FANS AND STARS

PRODUCTION, RECEPTION AND CIRCULATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE

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This is to certify that I, S. V. Srinivas, have carried out the research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph.D. Ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

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Introduction

The Publics of Cinema

The overarching concern of this study is to evolve a theoretical framework and analytical tools that help us understand how films are watched and what viewers, situated in particular historical, socio-political contexts, bring to bear upon their engagement with the cinema. Considering the centrality of the audience as a category for a study like this one, which focuses on the circulation and reception of cinema, an important question is how the audience is to be conceived. Given the differences among audience groups, like class, caste and gender, and the currency of influential narratives that accentuate and essentialize these differences, can we speak purposefully of the audience in the singular? These problems are brought into sharper relief by the particularities of the situation in Andhra Pradesh.

By the 1980s the categories mass-audience and class-audience gained unprecedented prominence in shaping attitudes to Telugu cinema. The audiences signified by these terms existed as distinct groups since the early days of cinema. Touring and permanent cinemas, the first of the latter being Maruthi Cinema in Vijayawada, opened in 1921, had separate enclosures and seating arrangements catering to lower and higher class/caste viewers respectively.[1] The terms themselves seem to have been in existence before the eighties, particularly in informal discussions on Telugu cinema rather than in 'serious' film criticism But in the eighties they acquired the ability to provide explanatory accounts of cinema, especially when used in consonance with two other terms which too

[1] I discuss the role played the viewer's caste in determining where he/she sat in cinema halls in the next chapter.

began to be increasingly used around this time: mass-film(s) and class-film(s).

`Mass-audience' refers to the lower class audience. Never clearly stated but implied is the lower *caste* origin of the referent. Mass' connotes tastelessness, absence or negation of culture, with the mass-audience supposedly watching mass-films and rejecting meaningful cinema. On the other hand, the 'class-audience' is middle-class (and upper caste) in origin, and watches class-films which are believed to fuse tasteful entertainment and social purpose.[2]

The schematic categorization and the traits attributed to these audiences need to be questioned But it is also important to pay adequate attention to the fact that the audience is differentiated, almost from the very beginning of the medium's history[3] and that the differences are mobilized to make larger claims about the state of the medium as well as society. Ironically, it is by redeploying these audience categories and those that denote the kind of films they allegedly patronize that a beginning can be made to understand how cinema is viewed in particular historical, social and political contexts. Commonsensical notions of cinema or its audiences cannot be wished away since they provide the frames for rendering the medium intelligible in the contexts within which it circulates.

I therefore propose to adopt the concepts mass-audience, mass-film, class-audience, class-film as well as some others which are already available. Using them as a starting point, I wish to examine how audiences in India understand cinema. Simultaneously I would tike to evolve a framework to engage with the politics of cinema, including the politics of viewing. My specific focus will be on Telugu cinema and its audiences.

Cinema circulates in different spheres, acquiring a range of meanings, bearing a variety of burdens. It is visible in the other media as well: Telugu language newspapers; television, both state

[2] Mass and class-films are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

[3] Hughes (1997) argues that it took over a decade for cinema to become available for the working class in Madras city. It is possible that the situation in other parts of the Madras Presidency, including what is now a part of Andhra Pradesh, was similar. However, I do not have any data to either strengthen Hughes' claim or counter it.

owned and private; and magazines (not just film magazines) promote themselves by promoting cinema. The pervasiveness of the medium in public spaces raises a question with which I wish to begin my study. What kind of a pubhc sphere does cinema have? Watching films is only a small part of the interaction between cinema and its actual or potential audience. To rephrase the comment made by a women's activist in another context, cinema *assaults* you everywhere. In an environment where this assault is public, the publicness of the medium merits close attention.

Jurgen Habermas describes the bourgeois public sphere as `a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as a bearer of public opinion' (1974: 49). Historically speaking, the political task of bourgeois public sphere was the regulation of civil society' (Habermas 1989: 52). This sphere was deployed, 'against the public authorities... to engage them in a debate over general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity relations and social labour' (ibid: 27). The constituent institutions of this public sphere were, in theory, open to all (ibid: 37).

The commercialization of cultural production in eighteenth century Western Europe resulted in a shift away from the court aristocracy which till the seventeenth century supported cultural production. Habermas notes: "The shift... produced not merely a change in the composition of the public but amounted to the very generation of "public" as such' (ibid.: 39). The public thus formed by cultural consumption made the public sphere a forum `to influence the decisions of state authority', 'to legitimate demands' and `an authority to which appeal could be made' in matters of `common interest' (ibid: 57). Consequently, coffee houses in England for instance, which began as fora for the discussion of literature, 'became the "seedbeds" of political unrest' (ibid: 59). Habermas's investigation is historically specific as well as particular to class and region of the eighteenth century bourgeoisie of Western Europe. His notion of the public sphere would need to be significantly revised by students whose work deals with other contexts.

It is possible to argue after Habermas that the public sphere of cinema is a sphere in which

cinema becomes the occasion for the public' to negotiate between state and society *and* to regulate civil society. However, in the Habermasian fiamework, the public sphere of cinema would be a contradiction in terms. He argues that under the aegis of the mass-media, the public sphere was replaced by a `pseudo-public sphere' because 'the web of public communication unravelled into acts of individual reception' (ibid: 161). The result is a nonpublic whose opinions are `informal, personal, nonpublic opinions' (245). The mass media's nonpublic corresponds with C. W. Mills's description of the *mass* which Habermas quotes approvingly. In a mass:

> (1) a fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community of publics becomes an abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media.
> 2) The communications mat prevail are so organized that it is difficult or impossible for individuals to answer back immediately or with any effect ... (cited in Habermas 1989: 249).

Mass' and public' are for Habermas diametrically opposed to each other. Therefore, if we were to adopt the Habennasian framework, we would have to accept that cinema results in the formation of a mass, a nonpublic rather than a public.

I would like to defer, temporarily, contesting Habermas's bar on the deployment of the concept of public sphere in the context of `mass' media, particularly cinema. I hope that my study will demonstrate that it is not `impossible for individuals to answer back immediately or with any effect', contesting the opinions expressed through the medium. Nevertheless, I would like to hold on to the insights offered by Habermas's work, particularly the conceptualization of the public sphere as a site where a public carries out multiple negotiations which address the state as well as civil society. As pointed out above, there is a need to revise Habermas's framework while studying nonbourgeois publics in other historical and socio-political contexts. Nancy Fraser (1994) points out that Habermas does not pay due attention to `nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres' even in the context mat he studies. Fraser argues mat while Habermas does recognize the existence of other publics he

fails to examine them and 'it is precisely because be fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere' (78). Citing revisionist adaptations of Habermas's work Fraser says, ` [V]irtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics and working class publics,' adding that ' [t]he relations between bourgeois publics aad other publics were always conflictual' (79).

Instead of presuming that there is a single public, conceiving of multiple publics is a significant theoretical and political move. The elite or official public sphere is constituted by a scries of exclusions (even in Habermas's account which, we have seen, has been accused of idealizing it). A study of the elite public sphere cannot explain how and what means exist for non-elite publics for accessing public life', to borrow a phrase from Fraser. This is certainly a political shift because it enables us to overcome rather than replicate in our analyses, the silencing of the voices of the non-elite in the official public sphere.[4]

Returning to cinema, the reason why audiences need to be conceived as publics is because at any given point of time an audience does not respond to images on the screen alone but also to a socio-political and historical context. I am not merely suggesting that films are interpreted in particular contexts which influence their interpretation. The response to cinema (by an audience) is the starting point, a pretext, for larger debates and contests over issues which are social and political in nature. The controversies that break out fairly regularly are an indication of how closely cinema is linked to

[4] Pandian (1995b) draws attention to the politics of exclusion of both the colonial public sphere and the reading of the Dravidian movement by the `Cambridge school', based almost exclusively on the print media which was accessible only to an upper caste/class minority. As a consequence the historians in question dubbed the Dravidian movement as a movement of the non-brahmin elite, ignoring how it empowered the lower caste poor— both men and women. Pandian suggests that the subaltern masses were read out of history because of the historian's reliance on the sources which included only the interventions of the elite.

anxieties of different sections of the population as well as apparatuses of the state.[5] The opinions expressed by the participants during these controversies arc certainly not `informal, personal, nonpublic' opinions but often mobilized the notion of social well being.

Controversies are seemingly exceptional situations. On such occasions discussion of cinema extends far beyond film magazines, fihn supplements of mainstream newspapers, letters to the editor columns. The public on such occasions includes elected representatives, political activists, edit-page contributors, police officials, etc. What is exceptional about these situations is the scale of the intervention and (at times) diversity of opinions expressed. But generally, there is a tendency among *all groups* involved to seek public expression of their opinions using a variety of means (I discuss one such controversy in Chapter 4).'

As for the publics of cinema I wish to argue that class-audience and mass-audience correspond with an (not *the)* elite and non-elite public of cinema. Before I elaborate, I wish to point out these audience categories are not given in any unproblematic way. They are *relational* categories and one cannot exist without the awareness of the existence of tbe other. In common usage they are defined in terms of each other, are value loaded and invoke behavioral traits which are also cultural traits of the caste/class groups that comprise each category. I would like to use class-audience and mass-audience as descriptive and conceptual categories referring to upper caste middle-class and lower caste/class audiences respectively. Despite the differences between them, they are not binary opposites, although they tend to be perceived as such

[5] There have been two such controversies in 1997 alone. The Mohan Babu starer *Adavilo Anna* (B. Gopal), a naxalite-film' evoked strong protests from the state's police department for depicting the police in poor light and promoting naxalism. *Osey Ramulamma* (Dasari Narayana Rao), also a naxalite-film, drew loud protests from legislators belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Telugu Desam Party (TDP). They claimed that the fihn insulted Dalit women but failed to respond to the producer-director's challenge to give instances from the fihn. Both tbe films were sought to be banned but were not.

[6] See Vasudevan 1996 for a discussion of the debate on *Bombay* for a national' level controversy revolving around a particular fihn.

The reason for my retaining these terms is that the labels and their connotations cannot be ignored as the traits supposedly exhibited by each category are believed to spilovcr into practically every space occupied by them as audiences and as publics. In Chapter 3 and 4 I discuss how the visibility of the mass-audience is perceived by the middle-class, upper caste elite public as at once being a sign of and cause for the degeneration of cinema. The mass and class-audiences become publics by virtue of articulating in public, opinions on social or political issues as if these were opinions on a film, a star or cinema in general.

As opposed to many western film theorists like Christian Metz (1982) and Laura Mulvey (1975; 1990) who theorize *individual* spectatorship, gaze etc., I shall focus on viewers' engagement with the cinema as a *public* activity. The presence of organized and visible fans' associations in Southern India (discussed in Chapter 1) not only draws attention to the importance of well defined group responses to the medium but also raise interesting questions about the circulation of cinema which theories of individual spectatorship do not address. Further, as I shall argue in Chapters 2 and 3, popular Telugu cinema constructs the spectator as a *member of a collective.* For this reason the figure of the fan–who is always/already a member of a group–is crucial to our understanding of the spectator position constructed by the filmic narrative. My concerns are to examine how publics are formed during and after film viewing; the spaces that are available to or are created by publics; and how these publics, formed around cinema, interact with and influence each other. I wish to argue that actual film viewing is only a part, arguably a small one, of the diverse negotiations of these publics with cinema and with each other. These publics have a histoncal specificity and frame the discussion of the cinema in ways which tend to emphasise certain issues at the expense of others It is thus possible to think in terms of the *agendas* (whether or not explicitly stated) and their political implications for the members of these publics.

As a sympathizer of left who is interested in intervening in local, context specific debates on cinema I need to redefine my `object' of study so as to include questions related to how publics are

constituted, their relationships with each other and the medium and the socio-political implications of their utterances/activities. Consequently, Western film theory--centred around the individual spectator and the filmic narrative-interests me only insofar as it allows me to shape my intervention. As I see it, my intervention has to come to terms with issues and themes that are current among various publics, bringing to the fore concerns which arc already familiar to these publics but raise a set of questions which problematize the influential narratives on cinema, its stars and audiences in the context mat I study. Simultaneously, I wish to work towards evolving a theoretical framework which, while drawing on existing film theory, is not burdened by the latter's concerns and instead allows the student of cinema to engage productively with his/her immediate context which necessarily includes ongoing discussions on cinema in film magazines or newspapers, among viewers, etc.

Much discussion on Telugu cinema conducted by different publics revolves around its stars. This was so even before NT. Rama Rao (NTR) established the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982 and became the Chief Minister of the State in 1983. For decades, films have been identified by the male star in the lead role: we have NTR films, ANR (Akkineni Nageswara Rao) films, Krishna films, etc. With the enormous growth in fans' associations in the eighties, coinciding with NTR's entry into politics, stars grew further in importance My study focuses on the career of one star, Chiranjeevi, who began acting in 1978 and continues to do so to the present (1997).

