

## **The Masterful Mingling of Caste Hierarchy and Successful Mainstream Cinema in Telugu: The Case of the Kamma Community in Solidifying Telugu Hero Identity**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The production of cinema has been a commercial activity since its time of inception in India. Particularly the English educated middle class from landed communities in the coastal Andhra region were pioneers of the mainstream Telugu cinema in particular and South Indian cinema in general in creating mammoth infrastructure(studios, facilities and allied industries in the 24 crafts of cinema). In a more subtle way, the Kamma community from coastal Andhra has been primarily responsible, not only to create a pure commercial idiom of cinema separated from Art cinema, but also to the personalisation of the quintessential hero of Telugu mainstream cinema as a symbol of the universe they belonged to and created. This paper examines the masterful way in which a self-sufficient dominant caste from a region, contributed not only to non-Brahmin movement, but also to challenge the Brahmin dominance in creative field like cinema, which is caste agnostic in principle. It also shows, with examples from the time of the talkie age of 1931 till late 2000s, how the Kamma community successfully sustained its caste identity in Telugu cinema without making it obvious to the cinegoer. The paper examines how a traditionally non-Brahmin, Sudra caste paved its way to gain monopoly over a effective social weapon like cinema, without hurting caste sensitivities of the cinegoers. The paper examines this process of assimilation of caste identity through several key players like, the heroes, producers and directors from the Kamma caste, who defined Telugu mainstream cinema.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Telugu Cinema-Kamma Community-Hero-Mainstream Commercial cinema-Caste identity*

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The story of caste and its dynamics which work efficiently in the creation of a successful world of art and commerce in the public sphere is a fascinating study in the field of Indian cinema, more so in a predominantly mainstream commercial idiom of Telugu regions in India. It is a story of how a non-Brahmin community from rural Andhra got benefited from the English education and its migration to towns and cities for various commercial activities, of which cinema became the most profit yielding business. The way the Kamma community rose to the occasion and developed its way of creating a sustained model of the star system from own community is an example of how caste can contribute to the growth of a caste agnostic industry in a nuanced manner. This process included a revolt against Brahmin dominance in the socio political milieu of rural Andhra of the coastal districts rich with the Krishna and the Godavari waters, by the non-Brahmin communities like the Kammas, Kapus and Reddys of which the Kammas lead the process of challenging the Brahmin supremacy both in personal and public spaces by getting their people educated to western ideas and thoughts. We can divide this saga of the Kamma community into four stages namely,

1. Starting a revolt against the Brahmin dominance in public spaces and equipping the non- Brahmin communities with education and economic prowess to challenge them. This included rural migration of educated non-Brahmin men to the towns for lucrative purposes. This included investing agricultural riches into cinema as producers and also developing film making skills as directors. The period includes late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (1858-1927)
2. This stage includes creating a progressive cinematic idiom for mainstream cinema where the themes are not mythological as was with general Indian early era, but introducing the social themes where the hero is a non -Brahmin commoner. Therefore creating a idiom of commercial cinema, with attractive songs and music, along with the hero. This period includes the early decades of the 1930s, till late 1940s (1936-1949).
3. This stage is a decisive one where the hero identity as a Kamma community representative is concretised, with further entrancement of the star system contributing to the spurt of many Kamma filmmakers to diversify into various departments of cinema and many more young men from the community to become leading men in Telugu commercial cinema. These heroes/stars in Telugu were

different from the Tamil and Hindi film actors, as they had a strong caste based support system already at their disposal to launch them in cinema. Tamil heroes like M. G. Ramachandran and Sivaji Ganesan used their political affiliations to the Dravidian movement to become forces to reckon with, in Tamil cinema. In Telugu, the caste factor preceded their politics which was not as a frontal attack on caste and its moorings, as in Tamil cinema. This solidifies the money spinning model of mainstream cinema created by the Kamma community (1951-1975).

4. This stage signifies the state of Kamma community becoming the prime mover of Telugu cinema, with occasional challenges from other non-Brahmin communities for the lion's share. It also signifies the subordination of the Brahmin intelligentsia to a less significant role in Telugu cinema as auteurs whose films had a niche audience. This period starts from early 1980s till the late 2000s.

