



Research Article

Women, Markers, and Representation in Early Telugu Cinema

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Abstract:

The early Telugu cinema echoed the contemporary concerns and movements in the country. Most films made in Telugu in the first two decades, the 1930s and 1940s, were mythologies, historicals and devotionals. However, regardless of genre, most movies focus on the woman question. Many had women at the centre, while many movies had titles after women characters. This paper focuses on select Telugu movies from the early decades to argue that the films might have focused on the woman question and might have argued for the reform of the condition of women. Still, they remained orthodox and sometimes regressive in their idea of womanhood. Markers of a married woman whose husband is alive become more valuable than women. A respected and celebrated womanhood is almost reduced to the markers she carries. This new woman combines tradition and modernity, influenced by the reform movement but strongly pulled by tradition to evolve into a better wife. The present paper proposes to examine the portrayal of a new family woman by the Telugu Cinema of the 1930s, reiterating the traditional markers with additional interpretations. It employs feminist historiography to understand the significance of the portrayal of new women in early Telugu cinema.

Key Words: Telugu-Cinema-Women-Markers-Representation

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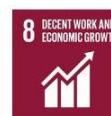
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Introduction

Cinema occupies a crucial place in a diverse society like India because it weaves, designs and enacts stories. Like theatre, it has the maximum reach for spectators. It is fluid yet fixed; it is enacted but influences people to repeat the enactment, and above all, it interprets cultures in its presentations and representations. Regional cinema, as described, is allowed a place in the margins because a “national” cinema is already constructed and mainstreamed. Being a linguistically diverse country, India has a strong tradition of cinema in several languages. They are all considered regional cinema, while Hindi cinema is described as the national cinema. One of the reasons for this is that Hindi variants are spoken in more than one state. Hindi is spoken by the largest number of people in the country when compared to other languages. The Hindi film industry is called Bollywood, the Telugu film industry as Tollywood, the Tamil film industry as Kollywood, the Malayalam film industry as Mollywood and the Kannada film industry as Sandalwood. Regional cinema constructs the mainstream from the margins depending on the contexts. It is these mainstream-margins, multiple contexts and creations that I am going to focus on. The purpose of this paper is not only to trace the history of Telugu cinema but also to understand the roots of contemporary Telugu cinema, to perceive the notions and ideologies it perpetrated, and to problematise its portrayal of a new family woman.

Telugu Cinema from a Historical Perspective

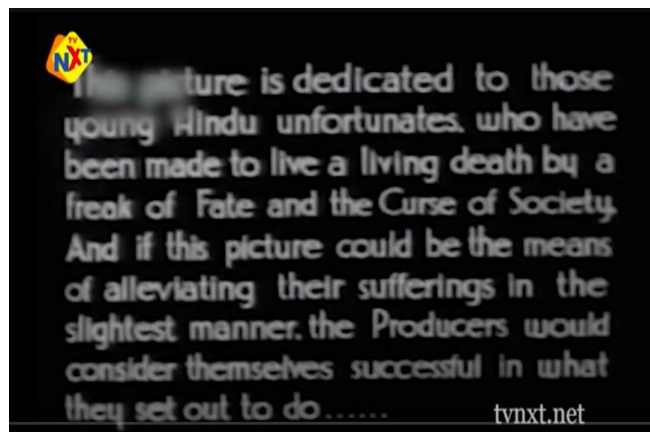
The history of Telugu cinema began in 1912 with the silent movie *Bheeshma Pratigna*. The first talkie in Telugu, *Bhakta Prahlada*, was released in 1931. The decade of 1930 witnessed the making of movies that echoed the movements going on in contemporary times. They were inspired by the reformist movements and tried to convey the message to the audience clearly. A bird’s eye view of the movies released in the 1930s will give us an idea about the focus of the early Telugu cinema. The list includes *Kalidas*, *Bhakta Prahlada*, *Rama Paduka Pattabhishekam*, *Shakuntala*, *Chintamani or Bilvamangala*, *Pruthvi Putra*, *Prajvala Alapana*, *Ramadasu*, *Sati Savitri* (one made by C. Pullaiah and one made by H.M. Reddy), *Athulya Sahavasam*, *Ahalya*, *Lava Kusa*, *Sita Kalyanam*, *Bhakta Kuchela*, *Harishchandra*, *Sati Anasuya*, *Sati Sakkubai*, *Sri Krishna Leelalu*, *Sri Krishna Tulabharam*, *Rani Premalata*, *Dhruva*, *Draupadi Maanasamrakshana*, *Draupadi Vastrapaharanam*, *Kabir*, *Lanka Dahanam*, *Mayabazar or Sasirekha Parinayam*, *Premavijayam*, *Sampoorna Ramayanam*, *Premilarjuneeyam*, *Sati Tulasi*, *Sulochana*, *Veerabhimanyu*, *Balayogini*, *Dasavataramulu*, *Kanakatara*, *Mohini Rukmangada*, *Nara Narayana*, *Sarangadhara*, *Vijayadashami*, *Vipranarayana*, *Bhakta Jayadeva*, *Bhakta Markandeya*, *Chal Mohana Ranga*, *Chitranaleeyam*, *Gruhalakshmi*, *Gulebakavali*, *Kacha Devayani*, *Kasula Peru*, *Krishna Jarasandha*, *Mala Pilla*, *Mohini Bhasmasura*, *Narada Samsaram*, *Satyanarayana Vratam*, *Thukaram*, *Amma*, *Jayaprada*, *Mahananda*, *Malli Pelli*, *Panduranga Vittal*, *Pasupathastram*, *Mathru Bhoomi*, *Radha Krishna*, *Raithu Bidda*, *Sri Venkateswara Mahatyam*, *Vande Mataram*, and *Vara Vikrayam*. The titles of the movies indicate two points. First, most of the movies are mythological, historical, or devotional. Movies with social concerns were also being made, though they were small in number. The common and connecting point here is a predominant preoccupation with women at the centre of the movies. Several of the movies have titles that are names of women characters from mythologies.