In mapping the career of Chiranjeevi, I argue, it is possible to study some of the major developments in contemporary Telugu cinema. Chiranjeevi (Konidela Siva Sankar V a n Prasad) has acted in 128 films (upto November 1997), including three in Hindi. His films have been dubbed into Tamil, Hindi, Russian and English. Undoubtedly the most popular star after NTR, Chiranjeevi is the centre of what is perhaps the largest fan movement in the history of Telugu cinema. Most of his fihns are referred to as mass-films by film makers and critics while it is against these (not just his but other stars' as well) mass-films that the upper caste/middle-class public has sought to mobilize public opinion for over a decade now. However, Chiranjeevi has also featured in some class-films which

have been lauded by film critics. Chiranjeevi's career offers the opportunity to study both mass-films and class-films, two major genres of popular cinema since the eighties, as I shall argue in Chapter 2 and 3 respectively.

In a sense, the choice of Chiranjeevi as a focal point of my study is inevitable since I shall be arguing mat fans, who are the most visible and vocal section of the mass-audience, are a non-elite public. Using the star as a starting point, it is possible to bring into sharper focus the way publics, both elite and non-elite, respond to cinema and to each other. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters the star mediates between various publics, both on-screen, while playing different roles, and off-screen, when he intervenes to shape fan activity in significant ways.

In the context of contemporary Telugu cinema, the star is often the most important component of a film, although throughout the eighties and nineties films have been made `without stars'. (A `starless' film is generally one with lead actors who have little star value in that they are not recognised as being important enough to contribute to the spectator's understanding of the filmic narrative.) In general, the star is crucial for the intelligibility of films.

As I understand it, a star is generally, though not necessarily, an actor or actress who renders a film meaningful and thereby shapes the spectator's response to the filmic narrative.[7] The most important feature of stardom is the perception of the viewer(s) that the star is a source of meaning which doesn't otherwise exist in a role or a film in general. It has been pointed out that recognition and memory (of the spectator) are necessary for stardom to function.[8] It is possible to read Chiranjeevi's

[7] Chiranjeevi defines the star as anyone who draws audiences to a film (Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995). Directors and music composers who don't actually appear on screen could thus be stars. My understanding though similar is not based on the economics of stardom but its semiotics.

[8] See Mulvey 197S and 1990; Doane 1990 and 1991. Both Mulvey and Doane, however, do not pay adequate attention to the fact that the spectator carries with him/her a memory of the star's earlier roles. Recognition, in the *literal* sense of the word, is absolutely essential for stardom to function. See Chapters 2 and 3 for a detailed discussion on the importance of recognition and memory.

films as if the star didnt exist or matter. However, this is not the way films are viewed by actual audiences. An analysis which does not pay adequate attention to the star as a product of the fusion of biography' [which M.S.S. Pandian (1992) points out could be quite fictitious] and earlier roles of the star, misses an important sub-text of the film. The star is a part of what Christian Metz (1982) calls the 'cinematic institution', which he insists:

> is not just the cinema industry (which works to fill cinemas, not to empty them), it is also the mental machinery–another industry–which spectators `accustomed to the cinema' have internalized historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films (5).

In a context where the star is the metonymic sign of a set of films featuring him/her, any investigation of reception and circulation of cinema must necessarily focus on the construction, reception and circulation of stardom. The palimpsest of images that add up to the star result from, and in turn, produce audience expectations and investments, which are not just financial but more importantly emotional and political. Engagement with films is a social and public activity partly because audiences invest so heavily in cinema.

In the eighties and the nineties, contests over cinema between a given public and the film industry, or among publics–over what kinds of cinema are good and socially purposeful and what kinds are injurious to social health– have often been staged as contests over the star. In my examination of Chiranjeevi's films I shall draw attention to the pressures exerted on popular cinema from within the industry, posed by emerging genres, as well as by publics.

Drawing on Roland Barthes' (1977) notion that, *the text is experienced only in an activity of production*' (157, original emphasis), I wish to argue that a film becomes a text in circulation and acquires *meaning because of its viewers.* [9] Analysing a filmic text would thus involve coming to terms

[9] Barthes (1977) offers a series of tentative definitions of the Text emphasising as source of meaning the act of reading/interpretation rather than an object like a book (which Barthes calls `work'). See Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1977: 155-164).

with complex negotiations involved in film-viewing on the one hand and the contexts in which viewing takes place on the other.

Annette Kuhn points out that there is a tendency among students of cinema to

> construct texts as processes of signification, often constituting them, in abstraction from the social, as more or less self-contained objects. The terrain of contexts on the other hand, is marked out by institutions, social relations and social practices surrounding the production, distribution and exhibition of films; thinking in these areas tends to hold contexts as determining and texts as determined (1988: 6).

Instead, Kuhn suggests,

> It might be productive... to stop regarding representations as objects confined to a 'cultural' realm and stop seeing institutions as locked into a space of the 'real'. Meaning would then be liberated to enter the social and the social inhabit meaning (ibid).

Kuhn's suggestion is particularly useful to my study, since my interest is in both representations and institutions. Rather than posit a base-superstructure relationship between them, I conceive of a text as a text-in-context and a text of somebody, not a set of images on the screen which exist independently of a viewer and his/her viewing contexts.

In their study of the popular fictional/screen hero James Bond, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott argue that the conditions of Bond's existence as a cultural icon were *inter-textual.* The authors distinguish between inter-textuality, by which they refer to 'the social organization of the relations between texts within specific conditions of readings' (1987: 45) and the concept of intertextuality' developed by Julia Kristeva to refer to the system of references to other texts which can be discerned within the internal composition of a specific individual text' (ibid : 44-45). Bennett and Woollacott go on to argue that

> [t]he figure of Bond has been produced in constantly changing relations between a wide range of texts brought into association with

> one another via the functioning of Bond as the signifier which they have jointly constructed. In turn, it is this figure which, in floating between them, has connected these texts into a related set in spite of their manifold differences in other respects (ibid: 45).

The notion of inter-textuality thus allows us to recognize and pay attention to the relationships between different kinds of texts (for instance individual films featuring Chiranjeevi and these films and his 'biographies') but also to the fact that acts of interpretation by a reader/viewer are not situated in splendid isolation from other such acts. Bennett and Woollacott propose that the process of reading is one in which 'the inter-textually organized reader meets the inter-textually organized text' (56). To understand how meaning is generated in specific contexts by viewers it is important to map what the authors call the 'horizons of intelligibility' (56) which encompass diverse texts in relationship to one another and what viewers bring to their reading of these texts in specific contexts.

The historical and socio-political context in which the 'object' of my study (Chiranjeevi, his films, his publics) is situated requires some elaboration. Before I begin to do so, however, I must clarify mat while I attempt a brief description of the contexts, here and in the subsequent chapters, constraints of space and focus do not permit me to dwell at any length on the subject in the course of my study. Instead of presenting a coherent historical narrative I will attempt only to draw attention to those developments which I feel are relevant to my study.

Between 1978 and 1997 approximately two thousand films were released in Telugu. About a third were dubbed from other languages (mostly South Indian) into Telugu.[10] About a thousand cinema halls (including permanent and touring cinemas) were opened.[11] During this period, popular cinema also became the target of concerted attack by the mainstream press as well as various political

[10] Based on lists prepared by K. Narasaiah, film journalist and former distributor, Vijayawada.

[11] According to APFCC (1981) there wore 1,904 cinemas in Andhra Pradesh in 1980 (131). APFCC's *A.P. Film Diary 1995* lists a total of 3,080 cinemas. However some of them may have been non-functional due to renovations or closure etc.

parties for being obscene and violent. This rapidly expanding medium—increasingly alleged to be morally degenerate— threw up N T. Rama Rao, the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. In the wake of his success, which has been attributed to his popularity as a film star, a number of other stars entered politics, although few have been able to build lasting political careers. Simultaneously, fens' associations (FAs) witnessed unprecedented growth in the eighties. They began establishing links with political parties in several parts of the state, even as their importance for the industry grew with their numbers. The establishment of mass-circulated film magazines in the late seventies and early eighties and the introduction of daily film pages/columns in Telugu newspapers in the early nineties resulted in making cinema a more discussed (and advertised) cultural form than ever before.[12]

The growth of cinema as a cultural phenomenon was coeval with a series of political struggles by new constituencies such as tribals, landless peasants, dalits and women. In articulating the rights of marginal sections of society, the naxalite movement from the late sixties, Dalit and women's movements from the mid eighties altered the dominant political discourse in significant ways.[13]

Partha Chatterjee's (1997) notion of civil society and political society help us understand the significance of these movements. Chatterjee argues that civil society in postcolonial societies is restricted to

> those characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating in western societies that are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberate procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles (31).

[tt] *Sitara*, owned by the *Eenadu* group of newspapers, was established in 1976. It was followed in 1977 by *Jyotichitra* owned by *Andhra Jyoti*. *Sivaranjani* was established by *Udayam*, another newspaper chain, in 1986. More recently, *Superhit* (1992) and *Meghasandesam* (1997) have been launched while *Sivaranjani* has been relaunched in 1997 after lying for years in suspended animation.

[13] Naxalite and Dalit movements are discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

He adds: 'the domain of civil social institutions as conceived above is still restricted to a fairly small section of "citizens".' To conceptualize the vast majority of society which lies beyond civil society he proposes the notion of political society. Political society is the domain of the *population,* not citizens, and includes `parties, movements, non-party political formations' although the `institutional forms of this emergent political society are still unclear' (32).

According to Chatterjee, the postcolonial developmental state `seeks to relate to different sections of the population through the governmental function of *welfare*' (32, original emphasis). It is important to note that *democracy* is 'the major form of mobilization by which political society tries to channelize and order popular demands on the developmental state' (32).

The movements I mentioned above, in addition to making demands on the developmental state, raised fundamental questions about citizenship. Theoretically speaking, every subject in India is a citizen, although in practice this is clearly not the case. For this reason Chatterjee distinguishes between citizens'—the elite—and the rest of society. Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana (1996) point out that the normative citizen- the abstraction on which the question of rights is predicated— is invisibly marked as middle-class, upper caste, Hindu and male (236).[14] As a result, a majority of the population cannot occupy the position of the citizen and cannot claim rights, In the post-emergency period, I wish to argue, Andhra Pradesh witnessed struggles which by advocating the rights of marginal groups of *non-citizens,* began to render visible the invisible markings of the normative citizen.

What cannot be ignored is that the cinema's elite public is a public of *citizens.* Although there are internal differences within this public which is not exclusively male, upper-caste or middle-class (discussed in Chapter 4), its members enter the public domain as citizens. On the other hand, fans-

[14] See also the essays in Sangari and Vaid (1989) for detailed discussions on the history of the normative subject in India.

whom I have identified as constituents of the mass-audience and non-elite public--are non-citizens. While their activity needs to be seen in the light of ongoing struggles for citizenship and rights, I argue that it is a manifestation of these struggles in spaces which are not in any obvious manner `political[1]. It is important to note that fans' associations drastically expanded the scope of the discourse of rights, by inserting this discourse which was hitherto the prerogative of citizens' into a public sphere that was constituted by predominantly poor, often lower caste, young men. As a consequence, the star-nominated by fans as the presiding diety, in a manner of speaking, of this public sphere--acquired enormous political significance. Not because the star had the ability to order this public sphere at will but, as we shall sec in the next chapter, because *fans* assumed a political role by becoming claimants for rights.

The questions the above proposition raises are when, under what conditions, how, and in what forms, does the articulation of rights manifest itself in fan activity? How do we understand this historical moment when cinema was itself coming to terms with the struggles for citizenship by political society and offering new frames of intelligibility to its audiences? The responses of publics to cinema and each other are responses to a historical moment which is often produced as a crisis (see Chapters 2 and 3).

This moment is best understood as the tail-end of the historical phase of our national-modern, a phase signified by a centralized, bureaucratic, interventionist welfare state, characterized by the Nehruvian model of socialism and overt commitment to secularism. The key concepts--nation, modernity, secularism, democracy--were so defined as to bracket caste, community and gender identities of the citizen-subject. It wasn't as if these identities didn't exist but they were to be set aside or rendered invisible when the citizen-subject entered the spaces delineated by the national-modern. The result was, as Tharu and Niranjana point out, the invisible marking of the citizen-subject as upper caste, middle-class, Hindu and male.

As Tejaswini Niranjana argues, `it is almost as if the hitherto hidden logic of the national-

modem is now acquiring visibility owing to a new configuration of forces which include the rise of the Sangh Parivar [the Hindu Right] and the liberalization of the Indian economy [from the early nineties]' (1996:1). The new nationalism unfolds in a situation Niranjana describes as the post-national-modern' (3) in which 'the composition of the national-modern is being centrally challenged by the assertion of political identities based on caste and community' (4). This is a situation in which the national-modem is radically transformed Broadly speaking, it is in this context that I wish to situate the developments taking place in the period under consideration here. Developments specific to the cinema, fan's associations, etc. shall be read in the light of the 'crisis' in the national-modern resulting from pressures exerted by the political society.

As a prelude, however, I wish to briefly discuss some studies on audiences in general and fans in particular to point out how my own work draws on and differs from them. A discussion of M.S.S. Pandian's *The Image Trap* (1992) and Sara Dickey's *Cinema and The Urban Poor in South India* (1993b) would help me raise some issues related to my work.

Pandian's study on M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) draws attention to the systematic orchestration of images by the star that results in the construction of the figure of the `real hero': a generous off-screen MGR who fights oppression and is a friend of the poor (1992: 95, 99, 102). The image of MGR (as a hero) was constructed across different discursive and cultural spaces, not merely on the screen. The interplay between the star's screen and off-screen images as an important technique for the production of the star as a 'real life' figure is crucial to our understanding of popular cinema as it is of stardom. In subsequent chapters I draw heavily on Pandian's observations in this regard.