#### **The Seed of Kamma Ascendancy: A Non-Brahmin Movement**

There is a necessity to examine the seeds of the Kamma caste ascendancy as the prime mover of anti-Brahmin movement in the coastal districts of Krishna and Guntur in Andhra in pre 20<sup>th</sup> century, to contextualise their development as a primary non-Brahmin community which wanted to compete with the Brahmin community, both in terms of social and political importance.

As mentioned earlier, the river basins of Krishna and Godavari were the major production reservoirs of Andhra with the advent of English administration providing them with both irrigation and waterways facilities in the area (Satyanarayana 104). This production benefitted the prominent agricultural communities like the Kammas, Kapus and Reddys who were major players in rural economy<sup>2</sup>. The introduction of English schools and other educational facilities made the Brahmin communities to get the prime benefits as they took to the new knowledge, as easily as they were a traditional community who were in acquiring the knowledge of Sanskrit and the chief officiating community on rituals in the rural life (Frykenburg 274-275).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Kammas, Kapus, Reddys are rural communities who are classified as Sudras by the brahminical religion, who come under the fourth category of caste classification.

<sup>3</sup> Frykenburg who worked extensively on the coastal districts of the Krishna-Godavari belt documents the positions of Brahmins as chief accountants of villages, apart from being priests therefore covering both socio economic area of rural society.

With the non- Brahmin communities taking to English education slowly, a desire to compete toe to toe, with the Brahmins arose in the Kamma, Kapu and other non-Brahmin communities who soon got enrolled into educating their kids into the western ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity through the British educational institutions(Sundar 71).Incidentally, these communities started migrating to towns and cities for greener pastures for their community development and entering into the business enterprise.

It is interesting that among these communities, it is the Kamma community which wanted to openly challenge the Brahmin caste dominance, by not only taking to English education, but also to challenging the Brahminical texts like the epics Ramayana, *Mahabharatha* and the *Puranas* by mastering the language of Brahmins, Sanskrit (Prabhakara Rao 163).

Kamma ideologues like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary (1887-1943) launched a literary attack on the Hindu texts by producing a counter literature with a rational critique, juxtaposing the hollowness of the religious texts and advocating the creation of a counter narrative of a term called eschewing Brahmin dominance even in officiating marriage functions. His works *The Suta Puranam*, *Bhagavadgita* and *SambukaVadha* deal with the treachery of caste system which gave injustice to lower castes. Tripuraneni uses the Aryan Dravidian theory to distinguish the Brahmins and non-Brahmin castes to make his point more significant (Sambasiva Rao 149-150). Tripuraneni produced texts specially based on rational thought, criticising the villainy of Brahmins who portrayed Rama and Krishna as paragons of virtue. The method he chose is to dissect epics of India through a rational and logical lens (Krishna Rao 102)<sup>4</sup>. Separate Sanskrit colleges were instituted for the non-Brahmin communities, to master the language and to create a separate community among non- Brahmins who can learn the ritual chants and can officiate over the functions themselves, by exclusion of the Brahmin community. This was the first step in the journey of the Kamma community to create a new ethic of creative literature and art which focused on social themes and included the theme of human dignity and non-Brahmin

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Tripuraneni wanted to attack the Brahmins and their ideology through producing scholarly literature like them. Hence he chose the poetic metre and composing a *Kavya* in fact subverting the illogical plots of epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

ascendancy. This creative attitude mixed with the western education, seeped into the Kamma endeavour of creating an anti-Brahmin thematic canvas even when the community started investing their commercial investments from their agricultural surplus into cinema (Damodaran 114). Likewise progressive ideas of upholding nationalism, along with creating a strong native Telugu identity with focus on native folklore instead of mythological was an important aspect of the Kamma filmmakers who were spreading their wings in literature, education and journalistic walks of life of the Telugu world.