The public sphere opened up for women in the name of performance and cinema. As spectators, makers and dancers, women started to inhabit the spaces of theatre—the movie theatre. The debates about women were going on in various forums such as newspapers, magazines, theatre, fiction, etc. The discourse continues to be represented on the silver screen, bringing together the questions of gender and nation. This paper will concentrate only on women as characters on the silver screen.

Reform, Sub-text, and the Social

On the one hand, the mythological, historical and devotional films tried to connect with the Telugu audience by invoking the various traditions of theatre and popular memory in the form of stories and songs. On the other hand, the social movies touched upon crucial issues such as nationalism, dowry, widow remarriage, untouchability, feudalism, etc. These were not only crucial issues but also controversial issues. It requires passion, commitment, and courage to face opposition and failure. However, the movies not only chose those topics but also announced their concerns overtly in the movies. Most of them declared that their agenda was not just to entertain but to change the existing circumstances, thus attempting to become part of the reform discourse. For instance, disclaimers, like epigraphs, create a sub-text. *Malapilla* begins with the lines “Dedicated to the memory of the Departed Andhra Leader Late Mr. K. Nageswara Rao Pantulu”, and in Telugu, it interestingly changes to “Deshoddharakulunu, Viswadatalunu, Harijana Seva Sanghadhyakshulunu agu sri kasinathuni nageswararaya smruti chihnamuga samarpichabadinadi” (Dedicated to the memory of Kashinathuni Narageswaraya, who is saviour of the country, universal generous patron, and president of the Harijan Seva Sangh). It traces the affiliations and ideologies of Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu and the filmmakers. *Vandemataram* or *Mangalasutram* attempts to weave the national and the familial or social together. *Vandemataram* is the slogan of the freedom struggle while *mangalasutram* means the sacred marital thread. These two are represented by two women, but both are tied with a man. The movie *Sumangali* begins with the lines,

This picture is dedicated to those young Hindu unfortunates, who have been made to live a living death by a freak of Fate and the Curse of Society. And if this picture could be the means of alleviating their sufferings in the slightest manner, the Producers would consider themselves successful in what they set out to do.....



However, the questions of concern are: what is the thought behind this overwhelming representation of women characters in early Telugu cinema? What kind of women characters were being chosen to be represented? What message was being given through women characters? The above list shows two versions of Sati Savitri by two directors in the same decade. Does this reflect the anxiety of a postcolonial society to cling to the spiritual values represented by idealising women? Does this also echo the fear of a society of "losing" women to modernity that it has invited or accommodated for other reasons? Was the Telugu cinema creating models for women or men? How did it succeed in superimposing the mythological women on the contemporary women in the so-called "social" movies? Was it possible to juxtapose or bring together the traditional woman and the modern woman in harmony? Or, was the Telugu cinema representing the conflict arising out of the clash of values between traditional and modern women where the traditional woman ultimately triumphed?