Pandian goes on to suggest mat MGR succeeded in transforming his audience and fans into political supporters. According to him this was achieved by ensuring that MGR's screen image and `biography' (which Pandian points out was as carefully constructed as the screen image) fed into each other and in turn produced him as a political messiah.

However, there are some problems with Pandian's suggestion mat MGR's audience, fans and

supporters were trapped in the web of images. The first problem has to do with tbe subject/victim of the 'image trap.' Assuming that MGR succeeded in presenting his 'life' and films as one seamless narrative in which he was the hero, although Pandian himself suggests that the enterprise was not fully successful, can we then equate the *spectator* posited by this fiction with the audience/fan/supporter? Pandian does provide evidence that actual fans/supporters believed the narrative and themselves constructed a heroic figure, based on the dominant image of MGR as saviour. But actual audiences are quite distinct from spectators. The spectator is a theoretical construct: it is a position from which a narrative is intelligible and which, in turn, is constructed by the narrative. Reading a film in terms of how it constructs the spectator may offer insights into certain aspects of the film. "But the spectator is not simply a person. While analysing texts and contexts in which audience response is sought to be explained, there is every need to maintain the distinction between audiences and spectators. Take for instance Chapter 18 of *The Image Trap* in which Pandian attempts to explain what MGR might have meant for the female spectator (79-84). Is the spectator position (constructed by films), from which a film is eminently believable or successful, the same as the position(s) occupied by female audiences of these films?

Paul Willemen (1994) cautions against ignoring the 'unbridgeable gap between "real" readers and authors and inscribed ones, constructed or marked in by the text[1] (63). The spectator of an image is not a `real' viewer. Because, to use Willemen's words, `[r]eal readers arc subjects in history, living in given social formations, rather than subjects of a single text [or for that matter, a range of texts]. The two types of subject are not commensurate. ..'(63).

The question of how working class, lower caste women viewed MGR's films *cannot* be answered by an analysis of the spectator position constructed by these films. By equating the inscribed viewer or spectator and the actual or `real' viewer, Pandian denies the existence of what

[15] See Chapter 2 for a discussion on the uses of positing the spectator of a film/genre.

Willemen calls the 'potential locus of struggle' within the text between the two subject positions (63). Consequently, Pandian gives the impression that the enterprise of image building is always successful. There is no space for contest or resistance to the dominant ideology in this framework. Interestingly, Pandian himself draws our attention to this problem in his conclusion to the book:

> The fact that politics is always a contested terrain and that even among the devoted followers of MGR there exist indelible marks of dissent, however, emasculated they may be, are quite important. Therein lies the possibilities [sic] of constituting the `other' of MGR-style politics and creating a new, progressive common sense (145).

Not only are the `indelible marks of dissent' more or less erased from Pandian's portrait of MGR's fans and `gullible supporters' but almost till the very end of the book the `hegemonic sweep' of MGR-style politics is indeed total.

Ironically Pandian's strategy for salvaging the subaltern for a progressive politics involves the production of the subaltern as a victim of the manipulation by the elite. As a result, the subaltern appears in the public realm as a member of a *nonpublic*.Among the questions Pandian's book raises is how the composite narrative (including both films and 'biography') featuring the star constructs a spectator position. This involves the investigation of how the star's films and life feed into each other but also the techniques used in films and off-screen (the latter by the star) to anticipate audience or fan (i.e. 'real' viewers') expectations. I wish to argue that the spectator position constructed, by signalling certain responses and generating a set of meanings, is one from which the narrative is sutured, becoming fully intelligible and immensely pleasurable. Contrary to Pandian's suggestion, this spectator position is *not* occupied by actual viewers (not even the fans among the audience). Crucial to our understanding of the experience of film-watching is the recognition of the incommensurability of the two subject positions. The narrative's production of the `inscribed' viewer and the response of the 'real' viewer (Willemen's terms) are both important and related but separate processes. In the subsequent chapters I would like to argue that audience(s) respond to and define themselves vis-a-vis

the spectator position constructed by the filmic narrative. It is possible for sections of the audience to reject films because they perceive an unbridgeable gap between themselves and what is recognised as *the* addressee of a film. One of the ways in which individual viewers form a public is by defining themselves as distinct from the 'spectator' of a film or genre (class-film or mass-films, for instance). If we were to presume that there is neither active negotiation nor friction between the two positions, we would make the mistake of believing that films are always successful in achieving their ideological purpose and conceive their audience as devoid of any agency.

In Sara Dickey's *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India*, the question of the agency of the audience and fans is raised. Unlike Pandian, she distinguishes between lower caste/class audience and fans despite the socio-economic similarities shared by them. Although Dickey doesn't employ the category of the public, her work gestures at the possibility of working class audience and fans constituting publics. However, the way Dickey handles the interesting questions raised by her own work is far too simplistic to offer any significant insights.

In Dickeys opinion, popular Tamil cinema is primarily escapist. She contends that the agency of the audience lies in its *conscious choice* of this escape: `[t]hey [viewers] seek out movies as entertainment and as an escape from the difficulties of their lives' (141). She suggests, without any irony, that working class audiences reject `realistic' cinema, which portrays real life' because they need their dose of fantasy to come to terms with the harsh conditions in which they live. That such an understanding of audience agency does not take Dickey far becomes clear when she suggests somewhat vaguely: ` [C]inema *may* aid viewers in resisting or subverting those elements of upper class judgements that they find oppressive' (144, original emphasis).

Dickey's work is important for my study because she treats cinema as a social activity involving active negotiation by the viewers as in Chapter 9, Fan Clubs and Politics' (148-172). But Dickey's observations are laced with stereotypes of fans" devotion' and their passionate attachment and respect' for the star. She suggests that fans attempt to appropriate the star and reconstruct his image according

to their class interests:

> [F]an's descriptions of the star imply respect for the lower class despite their poverty, chide the rich for their scornful and miserly attitudes and portray the poor as ultimately more moral and (therefore) more worthy than the rich (157).

But then Dickey herself claims that the poor are always noble in Tamil films too (113-114). The question is, how the rich, often upper caste star becomes a nominee of fans who believe that the poor 'are ultimately more moral and wormy than the rich'. Instead of addressing dozens of such questions thrown up by her own work, she goes on to offer something of a primer on what she elsewhere calls the politics of adulation' (1993a).

Among the interesting issues Dickey's work raises are the social and political implications of fan activity; the opportunities provided by fan clubs to form a public sphere and to enter public spaces otherwise inaccessible to them (in the name of social service' for instance). I address these issues in my discussion of fans and their activities in the next chapter.

Another question central to my study is that of agency (of fans and audiences) which finds no place in Pandian's work and is inadequately dealt with in Dickey's. Agency is a crucial factor in deciding whether audiences constitute themselves as a public. There is now an increasing body of work on popular culture, its audience, stars and their fans. Theodor W. Adorno's `culture industry' thesis serves as a starting point for much of this discussion, although most contemporary studies on popular culture which focus on the agency of the audience disagree with him. While it is not possible for me to discuss Adorno's work at length here, presenting his arguments briefly would help understand the general direction of the work of a number of contemporary students of popular culture in the First World*.

Adorno (1991) is highly critical of the culture industry' and its product `mass culture', which is endlessly repetitive and meant to be consumed like all other goods of capitalist industry. Adorno says

its products are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through' (86, original emphasis). Mass culture is a creation of monopoly capitalism. It has a `pre-digested quality' and justifies itself all the more firmly insofar as it constantly refers to those who cannot digest anything not already digested' (58). Moreover, `[t]he viewer is persuaded of the merit of his own averageness' (59).

For the culture industry, 'the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery' (85). Such an industry has dire political consequences because mass culture results in the 'renunciation of resistance [which] is ratified by regression' (80). Further, `[p]articipation in mass culture itself stands under a sign of terror. Enthusiasm not merely betrays an unconscious eagerness to read commands from above but already reveals the fear of disobedience...' (82-83). Adorno forcefully argues that the culture industry produces `mass deception' which replaces consciousness with conformity. As a result, `[i]t impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves' (92).

Adorno's critique of the culture industry, powerful as it is, ironically enough assumes that the 'masses' are in fact passive consumers of mass culture and therefore stultified by its status quoist deception. His highly pessimistic analysis leaves no room for intervention in the cultural realm. Miriam Hansen (1993) points out that Adorno's condemnation of mass culture, `preempt[s] the very idea of an alternative media practice on both aesthetic and sociological grounds because of the media's technological basis and because of their imbrication with mass consumption' (xx). Moreover, the mass audience is by and large a lower class one. To assume that it is passive, and lacking in taste as well as political will, is to assume a position of superiority vis-a-vis the *constituency* of the left (from which political position the critique is made). Laura Kipnis (1986) cautions:' [A]rguments, positions and theories about mass *culture* are coded ways of talking about class' (15, original emphasis). A condemnation of mass culture, therefore, could easily turn into a condemnation of the lower classes who may not have access to culture unmediated by the mass media.

A significant shift away from Adorno's culture industry thesis can be perceived in the work of Stuart Hall and other scholars associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham, in the 1970s. In an interesting collection of essays on youth subcultures in post-War Britain called *Resistance through Rituals* (1976), Hall *et al* focus on how working class youth used industrially produced goods to negotiate with or struggle against the dominant class and its culture. The authors argue that the youth appropriated or expropriated `objects and things', assigning them meanings which were radically different from meanings given to them by the dominant culture. So much so that neither money nor the market could fully dictate what [working class youth] groups used these things to *say* or *signify* (Hall and Jefferson 1976: 55, original emphasis).

By highlighting the interpretation of *signs* and their *redeployment* ('re-signification' is the term used), the authors draw attention to the agency of `consumers'. Popular culture therefore becomes a locus of struggle against dominant culture and ideology, rather than result in the `renunciation of resistance' (Adorno).

Studies generated by the 'Birmingham Centre' paved the way for what Colin McCabe sees as a switch made in the 1980s from treating popular culture as 'something produced for ordinary people' to `something approved by the people' (1986: 6). There has been a corresponding shift in the perception of the consumer/viewer/ reader. The processes of viewing/reading are perceived to result in active interpretation of texts rather than passive consumption of cultural goods (Radway 1984, Ang 1985, Setter 1989, Willis 1990). In the words of Ien Ang who has authored an influential book on television audiences:

> audiences are seen *as producers* of meaning not just consumers of media content. They *decode* or *interpret* media texts in ways that are related to their social and cultural circumstances and to the way in which they subjectively experience these circumstances (1990: 160, original emphasis).

The emphasis on audiences' agency has resulted in the opening up of a new area in the study

of popular culture. However, there has been a tendency to claim that audiences always produce counter-hegemonic readings. Consequently, popular culture becomes more than a contested site--it becomes a liberated zone where dominant ideology is resisted and always subverted The work of John Fiske is illustrative of this tendency.

Fiskc(l 989) begins by stating that popular culture is `contradictory and conflictual to the core' because:

> The resources—television, records, clothes, video games, language--carry the interests of the economically and ideologically dominant; they have lines of force that are hegemonic and work in favour of the status quo. But hegemonic power is necessary, or even possible, only because of resistance, so these resources must also carry contradictory lines of force that are taken up and activated differently by people situated differently within the social system (2).

The counter-hegemonic lines of force' mat Fiske finds in popular culture do not exist independently of the subversive *readings* of popular cultural texts. In fact, Fiske himself asserts that, 'meanings of popular culture exist only in their circulation, not in their texts' (4). However, Fiske projects a possible *result* of reading--subversion--onto the resource.

During the course of his argument, it turns out that the conflict between hegemonic and resistant lines of forces is resolved in favour of the latter. A few pages into the book Fiske decides that the battle is over. Popular culture is no longer 'contradictory and conflictual' but ` work[s] as an agent of destabilization or as a redistributor of the balance of social power toward the disempowered' (8). In an aggressive defence of popular culture, he likens it to guerilla raids' on 'Western patriarchal capitalism' (12). Later in the book he even suggests that ` small scale social change' (for the better, of course) is `facilitated by popular culture' (113). For Fiske, then, popular culture becomes an alternative to democratic politics.

Reposing such unqualified faith in popular culture is unlikely to result in anything more than endlessly repetitive celebratory accounts of the popular. In order to avoid this dead-end I wish to hold

on to the notions of agency and negotiation (without presuming that the agentive audience occupies a liberated space) and return to the question in my discussion of the publics of cinema in the following chapters, focussing on their interpretations of individual filmic texts as well as the deployment of the star in activities which are not directly related to cinema. Continuing the discussion in the previous pages on the disempowered subject as audience, the problem that I would like to address now is how to conceptualize the non-elite public sphere inhabited by fans. But before that, why fans?