This brings us to the next phase of the Kamma model of mainstream cinema with the Indian template of song and dance, which was filled with progressive and atheistic lyrics instead of treading the safe path of other Telugu filmmakers of producing safe mythological which were already in vogue in people's mind, on celluloid. From early 1930s, we see a progressive way of filmmakers like Gudavalli Ramabrahmam (1902-1946), a Kamma intellectual from the Krishna district who not only started a rational journal called *Prajamitra*, but also focussed on the themes of untouchability of harijans, who were cleverly ousted to the brink of the societal norms by the Brahmin community (Srinivas 28-29). Ramabrahmam also focused on creating the concept of native heroes of Andhra regions like Brahma Naidu who fought for entry of temples for untouchables in 12<sup>th</sup> century CE Andhra. He commissioned intellectuals of Telugu literature like Tripuraneni Gopichand (1910-1962)<sup>5</sup> to initiate research on Telugu folklore and translated the thematic universe from mythological to native, a theme we see as the long lasting theory which permanently impacted Telugu cinema in creating a Kamma hero, who also became a local star. In this way he created the concept of commercial mainstream cinema which celebrated non- Brahmin ascendancy reflected in the literary efforts of Kamma ideologues like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudhary.

### **The Introduction of the Social Themes in Telugu Cinema: The Kamma Aesthetic**

Telugu cinema presents an interesting aesthetic of introducing a non-Brahmin hero

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note Gopichand was the son of Ramaswamy Choudhary and also was a novelist in Telugu who also participated in M. N. Roy's Radical Humanist movement in the late 1930s to early 1940s as its secretary in Andhra region.

and also the idiom of commerciality, with the help of lyricists, writers and music directors who were Brahmins. This cleverly manipulative model of Kamma community by becoming the producers and distributors in the commercial set up of cinema, by subordinating the traditional community which was noted for the pride of place in public and private sphere of society is an example of how a economic model can influence the theme and set up of a creative endeavour like cinema, without being seen as an overtly casteist phenomena in the public sphere.

Gudavalli Ramabrahmam (1902-1946) forms an important figure in introducing the no Brahmin themes in Telugu cinema, totally non mythological and inviting the rational luminaries of Andhra renaissance like Chalam<sup>6</sup> (1894-1979) and Tapi Dharma Rao<sup>7</sup> (1887-1973), to write the dialogues for his progressive films including path breaking *Mala Pilla* or the Untouchable Girl (1938) and *Rythu Bidda* or Son of the soil (1939), films which introduced the social hero instead of the current themes of money spinning mythological of Telugu. This one decisive move by Ramabrahmam to make social films which speak of untouchability, the anti-Brahmin agenda of the regional Justice Party and the maverick touch of including songs which invoke anti-Brahmin ideology and which mock blind beliefs of religiosity of Brahmin rhetoric proved a watershed in deciding the course of Telugu cinema in coming decades of 1940s and 1950s.

As mentioned earlier, the Kamma landed community of agriculturalists in an attempt to compete with the Brahmin intellectual universe, taught themselves the skills of language and also led a movement of non -Brahmin ascendancy in the public echelons of South Indian cinema in general and the case of Kamma community is significant as it gave Telugu cinema a platform to become a big market, a playing ground for mainstream heroes like N. T. Rama Rao (NTR) who was the first superstar of Telugu cinema from the early 1950s (Srinivas 160). The timing of a charismatic young man from a coastal agricultural family, an economics graduate who wanted to

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<sup>6</sup> Gudipati Venktachalam, was a literary genius in Telugu who specialised in feminist ideas and women's liberation even before the term feminism came into vogue. His novels and short stories were once considered a taboo for women to read. There was a unofficial ban on his works as the society in early 1950s and 1960s felt they would spoil the family system and corrupt women. He was a Brahmin but a rational thinker.

