

Chapter 46

Branding Culture: A Study of Telugu Film Industry

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ABSTRACT

Telugu film industry, known as Tollywood is gaining popularity in the domain of regional film industry in India. Over the years, the industry through its actors, remaking and dubbing to various languages films; a tendency of culture and brand has emerged. Sometimes celebrated artists brand the films and vice versa. Brand endorsements and in film advertisements have become the order of the day. The current chapter attempts to explore Telugu cinema as culture and brand by analyzing the cases of the films like Pokiri, Magadheera, Baahubali: The Beginning and Baahubali 2: The Conclusion. In addition, the study tries to understand the timeline of Telugu cinema, keeping the culture and branding in mind.

INTRODUCTION

India is known for its culture. The Indian cultural history is more than 4,500 years old (Kuiper, 2010). Huge cultural diversities exist in terms of religious affiliations to Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, and Jainism (Heehs, 2002). Film has emerged as an important component in India's cultural progressions over a century, with noted French filmmaker Claire Denis rightly stating that India has a strong culture for cinema ('India has a strong culture for cinema', 2013).

Hindi cinema industry, known as *Bollywood*, is one of the largest film producers in India. Being a larger part of the Indian film industry, *Bollywood* represents 43% of the net box office revenue. The industry has to its credit the huge number of film productions in the world (Pippa, Niloufer, Keith, 2006; Wasko, 2003; Jha, 2005 & Matusitz, Payano, 2012). Many claim that the six major factors - ancient Indian epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*; the impact of ancient Sanskrit drama; the traditional and folk theatre; Parsi theatre; Hollywood; and Western musical television - have shaped the convention of Indian cinema industry (Jones, 2010; Gokulsing, Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004).

Apart from *Bollywood*, films are made in various Indian languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam, Bhojpuri, Punjabi, Gujarati, Odia, Assamese, Rajasthani, Haryanvi, Sindhi

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and Konkani. The regional film industries are coming into fore with increasing focus for reasons, which could be many. Several regional films have created waves in the Indian film industry, packed with rich content and fulfilling the audience's cultural appetite. Mostly, regional films are less budget-driven. They are based on the filmmakers' explorative ideas like the Marathi film, *Sairat* (2016), *Fandry* (2013) and *Dombivli Fast* (2005). Moreover, the films are focused in terms of regional languages, cultures and local issues (Mehrotra, 2016). The association of heavyweights from *Bollywood* and popular studies from abroad has further strengthened the industry. The Marathi film, *Ventilator* (2016) produced by *Bollywood* actor Priyanka Chopra's Purple Pebble Pictures, was invited to the 55th New York Film Festival. Similarly, the Marathi film, *Shwaas* (2004), directed by Rajesh Mapuskar, bagged the National Award for Best Feature Film and was India's official entry to the Oscars in the Best Foreign Language Film category for the year 2004. The Tamil film, *Visaranai* (2015) was chosen to represent India for the Oscars. Two Marathi films - *Harishchandrachhi Factory* (2009) and *Court* (2015), the Malayalam film, *Adaminte Makan Abu* (2011) and the Gujarati film, *The Good Road* (2013) had similar credentials in the history of regional cinema in India (Purandare, 2017). Going by these examples, it could be rightly stated that the regional cinema, in itself, has created a special space in the Indian film industry, becoming a brand in terms of contents based on language, culture and local issues.

TELUGU FILMS, BRAND AND CULTURE

Telugu film industry, popularly known as *Tollywood*, is based in Hyderabad, the joint capital of the two south Indian states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and has its own significance in the history of Indian films (Krishnamoorthy, 2007). The Telugu film industry boasts of having the highest numbers of theatres in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Statewise Number of Single Screens,' 2009). The industry had produced 268, 245 and 286 films in the year 2005, 2006 and 2008 respectively (Kurmanath, 2007; *Tollywood loses to Bollywood on numbers*, 2010).

Ramoji Film City, located at Hyderabad, has bagged a place in the Guinness Book of World Records, for having the world's largest film production facility (Ramoji Film City sets record,' 2005). The Prasad's IMAX in Hyderabad has the record of the world's largest 3D IMAX screen and the most attended screen in the world ('King of good times,' 2011). With a whopping 2,800 theatres, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana boast of having the largest number of screens in any state in India (Kesireddy, 2009). It has been seen that the culture of watching films at theatres is widely prevalent. Hence, this kind of phenomena has directly and indirectly helped the film industry to emerge as a brand in entertainment sector in India.

It has been witnessed that several successful Telugu films have been remade or dubbed into various Indian languages including Hindi ('The great role reversal of *Tollywood*,' 2012). With the success of *Bommarillu* (2006) directed by Bhaskar, the film was subsequently remade into Tamil, Bengali, Oriya, Urdu and Hindi. The success of the film, *Pokiri* (2006) directed by Puri Jagannadh, has resulted in its remake into Hindi, Tamil and Kannada. The film *Magadheera* (2009) was super hit and was remade into Malayalam, Tamil and Bengali (Narasimhan, 2006). Apart from remaking of films from Telugu to various regional languages in India, dubbing culture became popular. The films like *Dhee*, *Magadheera*, *Arya 2*, *Leader*, *Vikramarkudu*, *Eega* and *Baahubali: The Beginning*, were dubbed into Hindi language to meet the growing demand. Telugu films like *Criminal*, *Khadgam*, *Arya 2*, *Businessman*, *Magadheera* and *Dookudu* have been dubbed into Tamil language. The Telugu films – *Dookudu*, *Vikramarkudu*, *Rebel*, *Yevadu* and *Baahubali: The Beginning* have been dubbed into Malayalam. Films like *Pokiri*, *Magadheera*,

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