Feminist Historiography as the Theoretical Framework

This paper addresses some of the above questions by reading the select Telugu movies released in the 1930s, where the contemporary is portrayed in all its complexity, focusing on women. I will focus only on the social movies, indeterminately trying to weave the contemporary into its construction of "life". Writing women's histories is not only about the presence and absence of women, though presence-absence is a crucial dichotomy in histories that erase her stories. Feminist historiography goes a step forward in searching for the presence of women as subjects and critically understanding the construction of their presence and representation. This paper examines the early Telugu cinema as the canvas on which an ideal image of the new woman was portrayed. The analysis in this paper is confined to select movies released between 1938 and 1940, that is, *Mala Pilla* (1938), *Vandemataram* (1939), *Malli Pelli* (1939), and *Sumangali* (1940),

The Woman in Making

Most of the early Telugu movies are women-centred. However, they present women in docile, conforming, and reformed roles, thus mainstreaming the woman in terms of the location of her character and moulding the character regressively. Let us quickly examine the titles of the women-centred movies. Some of them are as follows: *Malapilla* (the Mala girl), *Vandemataram* or *Mangalasutram* (Vandemataram or the sacred marital thread), *Malli Pelli* (Re-marriage), and *Sumangali* (married woman whose husband is alive). The social and the reform here are closely interconnected with the nation. Thus, the questions of the social get connected with the national. This takes us to the nation-making in the 19th century in India. Partha Chatterjee analyses how the social, political and cultural came together to construct the nationalist spirit. The central point in these constructions is the woman. Also, Partha Chatterjee argues that this context that brought together colonialism, nationalism and women, or rather centred colonialism and nationalism around women, led to the dichotomy of the material-spiritual, home-world, and feminine-masculine. This dichotomy led to the emergence of a new woman with traditional feminine virtues as a new patriarchy started to dictate the nationalist Indian woman in a colonial set-up. The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social

representation. This can be seen in Telugu movies, where reform was discussed and advocated. Still, it did not cross the boundaries of the stereotypical femininity as the goddess of the home. These movies probably echoed the spirit of the reform movement that focused on rescuing the Indian woman and redesigning her in a new mould. However, that new mould did not lead to women's autonomy but only created new models of ideal women¹.

To quote Partha Chatterjee, "For a colonized people, the world was a distressing constraint, forced upon it by the fact of its material weakness...in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence." (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 624) Constructing the nation, national movement and woman-centric families was part of the debates about the nation. The woman, who is considered to be the gateway for entry into any culture, as pointed out by Uma Chakravarti and Leela Dube, embodies the nationalist spirit by addressing the private as well as the public sphere. It is precisely this debate that we also get to see in the early Telugu cinema. The regional tries to become part of the national and the nationalist ideologies by carving out a certain kind of woman.

This woman does not neatly draw the dividing line between the public and the private sphere as Partha Chatterjee observed on the representations of women in the nationalist discourse. This woman brings together the public and the private by presenting herself as a new woman. This "new woman" was also part of the nationalist discourse but also is strongly grounded in the reform discourse. It is not the binary of tradition and modernity that she is caught in, but in modernity, that is an extension of tradition in a different guise. Partha Chatterjee also explains how the nationalist paradigm did not dismiss modernity but rather made an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project and how the nationalist construction of reform as a project of both emancipation and self-emancipation of women (and hence a project in which both men and women must participate).

Cinema was a product of modernity, modernity in its larger sense of the meaning, and also has been a nurturer of cultural modernity. A critical politics of representation emerges from the cinema's efforts, in different contexts, to define and portray modernity. One such attempt that it has always made, specifically in the Telugu context, is to define, describe and stereotype genders. Those genders are also located in different social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Some are hegemonic, some victimised, some glorified, and some condemned. But, it has never forgotten or ignored to strengthen the stereotypes that contribute to the gender hierarchy; rather, it has taken the stereotyping to the extreme. This is true of the cinema of all times from the 1930s to the present in Telugu.

The Telugu movies that are centred around women focus on certain women and certain concerns and certain concerns of certain women and also model the ideal womanhood after them. This reminds us of the Indian reform movement that focused only on women of certain sections and completely ignored the existence of women of other sections, which, in a sense, also meant taking their suffering for granted and normalising it. Mainstreaming/mainstreamisation of women

¹This comes very close to the analysis presented by Zhang Zhen that the figure of the actress in particular embodies the vernacular experience of modernity in early twentieth-century China. Zhang Zhen, "An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: The Actress as Vernacular Embodiment in Early Chinese Film Culture" in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* ed. Jennifer M. Bean, Diane Negra.

brings a certain woman to the fore, erasing all diversities, similar to the nationalist discourse that created a unified nation against colonial rule by absorbing, appropriating, accepting and adopting the differences and diversities. This often led only to the erasure of the other identities.