Fans are only a small section, no matter how prominent, of the mass-audience. Film star Nagarjuna, quite accurately in my opinion, estimated that his fans `liberally counted [would] be around two lakhs'.[16] Further, as we shall see in the next chapter, fan activity is a specific kind of activity. While it does not exhaust the kind of negotiations carried out by the mass-audience on the one hand and within other non-elite public spaces on the other, it is precisely the specificity of fan actrvity that impels me to study it in detail. It spills over from cinema halls to other spaces, alerting us to how much is at stake in the whole business of film watching. Fans' engagement with cinema is an extreme instance of film watching being a collective social actrvity. But it draws attention to the existence of publics other than 'the public' which constitutes itself around the mainstream press, especially newspapers. Nancy Fraser (1994) points out mat the bourgeois public makes the claim to be *the* public (79). Ryan (1992) and Eley (1992) suggest that Hebermas himself took this claim at face value. That this is a tendency even in studies of cinema's 'public' reception is indicated by Ravi. S. Vasudevan's article, *"Bombay* and its Public" (1996). Vasudcvan docs begin by stating: In terms of reception, my analysis is conceived with the response of the articulate strata of "the public", as expressed in the outlook of mainstream politicians, journalists and reviewers' (45). He thus suggests mat the notion of *the public* is problematic, although the title of his article and his analysis itself does not leave room for the existence of other publics.

[16] *The Indian Express*, `Expressweek', 31 May 1997: 3.

It is possible to conceive of fans as forming what Miriam Hansen (1993) terms a 'partial public'. She points out that there has been a proliferation of partial publics in the USA during the nineties. What they have in common despite their differences is that `they operate through industrial commercial venues; that they are not usually constructed on an identitarian model; that they organize vast constituencies...' (xxxviii). This description does not, however, apply to fans because partial publics `tend to remain more or less... bidden from public view, that is, from anyone who is not directly paying for and participating in them' (ibid. xxxviii) In direct contrast to this description, fans are anything but `hidden from public view', as we shall see in the next chapter.

Fraser's (1994) category of `subaltern counterpublics' is particularly useful for my study. Fraser argues that subaltern counterpublics are not always democratic or egalitarian. However,

> insofar as these counterpublics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space. In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies (84).

Fraser adds that they are by definition not enclaves--which is not to deny that they are involuntarily enclaved' (85). Her focus on their *publicist orientation* is helpful in understanding the nature of fan activity. But what is puzzling about fan activity is the imbrication of the (Habermasian understanding of) publicity with an avowedly *nonpublic* discourse of devotion (to the star). In the next chapter I examine the socio-political implication of fan activity at some length in the light of issues raised here I also discuss how and why the star intervenes in fan activity to raise the question of why the figure of the fan is crucial to our understanding of popular cinema in the eighties and nineties.

In Chapter 2 I examine the mass-films of Chiranjeevi, tracing the history of the genre and the context in which it flourished. I focus on the spectator position constructed by this genre and the crucial role played by the star in rendering the filmic narrative of the mass-film intelligible I shall argue

that the mass-film offers itself to be read in particular ways but in circulation, actual viewers do not necessarily read films from the spectator position offered by the filmic narrative. Consequently the elite public views this genre as a part of the very social crises which the latter attempts to resolve.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the class-film, focussing on three class-films featuring Chiranjeevi to examine how this genre, celebrated by film critics and other members of the elite public, offers to resolve the crises in the social that the mass-film is perceived to have failed to do 1 shall argue that the class-film attempts to reform society by reforming cinema and towards this end it recasts the star of the mass-film.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the debate on `obscenity' which film critics argue is one of the most serious problems with contemporary Telugu cinema. Focussing on the controversy around the Chiranjeevi starrer, *Alluda Majaka*, I analyse dominant narratives on the degeneration of cinema which produce the mass-film as a problem because of the genre's negative impact on the masses. I shall argue that the campaign against obscenity, even as it becomes the rallying point of disparate groups and enables them to form a public constructs an antagonistic relationship between women' and the `masses'. I use the *Alluda Majaka* controversy to demonstrate the public nature of the engagement with cinema but also to draw attention to what is at stake in reading films

In the concluding chapter I examine the relationship between the spectator and actual viewers and how positing the spectator position offered by a film helps us understand how audience forms groups and how the groups thus formed interact with each other.

Finally, a note on the source material used in this study. Since my work revolves around the circulation of cinema, I pay close attention to how viewers and publics respond to the medium and to each other since this is as important as analysing the films which become the occasion of this interaction between public. I therefore examine a wide range of texts which can be broadly divided into four categories. Films featuring Chiranjeevi; material generated by fans on the star and his films: critical accounts on Telugu cinema, its stars and their fans and finally, personal interviews with

Chiranjcevi, some other representatives of the film industry, fans of Chiranjeevi and other stars, film journalists, political activists etc. to ascertain their responses to contemporary Telugu cinema and the fan phenomenon. Most of this material is in Telugu and unless otherwise indicated statements, comments etc. that are quoted have been translated into English by me.

Chapter 1

Fans And Their Public Sphere

The fan phenomenon is a fascinating object of study. The fan's excesses, hyperbole, obsession with (what is so obviously) trivia about the star's life and films; propensity to crime-in short, his otherness-make him a symbol of the most cxotic/dangerous/pitiable 'effect' of popular cinema. Fans interest me because they help film theory address some fundamental issues related to cinema: what audiences *see* at the cinema and what they take with them from their engagement with the medium. By focussing on what seems to be a well defined section of the audience characterized by highly visible activities, I wish to problematize the category of `audience', its givenness. In addition to alerting us to the need to conceive of cinema's audience as plural, the cxistance of the fan indicates how individual viewers form collectives that interact with while remaining distinct from one another.

In this chapter, I discuss the conditions under which fans are formed and how they constitute themselves as a public. Since fans constantly interact with other sections of the audience and the film industry, any discussion of fans remains incomplete unless it maps the responses by less well defined audiences and the star himself to fan activity. I therefore situate fans in various contexts: social, historical, political and interactive (i.e., whom they interact with and how).

Before I proceed, a clarification on how I use the term fan The Telugu word for fan, *abhimaani* (meaning admirer), is used synonymously with its English equivalent *Abhimaani*, outside the context of cinema, does not have the negative connotation of the word fan and is often prefixed

with `*veera*'(literally heroic but used ironically) to connote fanaticism, even while referring to fans of film stars. I use the term to denote members of fans' associations (FAs). Such fans comprise only a section of those who identify or perceive themselves as fans. Owing to the class/caste composition of fans associations and their association with `rowdyism' (discussed below), a number of fans are quick in dissociating themselves from fans' organizations. Limiting my study to members of fans associations thus needs to be qualified.

The advantage of including only organized fans is that they are less difficult to track down. Convenience apart, FA members are generally the most prominent fans, and, as pointed out earlier, the most vocal and visible component of the lower class audience as well. Moreover, FAs are more or less confined to Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra PradesL The fan phenomena in these states assumes importance precisely because fans are organized, unlike those in most other parts of the country. There arc significant differences between the activities of organized and unorganized fans, even in Andhra Pradesh, the most significant one being the publicness of the former. Crypto- fans, secret admirers, upper class fans and `non-fans' (who publicly disavow their fandom even as they perform fan activities) need not be a public. Yet others, while participating in a number of FA activities, do not consider themselves to be members but, are, for all practical purposes, fans of the organized variety. My claim that fans are a public is based on the ability of members of FAs to *talk back* to the star, tile medium, the film industry and different social strata. Fans become a public by talking among themselves and with others. FAs provide the institutional space to do so.

According to fans of various stars, there are teas of thousands of FAs in Andhra Pradesh. Of these, three thousand associations with a membership varying between ten and five hundred are devoted to Chiranjeevi.[1] They are spread across all the three regions of Andhra Pradesh, coastal

[1] The exact number of Chiranjeevi's FAs is not known. The figure I cite is based on estimates by Vijay Bapineedu, editor of *Megastar Chiranjeevi.* Some fans from Hyderabad dispute this figure and claim that Chiranjeevi has over seven thousand associations.

Andhra, Telangana, and Rayalaseema. A majority of FAs are situated in the urban areas of coastal Andhra Pradesh with the heaviest concentration in East and West Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts.[2]

Like most other FAs, Chiranjeevi FAs generally have ten to twenty members and most of them are often literates with some exposure to formal education. Graduate fans are not uncommon in the larger towns and cities like Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur, Ongole and Kakinada. In terms of caste, Kapus[3] are the single largest group but members of other sudra `forward' castes and backward castes are present in large numbers. Dalits and Brahmins are not uncommon while Kammas are. The large concentration of Kapus is certainly due to the fact that Chiranjeevi himself *is* a Kapu. * I will return to the question of caste in FAs in a while but it is interesting to note mat while caste plays a role in the choice of the star, it is not possible to explain the popularity of a star only in terms of his caste.

Not many fans hold regular white collar jobs. Students and unemployed youth apart, FAs

[2] Chiranjeevi FAs exist in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and even Gujarat, according to Chiranjeevi's office staff in Hyderabad. Some associations have been formed abroad as well. Chiranjeevi's office has photographs of fans in Kuwait with banners reading, `Megastar Chiranjeevi Fans, Kuwait'. Most fans outside the state are immigrant Telugus.

[3] M.L. Kanta Rao (Ph.D. student, Department of History, University of Hyderabad) who is working on the history of the Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, informs me that Kapus comprise 17% of the state's population. There are four major Kapu sub-castes: Telaga, Balija, Munnuru Kapu and Turpu Kapu. Of these the last two are classified as Other Backward Castes (OBCs). See Rami Reddy (1989) for more information on Kapus and their role in the state's politics.

[4] Chiranjeevi fans I met argued that young people of every caste were fans of Chiranjeevi. Suresh Babu, the president of one of the four major Chiranjeevi fans' associations in Vijayawada, is a Kamma (the other three are Kapus). He refused to accept that Kapus were a majority in his star's fans' associations and invited me to a tour of some nearby towns to prove bis point. A Dalit fan from Ongole however said that in his town most Chiranjeevi fans were Kapus, although a major fan organizer was a Muslim. Some Kammas in the film business in Vijayawada insisted that Chiranjeevi fans were Kapus, period. This is certainly an exaggeration and has its roots in the antagonism between Kammas and Kapus in parts of coastal Andhra since the eighties. Notice that while fans attempt to project Chiranjeevi's following as secular and universal, those who disliked the star or his fans, for some reason deny that the star has genuine popular appeal by suggesting that the star appeals primarily to the youth of his own caste.

mostly comprise of unorganized workers including cycle and motor mechanics, tailors, painters, shop assistants, hotel workers and errand boys. Some run small businesses like cigarette and *pan* shops.[5] Despite significant internal differences among fans, FAs are an exclusively male domain (with one exception, discussed below). They remain so even though other youth organizations like student unions and youth wings of political parties has witnessed some participation of young women. This is possibly because of the widespread perception of FAs as lumpen/criminal organizations and the still current elite condemnation of popular cinema as a corrupting influence.

Chiranjeevi FAs were modelled after associations of major stars of the seventies like N.T Rama Rao and Krishna. Chiranjeevi FAs inherited the organizational structure, activities and the lumpenness' (or rather the condemnation for what was supposedly lumpenness) of the seventies FAs. In the eighties there was a large increase in the number of fans' associations, with the proliferation of those of major stars as well as the establishment of associations promoting minor stars.[6]

Events following N.T. Rama Rao's entry into politics in 1982 had significant ramifications for FAs in general and played a major role in shaping Chiranjeevi FAs which became prominent after the success of *Khaidi* (A. Kodandarami Rcddy, 1983). Until the formation of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982, fans were believed to provide free publicity for a star's films, in addition to being repeaters' (Hardgrave and Niedhart 1975 use the term to refer to audience who watch a film more than once). After NTR's entry into politics, followed by other stars like Krishna and later Krishnam Raju both of whom had a significant following (and a number of others who didn't), fans became a

[5] My findings tally with Dickey's (1993b:148-165) observations on fan club composition and activity in Madurai. However, I do not intend to make comparisons between the fan phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu since my competence does not extend to regions outside Andhra Pradesh.

[6] Kannala (1986) expresses surprise that minor stars too had fans' associations in eighties. Implying that this was not the case in the past Other observers like the journalists K. Narasaiah, G. Srihari etc. feel that the growth of fans' associations witnessed in the eighties was unprecedented.

political investment as far as stars were concerned. This is a crucial development, although not all major stars acquired political affiliations. By the late seventies Krishna fans in Vijayawada were already involved in politics, as supporters of the Congress (I). However, political affiliation of FAs was not as evident as it was after 1982 and had little to do with the stars' own political involvement Once stars began contesting elections, not only was a political affiliation thrust on FAs but political participation became an official function of fans.

Interestingly, even NTR fans did not become political cadres of any consequence although they campaigned furiosuly for the TDP during the elections in 1983 and after. [7] Instead, a number of them formed or joined Balakrishna FAs which are not always directly linked to the TDP. Some non-Kammas left NTR FAs because the star, who was a Kamma, was perceived as serving the sole interests of his caste group. Similarly some Congress sympathizers too abandoned NTR FAs when the TDP was formed.[8]

Around this time (1983) a number of Chiranjccvi FAs were formed It is unlikely that the out-migration from NTR FAs led to the formation of Chiranjeevi FAs in any direct manner. But being a non-Kamma without any political affiliations, Chiranjeevi became the rallying point of not only Kapus but other non-Kammas and Congress sympathizers of different castes. In the other two regions of Andhra Pradesh Chiranjeevi FAs did not witness polarization along political lines although in terms of caste composition they are remarkably similar to the FAs in coastal Andhra.