<sup>7</sup> Tapi Dharma Rao was a scholar rational thinker who specialised in writing screenplay for early Telugu socials and an open participant in non-Brahmin movement in Andhra.

make it big in Telugu cinema defined the stardom of NTR, once he became the star-hero who was responsible to create an alternative image for non-Brahmin community of heroes, in Telugu cinema (Ramesh 8). First decade of Telugu cinema was dominated by Brahmin heroes like Chittoor Nagaiah (1904-1973), who distinguished himself as a singer musician and actor par excellence.<sup>8</sup> But in the second decade from late 1940s, Telugu cinema with the Kamma producer directors like Ramabrahmam and Ghantasala Balaramaih (1906-1953) (who introduced another superstar of Telugu cinema, Akkineni Nageswara Rao, popularly known as ANR, also a Kamma) paved the way for the star system which itself contributed to the commercialisation of art of film making (Srinivas 166). Slowly the titles of films were changing from hero agnostic tone to glorifying the hero. But this process was imminent and was not deliberate and can be seen as an offshoot of the male star that got the cash registers ringing for the distributors and producers.

The 1950s were also significant that the Kamma community with its paraphernalia of writers, directors and producers to a decisive turn to introduce social themes of daily life like lives of middle class people, the sufferings of peasant community and the nationalist themes as the mainstay of their films, unlike the reigning mythological and folklore till late 1940s. Films like *Shavukaru* (The moneylender) (1950) and *Palleturu* (The Village) (1952) symbolise the themes of rural social geography and the problems peasants face due to corrupt administrative officials<sup>9</sup>. Similarly *Rojulu Marayi* (The Days Have Changed)(1955) was an in-your-face film which discussed about the land ownership of farmers over the corrupt landlords and with its ending of the downfall of the landlord heralded the entrenchment of the social theme, which consisted of ordinary human beings and not gods and goddesses of the Brahminical system as heroes (Srinivas 160-164).

It is again interesting that ANR was the star who openly declared he is an atheist and who is generally attributed to usher in indigenous film making in the linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh. By the early 1960s he shifted his base to Hyderabad

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<sup>8</sup> Nagaiah was easily the first superstar of Telugu cinema, as he was the first actor to get a pay cheque of one lakh as remuneration. But he played roles of a hero, an old man and also a saint in his heyday, a fact why he was known more as a great actor than a star.

<sup>9</sup> It is significant that both the films have N.T. Rama Rao in the lead, *Shavukaru* and *Palletoru* cemented his star status as a people's hero.

from Madras, the citadel of south cinema in order to create an infrastructure for Telugu cinema in Telugu speaking state (Srinivas 102). So, we come to an era where the Kamma community created an ethic of commercial cinema, the concept of a hero, his cult of being the commoner and not god in the film and the creation of infrastructure of making films in commercial mainstream which created a permanent work milieu for Telugu cinema, a model which it continues till now.

### **The Era of Kamma Consolidation: 1975-2000**

The year 1977 was a watershed in consolidating the cult of commercial mainstream hero as a part of the Kamma ascendancy. Telugu cinema's most popular hero, N. T. Rama Rao starred in a 'masala' film, a genre which is meant to be a potpourri of all the ingredients of song, dance, and fights highlighting the hero came to the fore as the first mass film which gave high commercial possibilities to a medium which had a limited budget mark till the early 1970s (Prasad 49).

The film *Adavi Ramudu* (1977) or the man of the forests ('literally', 'cinematically' of masses) portrayed NTR's image of being an 'ideal hero', a messiah of the downtrodden and a man who saved the modesty of a woman, an image he cleverly carried from his films to his political entry in 1982 where he successfully translated his image of a mass hero to a mass leader in the politics of Andhra Pradesh. The film also introduced K. Raghavendra Rao (b.1942-), (a Kamma scion, son of a yesteryear director, K.S. Prakash Rao who pioneered the creation of infrastructure for films in Madras by building the Prakash studios) as a master mass film maker who is acknowledged by later day filmmakers like SS Rajamouli as their guru who taught them the visual grammar of making a successful mainstream film.