Gender, Nation, and English

The strands of nation, gender, modernity, and English woven together and articulated in the regional language through a visual medium expanded the opportunity to draw the women characters in detail and reach out to the spectators far and wide. The modernity discourse articulated in Telugu automatically invokes Partha Chatterjee's analysis of the woman's image moulded as part of the nationalist movement that described English as the masculine language and the Indian languages as the feminine languages. As Shefali Chandra observes in her article on "Gendering English", the masculinity of English was constantly accompanied by the feminization of the vernacular. The general analysis of this article focuses on the representation and regulation that shaped the context and reach of Indian English and this process of forming its own language of gender. The author says, "This gendered English created new codes of signification to support the matrix of colonial-national and heterosexual gender". (Chandra, 2007, p. 286)

Educated men, foreign-returned men and government officials only speak English in the movies chosen for analysis in this article, thus creating a common tongue, English, for the people who inhabit the colonial male mainstream space. The patriarchal and brahmanical² language gets re-iterated by the hero in the movie *Malli Pelli* when he repeats the word "munda" for women. This abusive word also means a widow. It is telling that the marital status of a woman turns into an abusive word. This movie seems to erase the division between the public space and the private space and create a common space by merging the two while carefully preserving the ideology of the woman as the angel of the house. The visible and the invisible ideologies played an instrumental role in the depiction of women characters

Similar to the national movement's attempts to redefine domesticity and transform homes, these movies also present a housewife moulded on the Victorian model. The housewife in the movies selected for analysis in this article is a woman who can rescue the man, cater to the man's domestic and aesthetic needs, sing, dance, write, serve, entertain, to put it in a word, a companionate wife. But, still, in ideology, a devoted wife at her husband's feet. New spaces at home become the site of togetherness and interaction. Most of these movies have no kitchens. We only see the man and the woman in the drawing room. The man tries to reform the woman, thereby re-formulating their relationship. He often motivates her to pursue education to become a good wife. This leads to a shift in women's social, economic, and cultural locations.

² The variant of Telugu specific to the caste, class, and region which is not only casteist but also patriarchal. Using munda, which means a widow, as an abusive word reflects on the cultural and ideological location, that is brahmin and brahmanical, of the character. Gurajada Apparao, in his play *Kanyashulkam* (1892), makes his characters speak Telugu that is specific to their caste, class, region, and gender, which is predominantly brahmanical in its ideology. *Kanyashulkam* was made into a film in 1955. The film retained the variants of Telugu employed by Gurajada to convey the socio-cultural location of the characters.

Ideal womanhood is celebrated by almost all the characters in these movies. Celebration of ideal womanhood here means celebration of the *sumangali* identity. Not all forms of womanhood but only the *sumangali* identity is celebrated, deified and idealised. It is considered to be the destiny and destination of a woman. It becomes the main idea behind the campaign against child marriage and for the widow re-marriage. Agencies such as family, community, and society function as the tools of patriarchy in convincing the woman that the fulfilment of her life lies in leading the life of a married woman whose husband is alive. One of the most emphatic forms of celebration of *sumangali* identity is highlighting the markers. In all four select movies, there are songs written around the markers and conversations built around the status of *sumangali* in elevation and glorification.

Markers as Validation of Identity

Malli Pelli (Re-marriage) (1939) strongly condemns child marriage and argues for widow remarriage. Y.V. Rao directed this movie apart from acting as the movie's hero. An orthodox lawyer gets his six-year-old daughter Lalitha to an old man. The old man who married Lalitha also dies, leaving the child as his widow. She grows up amidst stringent regulations. While her people and society constantly stigmatise her presence, a social reformer Sundara Rao falls in love with her, convinces her and marries her. The film passionately puts forward the need to stop child marriage and advocate widow remarriage. It echoes the concerns of social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu. The film not only advocates widow remarriage but also depicts the event of remarriage as the essential solution for the emancipation of women condemned as widows. The movie is titled Remarriage without fearing the negative response from the orthodox audience. However, women's/feminist movements and feminists such as Gudipati Venkatachalam questioned the logic of forcing remarriage on widows without knowing about their choice. Also, the willingness of the man to marry the widow was considered an act of reform, so the man's credentials and credibility were not given much importance. Gurajada Apparao, in his *Kanyashulkam*, alerts society about pseudo-reformers such as Girisham. He pretends to be an activist against nautch girls but regularly visits Madhuravani. He is in a relationship with an older woman, Putakullamma, whom he exploits financially. He tries to lure a young widow Buchamma, on the pretext of mentoring her younger brother. He uses his English/English education as a tool to hoodwink people. He expresses his preference for young, "virgin" widows. Girisham's character is a reflection of the dubious individuals who were taking advantage of the reform movement to exploit and abuse women. The play also hints at the gaps in the movement and emphasises the need to think about them seriously.