The FAs of Vijayawada offer significant insights into the kind of changes that were taking place in FAs during the eighties. In Vijayawada and some other parts of Coastal Andhra as well, the Kapu-Congress nexus within Chiranjeevi FAs is partly a fallout of the developments in Vijayawada politics Coastal Andhra witnessed unprecedented Kapu mobilization in the mid eighties under the

[7] The history of fans in politics was recounted by Gogineni Naidu, a former NTR fan from Vijayawada who is now a Balakrishna fan and a supporter of the Congress (I).

[8] Ambati Venkateswara Rao, Interview, Vijayawada, 9 July 1994.

leadership of Vangaveeti Mohana Ranga Rao (popularly known as Ranga), a Congress MLA from Vijayawada.' He actively encouraged Chiranjeevi FAs in addition to providing protection to them from the police and rival FAs.

Caste and political affiliation of FAs (at least in coastal Andhra) became evident simultaneously in the eighties. Further, for fans in Vijayawada, regardless of caste, participation in politics was made possible by the patronage of leaders like Ranga and his Kamma TDP rival, Devinem Rajasekhar (known as Nehru), who were leaders of criminal gangs long before they entered politics. Involvement in politics meant association with criminal elements in political parties. So in the eighties fans acquired' caste, politics and the image of the rowdy simultaneously. The linkages between crime and politics on the one hand and the (re)organization of FAs along caste lines on the other hand led to the accusation by journalists among others, that FAs degenerated rapidly in this period.[10] Chiranjeevi FAs, by virtue of their emergence during tins time provided the clearest indication of the changes in fan organizations.

The introduction of new entertainment tax rules by the TDP government in 1983 (which came into effect in 1984) increased the importance of fans for the star and stars for the film industry. Known in the film industry circles as the slab system, the new tax regime imposed a flat rate of entertainment tax on the gross collection capacity of theatres, regardless of the actual number of tickets sold.[11] As a result when the number of tickets sold decreased, profits declined exponentially since taxes were levied on the total number of seats in theatre. On the other hand, full houses even for a few weeks meant paying less tax than under the older regime Repeaters thus grew in importance and fans being repeaters were more crucial to film business than ever before. Dattatreya of the A.P Film Chamber of Commerce, Vijayawada, argues that distributors began funding FAs after the dab system

[9] See Parthasarathy (1995) for an account of Ranga's political career.

[10] See for instance *Andhra Prabha*,`Chitralekha,' 17 October 1997: 1.

[11] The slab system is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

was introduced; they wanted fans to do their bit to ensure maximum collection in the initial weeks of a film's release.[12] In the years following NTR's entry into politics- due to different, even unrelated, developments- fans not only grew in number and importance (for the film industry) but became sites for the formation of caste and political alliances and acquired, in the middle-class imagination, a criminal image. These developments were read as signifiers of deviance of a dangerous kind by journalists and industry's representatives who witnessed fan activity from close quarters.

One influential reading of the situation is that fans abandoned the original, founding principle of fandom: devotion to the star. Ambati Venkateswara Rao's comments on fans in the nineties illustrate the emerging consensus on their state. A Dalit Congress activist and former fan himself, Rao said mat unlike in the past, present day fans were not disciplined Motivated by selfishness and caste loyalties instead of admiration (for the star), they were interested in making money and projecting themselves as leaders. He ended bis assessment by condemning their involvement in politics.[13]

This assessment needs to be viewed in the light of the construction of the true or ideal fan as a devotee par excellence. For instance, Vijaya Bapineedu, editor of the fan magazine, *Megastar Chiranjeevi*, said, `The fan is the only selfless supporter'.[14] Chiranjeevi himself recounted dozens of incidents which testified to his fans' devotion to him.[15] Indeed he knew that he was a star when he, 'saw devotion in the eyes of [his] audiences.'[16] Dickey (1993b) takes this construction of the fan at

[12]Interview, Vijayawada, 20 July 1994.

[13]Interview, Vijayawada, 9 July 1994.

[14] Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

[15] According to Chiranjeevi his fans often cut their thumbs to apply the blood on his forehead; refuse to eat when his films perform poorly at the box-office; they have died in accidents on their way to one of his public meetings; many were injured during his public meetings in police cane charges or accidents; they imitate his hairstyle, use his gestures and phrases from films and remain prepared to pick violent fights with anyone who passes a derogatory remark against him.

[16] Interview, Hyderabad, 19 July 1995.

face value and suggests that there are similarities between fen clubs and religious culls (184n, 194n). The construction of the fan as devotee is deployed in the present context to condemn fans *for not being fans.* Rao's comments cited above just about sum up why fans today are supposedly not themselves. That this condemnation should come from a Dalit and a former fan who is not in any obvious sense a member of an elite public is an indication of the wide currency of the myth of the true/ideal fan.

Rao's antipathy to present day fans merits closer attention also because it is a pointer to larger transformation of FAs (and what they were seen to represent) in 1980s. I would like to illustrate this by returning to the question of the caste composition of FAs.[17] I read the unease of fans with the surfacing of caste loyalty as a factor in the choice of the star as a part of the larger problem for fans of attempting to situate themselves within the *national-modern.* In the previous chapter we have seen that the national-modern bracketed caste. Dhareshwar (1993) points out that the persistance of caste identities has been treated as a sign of the pre-modern' by modern, secular citizens. Insofar as the FAs in Andhra Pradesh were concerned, paradoxically the question of caste loyalty did not arise so long as all or most of the superstars belonged to the Kamma caste. Youth from a wide cross-section of castes joined the FAs of different Kamma stars such as NTR, ANR, Krishna and Sobhan Babu. With the emergence of Chiranjeevi as the most popular non-Kamma star ever, the question of pro-Kapu or anti-Kamma alliances arose I suggest that Rao's contempt for present day FAs is partly due to his reading of the surfacing of caste antagonism within FAs as a retrogressive development (because it is in some ways a sign of the pre-modern). For other fans, the desire to fashion their associations after other institutions within the domain of the national-modern co-exists with participating in activities

[17] On one occasion two fans from Karimnagar claimed that most Chiranjeevi fans in their town did not even know the star's caste and the question of caste loyalty being a factor in FA composition did not arise (in Karimnagar). They however conceded that the two of them knew Chiranjeevi's caste. They themselves were Munnuru Kapus and despite my repeated assurances that I did not attribute any casteism to their membership in a Chiranjeevi FA, explained at some length that their love for the star pre-dated their awareness of his caste.

(particularly those directly or indirectly related to caste assertion) which fall outside this domain. Currency of the narrative of the death of the ideal fan is partly due to this unresolved tension within contemporary FAs between the desire for the national-modern and the location of fans outside it.

The visibility of caste loyalties and caste alliances within FAs is read by critics of organized present day fans as an index of the degeneration of FAs. Consequently, the anxiety evoked by fans is articulated by theatre owners and distributors (among others) for instance, as the lamentation of the decline of the ideal fan. The ideal fan, who is said to have existed in the past, is invoked in off-the-record comments by film industry's representatives even as they accuse fans (actual, present day fans) of extorting money and doubling as rowdies. The transformation of the fan in the eighties is thus named as criminalization.

The notion of the fan as criminal is supported by Han Purushottam Rao, a prominent leftist critic of Telugu cinema. He argues that FAs in the seventies became something akin to private armies of politicans. He feels the fan phenomenon `reflects the lumpenization of politics since the late sixties'.[18] The death of the true fan then coincides with the lumpenization of the fan.

There is a remarkable degree of overlap in the position of people with otherwise distinct class and political affiliations when it comes to the rowdyncss of the fan. For instance, a police officer in Vijayawada, echoing distributors and film critics alike, referred to some important Chiranjeevi fan organizers in Vijayawada as `noted rowdy sheeters'.[19]

The police officer, the film industry's representative and the leftist critic all argued in the course of their interviews with me that on-screen changes (or transformation of the medium) are at least

[18] Interview, Hyderabad, 8 January 1995.

[19] Rama Rao, the Circle Inspector of the Five-Town Police Station, Vijayawada (Interview, 21 July 1994, Vijayawada). About a dozen of Vijayawada's fifty odd theatres come under the jurisdiction of this police station. The rowdies he was referring to were involved in serious criminal cases and faced charges of murder. None of the cases were related to fan activity.

partly responsible for the transformation of the fans. Hari Purushottam Rao's argument is the most forceful of the three and merits a mention. He directly traces the lumpenization of fans to the release of the NTR starrer *Kathanayakudu* (K.H. Rao, 1969) which inaugurated the era of autocratic populism in Telugu cinema. The perceived linkage between the image on-screen and the state of its audience(s) and both of these to a crisis in the socio-political realm is a crucial frame of intelligibility as far as the debates around cinema are concerned I am not suggesting that such linkages should not be made. But the supposed linkage is often deployed to condemn films, fans and the mass-audience who are seen as a part of the crisis in the social realm. I discuss this problem at length in Chapter 4. For the present I wish to return to the question I raised early in mis chapter. What does an audience see at the movies?

The critics of organised fans, sec the rowdy being made or having been made by a degenerate medium. They dissociate themselves from the rowdy-fan (whose being and pleasures arc obviously unlike theirs) and the cinema which produces him. In the process they constitute themselves as an audience category—a public--quite distinct from the other comprising of fans (and yet others like fans). We' therefore *see* ourselves (as a distinct category) and others watching films and responding to them We also see films affecting them. In the process, the othering of the fan (and of the mass-audience in general) takes place at the cinema. Individuals thus emerge as a collective from the viewing of films and attendant spectacles gratuitously performed by fans.

The question I wish to take up now is what kind of a collective is formed around FAs? The condition in which young people choose to become fans and the nature of activity of this collective which draws them into apparently making a public statement of their subjection (submission) to the star are issues which demand close attention.

In 1979, when Chiranjeevi was still playing supporting roles in low budget films, his first FA in Hyderabad, *Akhila Bharata Chiranjeevi Abhimana Sangham* (All India Chiranjecvi Fans'

Association) was formed.[20] Its members claim that it was the first Chiranjeevi FA anywhere. It had about twenty five members of whom ten were active. The President, B.S. Venugopal, is a matriculate and belongs to the backward Besta caste. Although he always liked NTR's films and holds that NTR was and is the number one star, he was never a member of any NTR FA. On the other hand, Chiranjeevi's `quick movements' (he used the English phrase and could not translate it into Telugu) against injustice in society made him a fan of the actor.

Venugopal saw a great future for Chiranjeevi after watching his first film, *Pranam Khareedu* (1978), and `wanted to encourage him'.[21] The *Sangham* promoted Chiranjeevi by publishing booklets and flyers on the actor. It adopted these techniques from NTR FAs which printed posters, booklets and flyers and decorated theatres and roads with cloth banners. Venugopal set up his own recording dance' troupe[22] and performed Chiranjeevi's hit dances in various places within and around Hyderabad. This was his personal contribution-to publicize Chiranjeevi's talent as a dancer. He continued to dance for the next thirteen years, while he was otherwise employed as a private gunman and later (from 1986) as an attender in a government office.[23]

To the question of why they joined or formed FAs, the standard response of fans is that they like the star and want to promote him/her. Dickey (1993b) quotes a fan who says he wants to

[20] Source: B.S. Venugopal and Ravi Goud, Interview, Ongole, 1 May 1997.

[21] It is not unusual for new stars and stars in the making to have FAs. The actor Lawrence had atleast one FA months before the first film in which be was cast as a hero was released. By this time he had featured in only one dance sequence but his fans declared that he would surpass the dancing sensation Prabhu Deva *(Tara Sitara*, April 97).

[22] The recording dance is a popular dance form in which stage artistes imitate and improvise the dances of film stars while the song (the `record') is played on a turntable. Baskaran (1996) calls it the `poor man's cabaret' (54). Recording dances are now banned in AP as the troupes inevitably performed ` obscene' numbers and because at times the performance was itself a part of a thriving prostitution business. Despite the ban, the chief attraction of the largest *Sivaratri jatra* in the state at Kotappa Konda is the recording dance. See the film *Sri Kanakamahalakshmi Recording Dance Troupe* (Vamsy, 1988) for a hilarious but sympathetic account of the adventures of a recording dance troupe.

[23] Interview, Ongole, 1 May 1997.

`promote and support the star' (163). But why would anyone want to do that? In other words, what are the conditions under which loyalty is donated to the star? Venugopal's career is a case in point He *predicted* Chiranjeevi's stardom and, more importantly, foresaw a role for himself in the association hierarchy. Notice that he did not become an NTR fan possibly because NTR FAs were saturated by 1979. 'Promoting the star' was for Venugopal also a means of promoting himself as a performer and fan organizer.

The exceptional career of Parachuri Vijayalaxmi, perhaps the only female member of an FA in Andhra Pradesh, illustrates my point further.[24] Vijayalaxmi is a Kamma by caste and a graduate. She established and became the president of the All India Vijayashanti Cultural Organization, Vijayawada.[25] When asked why she became an organized fan she said, `Of course I like Vijayashanti, but I started this association because someone [in the industry who was a family friend] requested me to'.[26]

`Liking the star' is evidently not enough for a woman, and an upper caste graduate at that, to join an FA. In addition to the obligation she felt to her family friend, she was also motivated by the ambition to enter politics and contest as a Municipal Corporator. She felt that the public exposure gained through fan activity would help her in electoral politics.