The coming years of Telugu cinema had a combination of parallel cinema by auteurs like B Narasinga Rao and Bengali masters like Mrinal sen and Goutam Ghosh but it was the model introduced by the Kamma community of making the commercial aspect of cinema more marketable, than the art aspect of cinema coming to the fore<sup>10</sup>. There is a geopolitical angle to the rise and entrenchment of Kamma community as the prime movers of Telugu cinema (Srinivas 35). A case in point was that along with

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<sup>10</sup> Mrinal Sen made his rural drama *Oka Oori Katha* (1977), while Goutam Ghosh made *Maa Bhumi* (1980) and B. Narasinga Rao made *Dasi* (1988), all movies which focussed on the feudalistic aspects of landlords and the question of ownership of land in Telangana districts.



the Kammas, the Reddi community another agricultural community from the coastal belt in a way pioneered the introduction of the social theme in Telugu cinema. Progressive rational themes of women empowerment, anti-caste rhetoric were introduced by the great director producer B. N. Reddi in his early films *Vandemataram* (1939), *Devatha* (1941) and more significantly in *Swargaseema* (1945), a path-breaking film which talked about a man leaving his wife after falling prey to a damsel, which leaves his wife and her two kids in a mess. Quite remarkable for the period it was shot, the wife of this man does not commit suicide, after being spurned by her husband. She lives alone, creates sustenance for her kids by doing a job known to her and brings up them well. The theme was rebellious in the Hindu belief system of a coy wife bearing with every mistake of her husband (Dakshinamurthy 107).

Such themes made by a Reddy filmmaker show that the introduction of the social theme was not a Kamma monopoly. But here is a catch. The way the Reddis portrayed the social themes with an aesthetic which was more subtle and arty was turned into more in-your-face and pungent visual treatment by the Kammas as socio politically the Kammas spearheaded an anti- Brahmin movement where they started schools and colleges for their community children, launched Sanskrit schools which taught ritual craft to Kamma men to officiate over their family functions instead of the Brahmin priest officiating them.<sup>11</sup> They even started a clan of Kamma Brahmins, meaning the people who were adept at performing marriages and other rituals with Telugu hymns instead of the traditional Sanskrit mantras (Ramesh 187).

This method of questioning the status quo is not present in the Reddi oriented filmmaking, but the Kamma clan took it a point to be shown in their films. More interesting fact is that most of the Telugu cinema's poets, lyricists, screenplay writers came from the Brahmin community but they were employed by the non-Brahmin community as cog in the wheel. This was a victory for the non-Brahmin model of the Kamma caste to encompass public and lucrative fields of Andhra society which were traditionally dominated by the Brahmin community. So, this was a model of debrahminizing the society at large and the creative arena which was dominated by

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<sup>11</sup> N. T. Rama Rao was the leader who continued this practice of engaging non-Brahmin priest for non-Brahmin marriages; mostly of Kammas he openly performed a marriage of his associate Koteswara Rao in 1988. The marriage consists of native language vows of marriage and excludes Sanskrit hymns of Brahmin priests.

the Kammas from the 1970s till the present globalized world, where the infrastructure was more extended by this community which took to the latest technology and introduced every new technique of using the paraphernalia of commercial mainstream prop to make it more saleable to the common man. There was a model of Sanskritization and copying the Brahmin model of being the high priests of culture by the Kamma community led by NTR himself, as he primarily donned the mythological roles of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, in many films of late 1960s and early 1970s before he called it quits in early 1980s to launch his political party (Ramesh 63).

The archaic Telugu he used in these mythological films depicted that he as a star hero belonging to a major non Brahmin caste, was debrahminizing the themes traditionally attached to the Brahmin community. His film on the warrior of Mahabharatha, Karna (*Dana Veera Soora Karna*, 1977) depicts a rational critique of the caste system through the character of Karna. A scene in the film has the character of Duryodhana, the benefactor of Karna mouthing rational critique of the dubious birth of the Pandava princes, and other sages like Drona entrenched in fantastic legends<sup>12</sup> (Srinivas 263).

This way NTR also embarked on the project that Kamma reformers like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudhary started of rational critique of the Hindu epics, through detailed analysis of the *Puranic* stories. As mentioned earlier, he was assisted by filmmakers who were masters in introducing the commercial mainstream which later got dubbed as the 'mass masala' genre. Directors like K. Raghavendra Rao who cemented NTR's position as a hero who pioneered this masala genre also gave rise to a crop of financiers who constructed many single screen theatres in the Telugu coastal belt, mainly the Krishna Godavari belt and by the time Telugu cinema shifted its base from then Madras to Hyderabad in late 1980s, theatres construction too got a boom in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh region too.