Similarly, there was no follow-up on the woman's fate after the remarriage. The anxiety to get the widows married off did not pay attention to the background check of the groom. What happened to those women remained a big question in most cases. Gudipati Venkatachalam narrates the story of his cousin and comments on the insensitive manner in which the Widow Rescue Homes were being conducted, and widow remarriages were being performed :

She related her story after lunch. Her husband died when she was young. Unable to bear her possibly life-long widowhood, my uncle left the unknowing girl in Mr. Veeresalingam's Widow Rescue Home. It was already well-known how Mr. Veeresalingam treated these

widows who joined the Home. Who would come forward to marry these women who ran away from home clamoring for husbands? Only those who had no place else to go, couldn't find wives or were worthless came ready to be bridegrooms. Then Mr. Veeresalingam would arrange a bride-choosing session: only those girls whom the men liked, whether the girls liked them or not, were given to them in marriage and sent off. Yes, true. Or else, how could the reform movement go on? What girl would look at such a groom's face and freely agree to marry him? On the other hand, how could so many women who had joined the shelter be supported, regardless of how compassionate the reformer is? What meaning does such a reform have? (Moorty, 2010, p. 28)

While the advocacy against child marriage and in favour of widow remarriage was transformative, the films present a stereotypical image of an ideal woman like any other socio-cultural agency that is striving to preserve its hold on gender hierarchy. Markers come into play to strengthen the age-old images of devoted Hindu wives whose husbands are alive. Not only are the markers shown on women's bodies, but also are they highlighted and elevated. One example of this is vermilion. The hero, in *Malli Pelli*, exclaims, "yee kunkume, yee tilakame mahila jeevitananda saudhamlo velige mangalajyoti; pati daivataradhanakettina pranayajyoti" (this vermilion, this auspicious mark on the forehead is the auspicious light glowing in the mansion of happiness in a woman's life; it is the lamp of love lit for the worship of god called husband). Hero's sister sings, "kunkumame pavaname nayana mano mohaname strila kalaa jivaname, srikaram, subhakaram, sundaram, mangalakaram, suruchiram, sulalitam, jeevakalafalakam, premasudhasevanam" (vermillion is pure, rejoicing for eyes and heart, dream life for women, brings wealth and goodness, beautiful, auspicious, delicate, artful epigraph of life, consumption of honey of love).

Sumangali (1940) has progressive characters. The hero is a man of ideals and ideologies. The heroine Saraswati is an educated, progressive and elite urban woman. Her progressiveness is established in her drawing room discussions, her tennis playing, and her books and trophies in her room. But, when she comes to learn that she is a child widow, her entire world crumbles. She is pushed by the society to fit into the role of a widow. However, Satyam decides to marry her and marries her in the end. Parvati, Satyam's cousin, an orthodox woman waiting to get married to him, silently moves away from his life.



However, *Sumangali* tries its best to glorify and deify the status of a married woman instead of logically arguing for widow remarriage. Although progressive in its intention and purpose, the film collapses with its stereotypical understanding of the markers. A song presented in the background declares, "Adabratuke madhuram, vayasu, valapu, sogasu kulike ada bratuke madhuram, pasupu kunkuma nudutani velige, pati kaugitilo paravasamayye bhary bratuke madhuram; pasikunaku palosagutu murise talli bratuke madhuram; virajajulato chirunavvulato kunkuma ragamu anuragamuto, sirisampadato pasipapalato anugata patiyai anandavatiyai alare sumangali bratuke safalam" (A woman's life is sweet. A woman's life bristling with youth, love and beauty is sweet. Sweet is the life of a mother rejoicing in feeding the infant. Fulfilling is a married woman's life with jasmines in her hair, vermilion, song and love, wealth, and children, followed by her husband, smiling and happy). While the life of a married woman whose husband is alive is being highlighted and validated, the life of a widow is being condemned and devalued. It is almost the death that a widow's life is compared with. We are reminded of Veena Das quoting Nadia Serematakis on the interaction between acoustic, linguistic, and corporeal orientations, giving a public definition to a "good death" and distinguishing it from a "bad death". of this issue by Serematakis, death is always seen as physical death. She asks, "What happens to the work of mourning when women have been abducted, raped, and condemned to a social death?" (Das, 1996, p. 78) She observes that those women who are violated and rejected may be said to be occupying a zone between two deaths rather than between life and death. Witnessing and performing can even transform a bad death to a good death.