During her tenure as fan organizer she had a very cordial relationship with Chiranjeevi fans although she was aligned with their 'enemies' (because they not only promoted rival superstars but also had affiliations with political parties that were violently opposed to each other): Balakrishna fans.

[24] Vijayalaxmi herself said that there was an all female FA of Vijayashanti, but I could not track it down.

[25] Vijayashanti, known as `Lady Superstar', is a very popular female star and has featured in a number of films opposite Chiranjeevi and other major stars. Besides, in films like *Kartavaym* (A. Mohan Gandhi, 1990) she was cast in action oriented roles which rendered the male hero redundant.

[26] Interview, Vijayawada, 20 July 1994.

She was well-known in the fan circles of Vijayawada and popular with theatre owners also. However in 1995 she destroyed her association files and quit She failed to get a TOP nomination during the Municipal Corporation elections in 1995. But more importantly, she felt that her work `didn't receive due recognition and encouragement from her [Vijayashanti]'.[27]

It is important to recognize that fans have offical agendas (to promote the star and earn goodwill on his/her behalf) and unofficial ones. By unofficial agendas I don't mean illegal/ criminal activities but the unstated undercurrent of demands which find articulation in terms of the official agenda as well as outside it Fans like Vijayalaxmi who openly discuss the reasons for their entry into FAs are rare. Nevertheless, it is important for the student of the fan phenomenon to recognize the existence of unofficial agendas. (Interestingly those who are familiar with the fan phenomenon, as I have pointed out, doubt the very existence of the official agenda.) The ways in which fan activity *is* imbricated with the social and political aspirations of fans and the *publicness* of fandom merit close attention. I wish to argue that this is evident in their day-to-day activities which are *public* in nature.

On most evenings fans meet in public places like tea shops and street corner *pan* shops, often in the vicinity of a cinema hall. FAs generally do not have regular offices. The apex body of Chiranjeevi FAs, Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association, itself acquired an office of its own only in 1997. Public places usually become their offices As a result, FAs have interesting addresses. For instance, Suresh Babu's (President of the All India Chiranjeevi Friends Unit) address is 'Urvasi Centre, Gandhi Nagar, Vijayawada' (Urvasi is the name of a theatre), Ramu YadaVs (President of the Akhilandhra Chiranjeevi Yuvata) is still simpler 'Opposite Sandhya 70mm, Hyderabad' (see Illustration 1).

Dickey's observation that fans' meetings in Tamil Nadu mostly revolve around, conversations about the star and his or her performance'(1993b: 150) holds good for Chiranjeevi and other FAs in

[27] Interview, Vijayawada, 18 March 1996.

Andhra Pradesh as well. Curiously enough, Dickey neither lists fans' conversations as a fan activity nor discusses it at any length. In an earlier chapter (`Audiences': 134-147) however, she suggests that working class audience's interpretation of films is closely related to real life conditions and concerns of the poor. In Dickey's analysis fans are somehow exempt from making these connections during their conversations.

It is important to note that FAs provide the only institutionalized space for face-to-face discussion on cinema (leaving aside discussions organized by film societies). Students and youth in many parts of the state talk about films fairly regularly. Talking about films is arguably among the most popular leisure activities of a wide cross-section of youth, after film viewing. Fan talk on cinema, while sharing a number of similarities with this practice has one significant difference. Criticism of the star is generally avoided even when his flops are being discussed

Considering that these discussions are sponsored by *fan* associations, the virtual ban on criticism of the star is not surprising. But this is the `official' policy and public stance of FAs. In private conversations fans of different class, caste and regional backgrounds have been highly critical of the star for bis roles in *Mechanic Alludu* (K. Raghavendra Rao 1993), *Big Boss* (Vijaya Bapineedu 1995), *Alluda Majaka* (E.V.V.Satyanarayana 1995) and *Rickshawvodu* (Kodi Ramakrishna 1995). Chiranjeevi too said that fans made abusive long distance phone calls and wrote angry letters when the)' were disappointed.[28] I mention this to point out that there are serious limitations to the openness of the debate. However, within these limitations a great deal can be and is possible, as regards generating a *critical publicity*, which Habermas (1989) argues is almost impossible with mass media 'consumption'.

By critical publicity I do not mean oppositional readings of films. FA discussions are analytical to a degree and lay down the framework in which films are to be understood. They are critical in that

Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

they do not necessarily induce passive consumption of films but often result in active rejectioa[29]

Typically, participants in FA discussions involve members of the association, their friends (who may not be fans of the star) and regular hangers-on at the meeting place, which is after all a public place. Current and forthcoming films of the star but also other films are the most discussed topics. Exchanging news on the box-office front and predictions about takings are fairly common.[30] Also dwelt upon are the latest news and gossip on the industry front, often picked up from popular film magazines.

What is of interest is the way films are analysed. Films are generally broken down into components along lines which correspond with the way the film industry and the popular film press often do. The star, story, direction, music, dances, comedy track, photography, family/ladies sentiment and climax etc. are the most widely recognized filmic components. The film industry actually assembles some of these components independently of each other.[31]

S.P. Parasuram (Ravi Raja Pinisetry, 1994) was one of the films which came up for discussion in my presence.[32] The star's performance was (of course) very good. He played the (unusual) role of a police officer very convincingly. The opening sequence and first fight were all wrong because no police officer hunts criminals all by himself. But the comedy track was terrible because it showed

[29] Bad talk' by the audience is rightly considered to be the worst thing that can happen to a newly released film. Fan discussions could very well generate bad talk, especially when their star or his chief "rival' do not feature in the film. When they do, fans' assessment is generally discounted by non-fans.

[30] This often leads to heated discussions with non-fans who are quick to disagree when fans exaggerate the success of their star's film or underplay another's.

[31] Fights and dances are often not directed by the director. See Prasad 1994 for a discussion on what he calls the heterogenous form of manufacture (73–87). There are now script-writers who specialize in writing the comedy track. P. Rajasekhar informs me that die hard fans actually watch their star's film concentrating on one component at a time.

[32] I am grateful to members of All India Chiranjeevi Youth Cultural Association, Vijayawada and Akhilandhra Chiranjeevi Yuvata, Hyderabad for allowing me to participate in their discussions.

Chiranjeevi, a Superintendent of Police, clowning around with a petty crook (the heroine, played by Sridevi). The direction was sloppy because Chiranjeevi in police uniform leaves three of his shirt buttons open (as he does in his roles as a rowdy). The climax was disappointing. Moreover, the story was already familiar as the Hindi version of the Tamil original (of which the film was a remake) was already released. The heroine (or rather, her lack of glamour in this film) and the fact that this was a police film in a state where cop-centred films generally don't do well, were all offered as reasons for its failure.

Apart from breaking down the film into components, the method of analysis involves paying attention to minute details and making cross references to other films Fans read meanings into each of the filmic components and have a set of rather loosely defined expectations of these components. It is, therefore, possible to reject a film because its components (including the star in very exceptional cases) do not meet fans' expectations. Intertextual references are made between a whole range of films which potentially include all Telugu, Hindi or English films available to a generation of filmgoers. The star is the most often discussed and essential component (not only of FA discussions but also of the popular film press which thrives on star centred reporting). The importance of these discussions lies in the fact that meanings of films and stardom, as well as expectations of the star and cinema in general are buih around such discussions. (In the next chapter I look at how films address the expectation that audiences have of the star.)

Although talking is what fans do most of time, their most prominent and controversial activities are theatre-based. Decorating the theatre on the occasion of a film's release and noisy celebration within the cinema hall are among their activities on the premises of theatres. I would also like to treat as theatre-based activity generation of publicity material for the star's films and all other efforts to ensure a film's success. I include these diverse activities under one head, although some of them are not performed at the theatre or near it, because all of them are related activities. They are among the most important official functions of FAs (directly liked to 'promoting the star') and centred around

films (see Illustration 2).

K. Narasaiah, a noted film journalist and former distributor, argued that fans were/are encouraged and directly funded by sections of the industry (stars, distributors, even producers at times) largely because fans' theatre-based activity, including repeated viewings and providing

expressed similar opinions.) 1 wish to point out that the overlapping of official and unofficial agendas is discernible in these activities, as with most other activities of fans. It is for this reason that these activities cause much anxiety for the film industry.

As for the activities themselves, the most wealthy FAs install plywood cutouts costing upto tens of thousands of rupees of the star within or in the immediate vicinity of theatres. The smaller FAs publish flyers in praise of the film or paste posters (either crudely illustrated or unillustrated) to advertise it Cloth banners are strung across the roads leading to the theatre or main thoroughfares of the town/city. Distribution of sweets to the audience before the opening show; food packets (packed dinners), sometimes even clothes for the theatre staff on the hundredth day of screening and decoration of theatres with flowers are among the other theatre-based activities (see also Dickey 1993b: 158).

All publicity material generated by fans prominently displays the name of the association and some or all its members. To cite an extreme example, a poster published on the occasion of the hundredth day celebration of *Hitler* (Mutyala Subbaiah, 1997) merely lists dozens of fans (with their photographs) complimenting the star. Fans also ensure, whenever possible, that their material *is* photographed, with themselves occupying a prominent place in the picture. Copies of photographs or samples of the material (flyers, posters etc) are sent to Chiranjeevi and his other FAs by post (see Illustration 3).

[33] Interview, Vijayawada, 19 July 1994.

The opening show and night show of the hundredth day are almost exclusively fans' shows.[34] On these occasions, theatres are occupied by revelling fans. Without exception such occasions are heavily policed, and one witnesses frequent cane charges outside theatres and patrolling by armed policemen within. Rioting has broken out, at times resulting in the destruction or damaging of theatre property.[35]

Theatre-based activity demonstrates that fans do not merely advertise a film but also their presence. Whether it is through the modest poster or the expensive cutout, fans leave their signature behind. They project themselves on to the image of the Mcgastar, quite literally by drowning out the soundtrack with their whistling and cheering or throwing balloons and confetti across the projector's beam.

Further, in the course of their celebration, fans lay down the rules according to which the spectacle (on screen) will unfold. Celebration before the screen (in theatres) results in an inversion similar to the one Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1993) argues took place in early Indian cinema. Rajadhyaksha notes that in the case of cinema (unlike the still photograph or calender illustration):

> a large number of people converged upon a single screen, to collectively gaze upon the projected image.... In place of a series of mass produced frames that went out to a number of individual buyers/viewers, many people came to collectively view a single frame, and *rendered it mobile* (68, original emphasis).

Similarly, with the Megastar's films, the star appears on screen *because* fans congregate to witness the

[34] Between 1990 and 1995 influential FAs organized special shows, misnamed benefit shows, before the regular opening show and sold gate passes at five times the price of regular tickets. This practice brought in large sums of money to the organizers but it had been stopped as none of the FAs maintained audited accounts and therefore couldn't prove that the gate collections were used for charitable purposes.

[35] The night show of the hundredth day of *GharanaMogudu* (1992) ended in a riot when the theatre management (Sandhya 70mm, Hyderabad) refused to repeat a song for the third time as demanded by fans.

show (not the other way round) and *for them*, often addressing them using a variety of techniques (see Chapter 2). Interestingly, what really matters during these shows is not so much the spectacle on screen but the one before it in which the viewer/fan is also the performer. This off-screen spectacle (like a number of other FA activities which need not be spectacular) is *addressed to* the absent star, as it is to fans themselves and others. It is a celebration of the presence of fans (at the theatre) who by their very presence make the film happen and the star appear. Collective film viewing provides fans the opportunity to demand that the filmic narrative progess according to their expectations This could mean pressurizing theatre managements to re-screen parts of the film, particularly songs. When a film is perceived to meet their expectations, fans could return again and again to watch it However, when a film disappoints them, despite claims to the contrary, they stay away from it after the customary second or third viewing or on rare occasions even prevent its screening (two such instances are discussed below).

I wish to point out that the address to the star is a displaced address to themselves and other sections of the audience and society. To elaborate, he who watches this performance within and outside theatres by fans is, ideally speaking, the star (which is why every thing they do is photographed and sent to the star). There is thus a double inversion: The star appears on screen because of the presence of fans and addresses fans; fans address the star and in the process themselves and others in their vicinity. This circuitous means of communication is one of the chief characteristics of fandom. Consequently, all communication by fans is via the star, who is the primary addressee.[36]

Notice what happens when a film is released. At the very outset there is a tussle with theatre managements for tickets This used to result in riot-like situations earlier but now FAs have obtained quotas. Then the question of how long a film should run. This is often decided by fans and not the

[36] Fan mail begins with `Dear Chiranjeevi/Megastar...' although most organized fans know that the mail is read and replies written by a ghost writer. In fact mail addressed to the Secretary of the apex body of fans, Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association, too begins with, `Dear Chiranjeevi'.

laws of profit alone. Fans attempt to ensure that a film runs for fifty, a hundred or more days (depending on its popularity and the size of the town/city). In the seventies Krishna fans bought tickets and distributed them free of cost to ensure that the film ran on and on Now FAs approach the distributor when they hear about the film's impending withdrawal and insist on postponing it. Sometimes a deal is struck and losses are shared On other occasions messages are sent to the star and the producer to intervene.[37] When nothing succeeds the film is of course withdrawn but not without a fight[38]* The absent star thus becomes a pretext for negotiation or conflict with the film industry with fans dictating terms in the course of `protecting the star's image'.