This way, the Kamma community rose to the level of a bunch of film making clans who control not only the infrastructure but also the distribution of the films made in Telugu. So, economic affluence combined with the commercial up splurge of

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<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that the dialogue writer for this movie was one Venkata Kavi of Guntur, who studied in a Sanskrit college started by Kamma community in Guntur and who became a Telugu scholar and poet, the dialogues of the movie went in the vein of Tripuraneni's rational critique of the epics of Mahabharatha and Puranic tales.

the star system and paraphernalia of theatres helped the community to further create a Gramscian hegemony of a select group who function with vested interests and decide the course of a film industry <sup>13</sup>(Srinivas 104). The result being that, it is the process which garners our attention how this was achieved. The use of Brahminical mythological depicting NTR as a god, thereby creating a cult of devotion among the already established mass star system and converting into political victory in 1983 by NTR became the final frontier of the ascend of Kamma community (Srinivas 260). To sum up the community first started with educating themselves with the western ideals, also competing with the dominant Brahmin community by acquiring knowledge of the canonical literature of Hindu lore, then started a project of subverting it through rational critique, and then with this knowledge entered the business of films in Telugu.

Western education and ideals were lapped up by the Brahmin communities in the form of securing jobs and becoming officers etc. but Kamma community took this to the next level as they branched out into many walks of life, not only in government jobs, but into entrepreneurship by positing the capital they earned through their farms and agricultural produce to city based trade, of which they saw films and cinema as a lucrative possibility. So the concept of modernity in India was taken not only in being educated in English and getting jobs, but also in using it to effect in modern entities like cinema and other arts by a community. In other words the Brahmin community could not utilise the offshoots of modernity in entirety in the Telugu speaking world, but the ambitious Kamma community with their unity of caste and purpose went on to use various facets of modernity to its benefit. So agricultural affluence, combined with acquiring knowledge of the language and a zeal to emerge as the prime movers of mainstream commercial Telugu cinema is the story of this community which produced some pioneers in Indian cinema like L.V. Prasad(1908-1994), who was the first major filmmaker who started a studio in Madras and Akkineni Nageswara Rao, whose name is synonymous with being the star responsible to the shift of filmmaking

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of hegemony sits through the case of Kamma community well, as they created a political, social and their commercial culture as the organic ideology which was accepted by the market forces and the masses as a part of consent (in Gramscian terms).

from Madras to native Hyderabad, right from shifting his residence to the capital of Andhra Pradesh in 1963 itself.

A consequence of the Kamma resurgence was the relegation of Brahmin filmmakers like K. Visvanath (b.1930-), Bapu (1933-2013) and Singitam Srinivasa Rao (1931-), three significant auteurs of Telugu cinema who produced landmark films which gave Telugu cinema international recognition, to a subordinate level of niche filmmakers<sup>14</sup>. Another result of the Kamma model of mainstream cinema with its control over theatre business was the lack of a helpful atmosphere for the growth of parallel cinema, which had an already meagre representation by filmmakers like B. Narasingarao, Madala Ranga Rao and Akkineni Kutumba Rao. These makers could not get theatres to screen their films as a culture was created by 1970s in Telugu cinema, where people worshipped their heroes (thanks to the star system orchestrated by production houses through the persona of NTR in 1950s) and minded only star vehicles as cinema worth watching.

Another filmmaker actor who needs a special mention here is superstar Ghattamaneni Krishna (b.1943-), a charismatic hero who followed the star system and had a loyal fan base<sup>15</sup>. He not only excelled in competing with NTR in being a mass hero, but pioneered many technical developments in the craft of film making in Telugu, like producing the first 70mm screen film, the first James bond genre film, the first cowboy film in Telugu (Srinivas 194). Like NTR Krishna too became a progenitor of studio by establishing a studio in Hyderabad (Padmalaya). So in a way the continuation of this model of commercial cinema proved beneficial for Telugu cinema. With all this set up well arranged by 1990s, Telugu cinema gave rise to the biggest commercial filmmaker of 21<sup>st</sup> century, S. S. Rajamouli (b.1973-) a dream warrior who thinks innovatively in the masala genre of mainstream pot-boiler along with the native sentiments of Indian psyche.

