbolic part is that the shadow speaks as an Atman (Soul) foretelling the secret of Prahlada's birth and warns HiranyaKashyap of his eventual death due to him. Source: Originally the Eastman colour film was produced by the AVM Productions, Chennai. Presently R.Satyanarayana, Guntur posses the copy right of the film.two categories of authors concerning the term Bollywood notwithstanding, the study finds the very term Bollywood as a pan-Indian signifier continues to be an unsettled riddle. The present study tries to reject the moniker Bollywood as national cinema on postcritical estimations alone and suggests that both Telugu and Hindi cinema based on modernist and foundations traditions of filmmaking as applied to then contemporary society would constitute Indian cinema.

The study brings forth evidence to show that Telugu cinema, which is the second largest movie industry in India, having a parallel history with Hindi cinema and a record of excelling in many aspects such as innovations in technical, symbolic, and aesthetic forms, has offered a wide spectrum of genres compared with Hindi cinema. The bankruptcy of Western authors and Bollywoodized academia to take into account the distinctions of Telugu cinema is by and large due to their lack of knowledge regarding cultural, spiritual, and traditional practices of Indian aesthetics and performing arts, which Telugu cinema applies quite

diligently to its film texts through deeply embedded semiotics that poses a considerable level of difficulty for deconstruction.

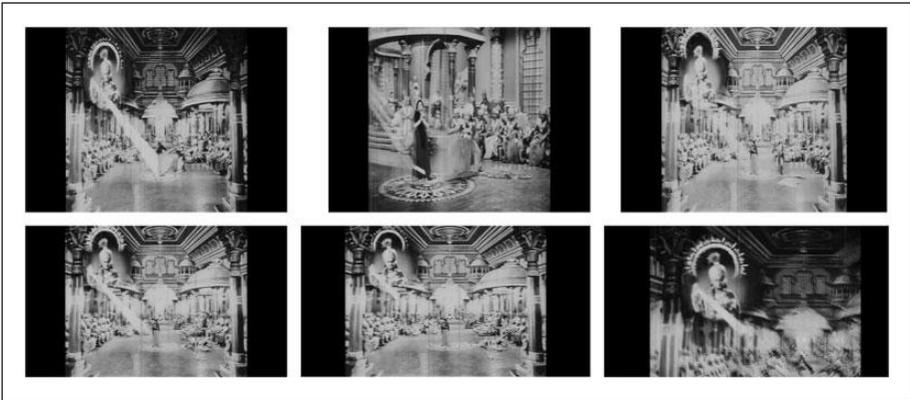


Figure 5. Camera and editorial exuberance giving connectivity to the inset picture of Lord Krishna with Draupadi seeking for Saree live-PandavaVanavasam (1965).

Note. In PandavaVanavasam, 1965 (Pandavas Exile Life) the scene where Draupadi's saree was pulled out by Dussasana at the behest of his brother Duryodhana, Lord Krishna would surface in the corner of the court of Duryodhana and extends saree from his divine palm. The sequences of the clippings show how the inset picture of Lord Krishna relates to the main frame by extending the saree from his palm (a divine miracle attributable to God/Almighty in Indian Epics-Mahaabharat) to Draupadi. The saree continues to flow from Lord Krishna's palm till Dussasana gets fainted. As he faints, the saree gets stopped. Both scenes could be seen connecting to each other quite vividly, a technique which is quite difficult to achieve on FCP using even multi-media today.

Source: Produced by A. S. R. Anjaneyulu on behalf of his own production house Madhavi Productions, Chennai. Presently S. Venkateswara Rao of National Litho Printers, Vijyawada is holding the copy right of the film.

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