A similar situation results when fens allegedly extort money from distributors. [39] 'Donations' are sought by FAs to fund their activity which is purportedly aimed at providing publicity to the star's film or earning goodwill for him through social service Fan activity therefore becomes an occasion for fans to assert themselves in a public sphere and public spaces—the medium, the street, the theatre—which do not otherwise acknowledge their presence.

In the light of these observations I would like to briefly discuss social service by fans which has always been an important official function of FAs and is increasingly becoming the most important fan activity, largley due to the emphasis by the star himself on 'productive' work. Social service includes feeding the poor, blood donation, providing relief to victims of disasters (cyclones, floods etc.), distribution of fruit to poor patients in government hospitals, organizing festivals, building bus-shelters for commuters, providing financial help or free text books to poor students and loans to the

[37] Vulisetty Anjaneeyulu recounts that fans in his town hired a taxi and travelled all the way to Madras to meet the producer and ensure that *Kondaveeti Raja* (1986) would ran for hundred days when the distributor withdrew the film. The film was re-released after a gap of a few days because the producer obliged.

[38] Balakrishna fans in Vijayawada burnt a distributor's office in 1993 because a film was withdrawn three weeks or so before the hundredth day, despite an agreement being reached to share losses.

[39] Financial transactions between distributors and FAs are denied by both parties supposedly involved.

unemployed, etc. (See Illustration 4.)

These activities are covered very well by the local press and are thus the surest way of gaining access to the official public sphere, what Negt and Kluge (1993) would call the constitutive public sphere. The stated objective of social service is in the fan Venugopal's words 'to earn a good name for the star.' The logic is that fans are agents of the star,[40] who supposedly earns a good name as fans effectively donate their goodwill to him. Both fans and the star, however, underplay a key step in the process of accumulation of goodwill by the latter fans ensure that they become the centre of the social service activity even while they invoke the name of the star.[41]

The question fen activity raises is when does the fen donate or apparently surrender his agency, by attributing it to the star? In other words, what unofficial agendas make it possible for fans to adopt the official agenda which produces the fan as a devotee? The official agenda *is* accepted because unofficial agendas coexist with it. The latter are *articulated* in terms of the former. The condition under which fans constitute themselves as fans is the ability or opportunity to formapublic. And this public articulates a discourse of *rights* in the language of devotion, admiration and commitment (to the star). For this reason fan activity is addressed to the elite and the state in addition to the star.

To understand the full significance of the articulation of rights by fans, we need to recognize that the elite civil society and its corresponding constitutive public sphere is limited to the upper caste, middle-class minority of the society and is founded on principles of exclusion (of lower castes and classes, minorities and women). I have already pointed out that FAs comprise of a signficant lower caste and predominantly lower class membership. While Sudra `forward' castes are prominent in FAs, the form of their activity identifies them as essentially non-elite (meaning lower caste/class) formations.

Pandian (1995b) points out that the response of the Dravidian movement to the colonial public

[40] Chiranjeevi actually called them his representatives in every town and village. (Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.)

[41] Most of these activities are performed on the star's birthday (22 August).

sphere's exclusion of the lower caste/class majority of society was to quite literally invent another public sphere. Its spaces included the street, temple and pond. Pandian suggests that the primary means of the subaltern public to express its opinion was to establish its right to be *physically present* in these places.

K. Ilaiah (1996) argues that even in the post-Independence period, urban centres were so Brahminized that `the Dalitbahujan[42] masses began to feel that they were actually a minority—at least as far as visibility in markets was concerned[1] (57). Dalitbahujans would therefore have to debrahminize these spaces to render them hospitable to their habitation.[43]

When fans hang around in urban public places, turning them into `offices', they make a claim over them which they otherwise cannot—unless they are a part of a political-criminal gangs of `rowdies' which were a product of the seventies and were very visible since the eighties. [44] In the case of theatres, the lower castes were not generally denied access at any point of time. But, historically speaking, they gained an unequal access because the segregation of castes was reinforced by the manner in which theatres were constructed. The lower castes, especially the Dalits, entered cinemas in the lowest `class' where people actually sat on the floor (the next class had benches and only the highest had chairs). Till the seventies even large towns like Guntur had theatres which did not have uniform seating arrangements. I wish to suggest that the seating arrangement in cinema halls reinforces not just the economic inequalities in the society in general but more importantly social, particularly caste, inequalities. However, like most other `modern' institutions in India, cinema brackets caste and

[42] Dalitbahujan is defined by the author as `people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority' (Ilaiah 1996: ix).

[43] Urban property in Andhra Pradesh is not owned, in a literal sense, by Brahmins alone but also Vaisyas, Kammas, Reddys and other `forward' castes. Kammas, for instance, own a majority of the film theatres in coastal Andhra. However, these castes have proved to be faithful adherents of Brahminism, as Ilaiah notes.

[44] See Parthasarathy (1995) for an informative but unsympathetic account of the rowdies of Vijayawada.

presents itself as modern by disavowing caste by refusing to recognize the existence of caste inequalities/differences. I would like to illustrate my claim by briefly examining the history of segregating the audience in cinema halls.

According to K.Sivathamby, starting with Company dramas'[49] which are generally believed to be the immediate precursors of the cinema in South India, in the early part of this century, there were separate enclosures for *panc hamas* (members of untouchable castes) within the lower stalls. This practice, clearly meant to ensure that the untouchables did not pollute the other members of the lower *class* audience, was inherited by the early cinemas. Sivathamby reckons this practice may have continued up to the forties of South India.[46]

A survey conducted by Prattipati Muttaiah on the Dalit audience of early Telugu cinema shows that in the post-Independence period, although there was no official (i.e. state ratified) restriction on the entry of Dalits into the upper stalls, Dalits were actually prevented by theatre managements from purchasing higher class tickets in rural areas of coastal Andhra Pradesh where semi-permanent and touring talkies were quite popular. Muttaiah cited a seventy year old Dalit man recollecting that in his youth (1950s) some Dalit boys would proudly claim upon returning from Vijayawada that they watched films' sitting in chairs'. Muttaiah pointed out, 'only the anonymity the town (Vijayawada) provided Dalits the opportunity to enter the higher class enclosures whenever they could afford it, which was not very often'.[47] While Muttaiah's work indicates that there was an effective, albeit unofficial, ban on the entry of Dal its into the upper stalls in parts of rural Andhra Pradesh even after Independence, a report by Samata Sanghatana (1991) notes that even in the early nineties--when Dalits could not be physically prevented from sitting anywhere they liked, provided the} could pay for

[45] See Baskaran 1981 for more information on Company dramas.

[46] This information was made available to me by K. Sivathamby in the course of a discussion with him in Madras on 15 August 1997.

[47] Based on a personal interview with P.Muttaiah, Hyderabad, 1 June 1997.

it—the presence of Dalits in the Balcony (the costliest) seats resulted in much tension with the upper castes. [48] It is important to note that various forms of segregation were practiced in cinema halls to ensure that different sections of the audience were in their respective places' and the class-caste hierarchy of society was replicated and reinforced within the cinema halls. Given this history of cinema halls, theatre-based activity of fans (discussed below) assumes tremendous political significance because it involves challenging established modes of reinforcing social hierarchies in public spaces. The takeover of theatres as well as other public spaces by fans needs to be read as an attempt by the non-elite to make these spaces more inhabitable by establishing their physical presence and visibility.

In the eighties, the written word became available to a far larger section of the urban poor than before (see Balagopal 1988: 194-201). In fact, the explosion of FAs was coeval with the expansion of the exhibition sector of the film industry in the eighties when theatres grew from 20 in 1931 to 1,950 in 1981 and from 1,950 to 3,080 between 1981 to 1995." Simultaneously, the establishment of mass-circulation film magazines from the latter half of the seventies, starting with *Sitara* (1976), owned by the *Eenadu* group of publications, are indications of the presence of a larger and better defined lower class audience in the eighties than in the earlier decades. FAs became a site for the struggle against the exclusivist tendency of the elite civil society and its public sphere since fans used their habitation of these and other spaces to constitute a non-elite public of cinema. These developments, and not merely the linkages established between FAs and political parties, amounted to a politicization of FAs which was coterminous with ongoing socio-political struggles against the elite. Consequently, every fan is a bearer of rights: over the star and the spaces they inhabit Fans have rights because in the post-emergency period other non-elite sections of society, particularly the

[48] The report investigates the Chunduru massacre which is dicussed in Chatper 2.

[49] Figures upto 1981 cited from Turlapati Kutumba Rao (1981: 144). In the six years since the establishment of the Andhra Pradesh Film Development Corporation (APFDC) loans were disbursed by the corporation to build 108 theatres of which 9 were completed by 1981 (Manikyala Rao 1981, 152). The 1995 figures are cited from APFCC's *Film Directory 1995*.

backward castes and Dalits, present in significant numbers in FAs, began to assert their rights, albeit in spheres unrelated to cinema (discussed in Chapter 3). (See Illustration 5.)

The very assertion of rights by fans is an address to the state (since the state is the ultimate protector of rights) and the elite which is not only comprises of dominant classes/castes but also exists in a relationship *of dominance* with the subalterns and is therefore often responsible to the denial of civil and political rights to the constitutive sections of FAs. The *Alluda Majaka* controversy (discussed in chapter 4) witnessed a fan intervention which is an instance of fans' address to the state and the elite in the course of their activitiy. For the present I wish to focus on the nature of the address and the star's reponse to it

Fan activity is characterized by excess. Or rather, actions by excess and words by hyperbole (see Jenson 1992 and Fiske 1992 for the supposed excesses of fans). The number of times they watch their star's films; the forms they adopt to make public their enjoyment of the film (within and outside the theatre); the ease with which they pick up quarrels or bloody fights to defend their nominee; threats of suicide for what are 'obviously' trivial matters (one such is discussed below); the superlatives they use to describe the star or their own devotion—are instances of the excessive nature of fan activity.

It is possible to argue mat these excesses are everday forms of resistance to upper class/caste norms of behaviour. Given the history of condemnation of popular cinema (see Baskaran 1981 and Pandian 1995a), public declaration of unqualified obsession with the medium and its star(s) *is* in itself an act of open defiance of the dominant ideology. Fiske (1989: 95-113) takes a similar line of argument in bis discussion on female fans of the pop idol Madonna. Fiske reads the fan's imitation of the star as a subversion of patriarchal values.

This argument has several shortcomings when applied to organized fan activity. In the fans' own domain mere is intense competition between groups and individuals to surpass whatever has been considered the limit of expressing admiration. For example, a thirty foot cutout by one FA has to be overshadowed by a larger one by another association

Reading resistance in any simplistic manner into fan activity's excess ignores how excesses arc means by which fans enter spaces which are generally accessible only to the official or elite public In the work of both Pandian (1992) and Dickey (1993b), the sources of practically all instances of fans' excesses, including criminal acts and obsessive devotion, are mainstream newspapers and journals, including English language ones (Pandian 1992: 18 n2, n3, n4; 117 n87; 130 n103, n104; 131 n105, n107; 143 n126, n127 and Dickey 1993b: 191 n10). The link between excesses and entry into *the* (i.e. official) public sphere is an indication of the inaccessibility of these spaces to the non-elite. This is not to suggest that acts of violence arc committed with any degree of planning But the striking correlation between excess and *visibility* cannot be missed.

Excess is a cardinal principle of fan activity in general and plays an important role even in the public sphere constituted by fans. The fan is defined and recognized by bis active participation in the whole business of filmwatching and the spectacular act of devotion is in itself evidence of his fanhood.[50] Excesses enable fans to gain visibility, as fans and members of subordinate class/ caste groups, in precisely those spaces which do not otherwise acknowledge their presence.

Around the time when Chiranjeevi established himself as the major star of Telugu cinema and coinciding with the moment when his fans were most active, the star made his fans the target of a series of reformist imitatives. Throughout this exercise, intervention by the star was produced as an attempt to curb fan excesses even while it systematically delegitimized the articulation of rights (by fans). The star, as the addressee of fan activity which being performed in his name, also made him its subject (agent), responded in a manner that positioned him as an ally of the elite This positioning (of the star) indicates a disavowal of the ascription of agency (by fans to the star). An examination of the star's interventions shows that the star re-positioned himself vis-a-vis bis fans in order to ensure that

[50] Vulisetty Anjaneeyulu was introduced to me by Swamy Naidu as a special fan because the former, upon failing to meet Chiranjeevi on the occasion of the star's birthday (22 August 1996), stayed back in Hyderabad for over three months, working as a motor mechanic to support himself. He returned home (Aravapalem, East Godavari District) only after meeting the star.

the latter did not freely deploy the former to justify action that did not in fact have the approval of the star.

As far as the star is concerned, fans' perception of themselves as guardians of the star's image is in fact a problem. Half jokingly Chiranjeevi said, `Even the man who pays three or four rupees [to watch a film] thinks he owns the star and has a right over him'. "He went on to add that fans acquire this right because of their unqualified love for and committment to the star. There is, however, evidence for arguing that the rights of fans over the star's image is hardly a laughing matter. We have seen that it can result in fans' conflicts with the distributors about how long a film should run. This apart, rare instances of fans boycotting their star's film when he disappoints them, are evidence of the difficulties they can create for the star.