Post globalisation had posed a challenge to the craft of cinema, to make it a marketable product. And Telugu cinema slowly picked up its moon by masterminds

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting again to know the fact that all three directors noted as the cultural messiahs of Telugu cinema, Viswanth, Srinivasa Rao and Bapu are born Brahmins and they dug their own furrows in the commercial jungle of mainstream Telugu cinema, garnering success with their sheer strength of storytelling as a visual medium, as opposed to the in-your-face type of commercial masala movies.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly Krishna gave birth to another superstar Mahesh Babu (b.1975-) who is one of the most popular commercial stars of post globalised Telugu cinema.

like Rajamouli in late 2000s of how to mount a movie to a nationwide success. So here also the Kamma model of star system gave a new dimension in Telugu cinema, that of a star filmmaker, whose films are eagerly awaited across the country.

### **Conclusion**

The recent surveys suggesting that Telugu cinema is responsible through Rajamouli for creating the term, a “Pan Indian film” through his classic series *Bahubali*, the model of masterfully introducing a star system, creating a hero worship (mind you, Prabhas was made a pan Indian star through this successful Kamma model, though he is a Raju or belonging to the Kshatriya caste of coastal Andhra) and introducing a successful marketable product called a pan Indian film all became a triumph of the Kamma caste which had the ability, ambition and most of all a genuine zeal to make cinema a profitable mechanism of investment for a community migrating from villages to towns to win it big. It was this ambition which the Brahmin community lacked, though Telugu cinema boasts of many poets, lyricists, screenplay writers belonging to films but the aspect worth observing is that they were all subordinated to be cogs in the wheel not the holders of the reins of filmmaking by non-Brahmin communities. Many socio political aspects played a role in this process of subordination. The Kamma community traditionally being an agricultural community, it knew how to work physically to earn and the Brahmin community being more noted for being brainy, were appointed as village accountants and sarpanches. It is worth noting here that the system of Karanam (chief accountant) introduced by medieval times in village administration was the heirloom of Brahmin community. Reports were documented that these men as accountants conspired with other heads of village to snatch land of the voiceless cultivators by producing fake documents, owing to the ill-informed village community (Frykenburg 275). NTR when he became the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 1983, abolished this system of Karanam and Brahmins lost their monopoly even as village heads (Ramesh 263). So the success story of Kamma community as a symbol of fighting for equality and with a vengeance to be the pioneer of non -Brahmin movement in Andhra and also to be the main player in the creative output of cinema shows how a traditional Sudra community can create a field where caste identity is cleverly camouflaged as a soft power in a caste agnostic field like film production.

This case is significant as the process in which Kamma community did this is by occupying prime positions of film making like direction, action, and production and subordinating Brahmin community to other crafts of cinema like lyrics, screenplay and dialogue writing. Holding the reins of commerce and relegating the tertiary departments, making the other caste communities subordinate in this commercial ethic, where caste fighting is controlled by the employment opportunities created by the production house. So here in Telugu cinema the Kamma community masterfully created a permanent mainstream film ethic, where their caste and the hero is projected in the front side and others are kept aside, but no opposition or discomfort is created in the creative area of making a film. The presence of key players who pay the others as the ones who call the shots in a post globalised soft power of creating community domination makes for a perfect example of achieving a success in a caste ridden society through adapting to modern techniques, including creating the manpower who master the technique of film making. This is a unique case of Telugu cinema where actually caste system was used effectively against the dominant community to blur the differences at least on paper, at the same time wielding a soft power of being the prime community sustaining a sector which is in principle unorganised, but by bringing their own work ethic the Kamma community made it an organised sector with their calculated moves yielding results for the universal appeal of mainstream Telugu cinema.

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