Resistance and Reversal

These movies, similar to other movies made in Telugu in the early years as well as later and now, are not devoid of occasional resistance against markers and associations. For instance, *Malapilla* narrates the story of a rural Dalit girl falling in love with a man from a privileged community and relocating herself along with her younger sisters to Kolkata as a married woman. She redesigns her thinking, lifestyle and appearance on her own terms. She strongly objects to the invocation of the image of wearing bangles as being not male enough or worthless.



Apart from her, other women in the movie are in the public domain and actively participate in the National Movement. Although most of their characters are nameless in the movie, they appear briefly, and their presence highlights the participation of women in important people's movements in an uninhabited manner. We can see them participating in community activities, addressing people and contributing to weaving on a charkha. Below are a few pictures that speak for women's presence in the transformative movements in pre-independent India.



Similarly, the movie *Vandemataram* or *Mangalasutram* (1939) presents women who are part of the public domain. The movie juxtaposes a woman confined to the private domain as the hero's wife, emphasising the importance of the sacred thread with a woman who is independent, progressive and autonomous and does not hesitate to propose to the hero. When he rejects her politely, her world is not crumbled like a typically stereotyped docile woman. She continues to move forward in the public domain, more actively participating in the National Movement. *Mangalasutram* remains not a mere marker but a symbolic connecting link between the woman who is eternally waiting for her husband lost to the cause of the nation and the man who loves his wife but prioritises his contribution to achieving freedom for the country. He lets down the private domain represented by his wife and rejects his movement companion's proposal to extend their ideological companionship to conjugal companionship. He chooses a path that he thinks is right. The two pictures given below show the two women, one as a companionate wife and the other as a companionate activist working towards the spread of nationalist fervour in society, particularly among children. (Rani, 2021)



The representation of markers is not limited to the representation of women but to the representation of Hindu women. It would be fascinating to connect gender, religion, nation and freedom movement to problematise the making of idealised and idolised mainstream identities as good Indian women.

Conclusion

Similar representations continued later and into the present. Telugu cinema, probably similar to films in other languages and contexts, has continued to celebrate markers, objectify and commercialise women's bodies, represent women as mere bodies that are passive, docile, incapable, and worthless, devalue women as targets of violence, aggression, domination, exclude them and humiliate them as stereotypes, and reduce them to the roles thrust on them. However, some women, depending on their other identities—given, imposed, chosen, deprived—are excluded, ignored, dismissed, dominated, discriminated and tortured further. Such women include those from socially marginalised communities, working classes, and minority religions. While the suffering of mainstream women is elevated as ideal feminine endurance and condemned with sympathy, violence against "other" women is normalised and even encouraged. While markers are imposed on mainstream women, markers of respectability are prohibited for "other" women. Rather, markers of degradation and humiliation are imposed on them.

The site of the movies has extended from the initial tents to theatres to the multiplex to OTTs, erasing the space between the theatre and the home, the public and the private. Thousands of Telugu films were made between the 1930s and now, and they have witnessed radical experiments regarding technique, theme, and presentation. However, the deep-rooted prejudice against identities is carefully preserved and presented by Telugu films in some way or another. The binaries were intact throughout. Rural and urban binary was extensively represented in the early Telugu movies, particularly through women characters. Similarly, Indian values and Western influence was another binary. Uneducated and educated also was one such binary. The binaries were complicated because nuances of good and bad were associated with them. A critical exploration of such binaries in the early Telugu cinema can be an interesting study. Bias against questioning and non-conforming women is still articulated in several forms. Popular Telugu films emphasising the elaborate and chauvinistic marriage rituals are still being made. Such films, apart from many others, continue to glorify the markers that define a Hindu, upper caste, middle/upper class, conforming, "traditional" woman.

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