Chiranjeevi is reported to have said that screenings of *Aapadbandhavudu* (K. Viswanath, 1992) a 'classy film' were stopped by fans in some places because they didn't like the role played by him (*Filmfare*, January 1994: 50). This was confirmed by fans in Hyderabad according to whom fans in Visakhapatnam had prevented the screening of the film. (There is an interesting twist to the story, which is discussed below.) To cite another instance, Krishna issued newspaper advertisements requesting his fans not to boycott his film *Varasudu* (E.V.V. Satyanarayana, 1993) when angry fans protested against his role in the film.[52] It is now something of a custom for stars to make press statements on a forthcoming film well in advance to prepare fans for an unconventional role. The single largest exercise of this kind was undertaken during the making of the Chiranjeevi starrer *Hitler*.

Apart from affecting the business prospects of a film, certain activities of fans have caused considerable anxiety to the star. As indicated above, fans transfer their agency to the star by acting in

[51] Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

[52] The film has the younger star, Nagarjuna, holding Krishna by the collar in the course of an argument. Despite the initial controversy, the film went on to be a box-office hit. Fans were evidently pacified by Krishna's appeals.

his name and thereby disavowing their own agency. They thus make the star responsible for their actions.[53]

The ascription by fans of their agency to the star is a means by which they simultaneously reinforce and come to terms with the way the star and fans are constructed across textual and discursive spaces as the source of authority and followers/devotees respectively. Paradoxically, fan activity is enabled, in a manner of speaking, by attributing it to an instruction emanating from the star or presenting it as a means of proving their loyalty to him.[54] But the immediate problems created by fans, born by affecting a film's business and transferring their agency to the star, do not fully explain the scale of the intervention by the star.

Produced as attempts at curbing fan excesses, the reformist initiatives made the fans' presumed ownership of the star's image their primary target. But as we shall see, they were not limited to (re)establishing the star's control over his own screen image.

Interestingly, fans themselves perceived the beginning of the moment of `reform' as a changed attitude of the star to them. Venugopal felt that after the success of *Khaidi* (1983) Chiranjeevi received his fans better and began to take more interest in their activities. The turning point came in 1988 when a fan allegedly tried to poison the star[55] during the filming of *Marana Mrudangam* (A Kodandarami

[53] Prominent film critics, including Gudipoodi Srihari and representatives of the film industry have told me that stars are responsible for their fans' actions either directly, by their instructing them to perform those operations, like rigging box-office collections, which they themselves cannot do, or by their failure to control them.

[54] See Amin (1984) for a discussion on how peasants in (what is now) Utter Pradesh made the iconized figure of Gandhi central to their social and political agenda. Amin points out that the peasants' "ideas about Gandhi's "orders" and "powers" were often at variance with those of the local Congress-Khalifat leadership and clashed with the basic tenets of Gandhianism itself (55). The point I am trying to make by this comparison is that the popular classes' interpretation of cultural or political figures/signifiers has a great deal to do with their own attempts to negotiate their subalterniety within particular socio-political contexts. Therefore, what the star *wants* his fans to do is not quite what the star *enables* them to do.

[55] Venugopal insisted that the fan in question did not try to poison the star but added some `medicine' in a sweet to earn Chiranjeevi's affection. Another fan, who heard Venugopal's

Reddy, 1988). After this incident, according to Venugopal, the star began to maintain a distance from his fans.

Venugopal's explanation hinges on the understanding of the star as an individual without socio-political or institutional affiliations. All his actions are rendered transparent provided we know some detail of his personal history. As we shall see presently, one of the achievements of the star's interventions was to present himself as being detached from the film industry and the elite. However, it is interesting to note that the alleged poisoning attempt and the subsequent distancing of the star from his fans coincided with the beginning of the reformist phase of his career. The reformist initative began with his role in *Swayamkrushi* (K. Viswanath, 1987) and included his roles in two subsequent class-films' (discussed in chapter 3), the launching of the fan magazine *Megastar Chiranjeevi* in 1989, the formation of a centralized fan organization called Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association in 1995 and finally, the rejection of the mass-film with the making of *Hitler*.

I am aware that I am making this argument with hindsight and that these events were not pre-planned. Looking back, however, it is undeniable that the board thrust of these interventions was the *caderization of fans*. Implied in this construction of the fan is a similarity between the fan and political cadres; FAs and political parties. While imaging the fan thus could be read as anticipating the transformation of the star into a politician at a future date, it is more important to notice that there is an implicit recognition by the star of his *political* function. In the immediate sense this meant ensuring that fans were more disciplined, and, indeed, behaved like fans whose business is unselfish devotion. At another level, disciplining the fan itself was a means of disciplining the *masses* since the fan is a representative of a stand in for the masses. The enterprise of reforming fans therefore needs to be seen as an attempt by cinema as an institution to maintain social order. I discuss this at length in the

explanation later told me that it was indeed a *bona fide* murder attempted by a madman. Long before Venugopal narrated his version of the incident a fan in Hyderabad told me about the incident and claimed that it was one of the many plots hatched to destroy the star. He cryptically added, `There are many things you don't know.'

subsequent chapters. Here I wish to focus primarily on *Megastar Chiranjeevi*, according to its publisher Allu Aravind (a producer and Chiranjeevi's brother-in-law) the first official fan magazine in Andhra Pradesh.[56] (See Illustration 6.)

The first issue of *Megastar Chiranjeevi* was published in August 1989, coinciding with the star's birthday celebrations on 22 August. Although announced as a monthly, the journal published less than half-a-dozen issues annually after 1991, usually on occasions like the star's birthday or release of a film. Its editor Vijay Bapineedu is a prominent director who calls himself a fan of Chiranjeevi. It had an average print run of 15,000 copies, extended to 40,000 for special occasions. Usually published as three booklets, it contained at least one glossy pin-up, colour photographs, biographical notes, interviews (of the star, his producers, directors, other stars etc.) and fan mail.[57] Its price ranged between Rs. 15-20, making it the most expensive film related periodical in Telugu (popular film magazines at this time costed between Rs.3-5). Despite this, it reportedly sustained an aggregate loss of Rs.1.5 lakh.[58]

Megastar Chiranjeevi was undoubtedly aimed at providing advance publicity to the star's forthcoming films. Almost all issues carried photographs of the star and other members of the cast of forthcoming films. Portions of the scripts were sometimes reproduced, as were lyrics of songs of films in the making. However, its concerns were not confined to advertising the star's films or even the star

[56] The only other fan periodical is the newsletter issued by Suman. It contains information about his forthcoming films, shooting schedules, stills from future releases etc. and is distributed free of cost to his fans through the FAs. However, it is neither as ambitious nor attractive as *Megastar Chiranjeevi.*

[57] The journal ceased publication in 1995 but no formal announcement has been made on its current status or why publication was suspended. One source said there were no chances of its revival because of its financial unviability and other problems like the shortage of qualified editorial staff.

[58] Information related to circulation and finances of the magazine has been provided by Allu Aravind (Interview, Madras, 23 January 1995). I am grateful to Aravind for making available the back volumes of the journal for my reference.

himself.

The inaugural issue of *Megastar Chiranjeevi* called for photographs of FAs along with details of the nature of social service rendered by each. These were published in the next issue. What is interesting is this emphasis at the very inception of the magazine on social service as the most important fan activity. Curiously enough, social service by fans was practically ignored, except for rare mentions in the later issues, perhaps an indication that the star's agenda for fans had not yet fully crystallized. It was not until the establishment of the Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association that social service became *the* official function of fans. Nevertheless, the underscoring of social service is an indication of the direction FAs were expected to take by the star. The fanzine itself paid more attention to projecting the star as a national `hero'.[59] This coincided with the star's forays into Hindi cinema.

References to theatre-based fan activity are conspicuous by their absence although fans spent considerable energy and money on them. Given the increasing number of complaints by distributors and theatre managements of `indiscipline' and `rowdyism' by fans which was after all a fallout of such activities, this omission has to be seen as an attempt to underplay their importance. Further, there seems to be a realization on the part of the industry that publicity by fans is not responsible, to any significant degree, for a film's success. Allu Aravind, for instance, said that the media 'hype' built up by the producers had far greater reach than ever before and made the modest posters and leaflets by fans redundant

These immediate reasons apart, the silence of the magazine regarding fans' theatre-based activities was clearly a result of the different construction of the fan that it attempted. The quiz and the question-answer format regularly disseminated information about the star's life and career. This

[59] *Megastar Chiranjeevi* August 1992 and June 1993, for instance, carried reports on the popularity of Chiranjeevi in Gujarat and Karnataka respectively. The June 1992 issue claimed that Amitabh Bachchan himself said that Chiranjeevi was `greater' than the Hollywood stars Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwartzenegger.

is one indication that the journal attempted to construct a fan whose obsession with the star was essentially personal.[60] The only public statement the fanzine's version of the fan was expected to make was to watch the Megastar's films and attend officially approved public celebrations of the star's birthday or his film's success." The magazine itself was of course presented as *the* public forum for fans. This redefinition of the fan strives to snap the link FAs established between publicity for the star and the creation of an alternative public sphere. The star in the magazine thus exists without any reference to or support from *organized* fans. Further, the magazine itself sought to mediate between the fan and the star on one hand and fans themselves on the other, appropriating crucial functions of FAs in the process.

Simultaneously, attempts were made to *train* fans to produce/reinforce the dominant constructions of the star and also to improve their 'tastes'. The inaugural issue, deploying hyperbole—the most common rhetorical device adopted by fans themselves--declared that Chiranjeevi was a `Megastar', explaining that mega meant ten raised to the power of six. `If anyone in the industry imagines himself to be ten times greater than others, Chiranjeevi is many times greater than him', read the explanation for the star's title. Later issues, like other existing productions including those by fans, tried to construct a real-hero figure by collapsing the screen and off-screen Chiranjeevi (see Pandian 1992 for a detailed account of how this technique was used by MGR). We learn that Chiranjeevi is generous and concerned for the poor, brave even in the face of death, and deeply moved by the misfortunes of his fans. The July 1991 issue, for instance, chronicled his concern for the victims of a cyclone (which included the donation of a large sum of money). In the January 1994 issue he was

[60] In September 1992 issue had a feature titled, "Are you a Chiranjeevi Fan?" Its format was that of an examination question paper. Most issues had a quiz with cash prizes for the best quizzies.

[61] Gate passes to the *Jagadeka Veeruda Atiloka Sundari* function were issued through the magazine's August 1990 issue. The 100* day celebration of *Gharana Mogudu* too received wide coverage. All 100th day celebrations in Andhra Pradesh are funded by producers.

presented as the bravest survivor of a plane-crash who rushed other survivors to safety and in general took control of the situation.[62] In the January 1993 issue, he was shown with a fan who had lost both his legs in an accident while travelling to watch the latest Chiranjeevi film. The fan was reported to have said that the star had promised financial help for him to set up his own business once he had learnt to walk with his artificial legs.

But this technique of collapsing the screen and 'real' images, which happens to be the most widely used one in the inventory for the production of the star's `image(s)' could and often does, produce undesirable results. Especially when applied randomly or injudiciously to incompatible elements of these semiotic sets. The official fanzine therefore delegitimizes certain uses of the technique. I wish to briefly discuss two instances in which fans were imparted training in image making (in addition to being provided with examples of fine craftsmanship such as the specimens shown above).

In April 1992, *Megastar Chiranjeevi* published a letter from an angry fan and Chiranjeevi's signed response.[63] The fan was scandalized and angry that the actress Nagma addressed Chiranjeevi

[62] Among the other travellers (all of whom survived) were his `rival' Balakrishna, father-in-law Allu Ramalingaiah, and Vijayashanti. This particular issue needs to be read in the light of a major debate in the Telugu press, both mainstream and popular, as well as fan circles, triggered off by press reports that upon alighting from the plane, Chiranjeevi hugged his father-in-law and wept. *Megastar Chiranjeevi* does not mention these reports or angry letters and statements by fans who claimed that the star *hadn't* wept, or the press statements by Chiranjeevi that he did not weep. Instead it carried a series of eye-witness accounts of villagers who were supposedly present at the crash site. All of them apparently presented Chiranjeevi as the hero of the crash.

[63] Ravi Vasudevan, responding to my article (Srinivas 1996) in which the exchange between fan and star was discussed, wondered how authentic these letters were. I am grateful to Vasudevan for raising this question because it allows me to clarify the following: (a) fans do write threatening to kill themselves fairly regularly. I have myself seen such letters and have a few with me, which came with the randomly picked (randomly because picked in handfulls) samples of fan-mail I was presented with by Chiranjeevi's office in Hyderabad. (b) In all likelihood the star did not write this letter himself and even the signature could well be of the kind that is found on the ghost-writer's replies to fan-mail-it is printed at the bottom of a sheet of plain paper.

The point however is not the authenticity of the exchange but the need for it. Further, Chiranjeevi is an institution (and an individual of course, but the latter is not of inteest to me) like

abusively during a song in *Gharana Mogudu* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1992, unreleased at the time of publication). The ran sought the withdrawal of the song as it damaged the image of the 'Megastar's Natakishore' (a play on two of the actor's titles). Fans of other stars were ridiculing the song, the letter said, to the extent that the author felt insulted and wanted to die.

Chiranjeevi's response asserted that it was only in the 'acting' that he was insulted, and not in real life. *In the film* the abuse is addressed to the character's husband Raja, not to himself. 'Watch *Gharana Mogudu,'* he pleaded ' even after doing so if you feel the song denigrates me, write to me.' But then it is impossible in practice to separate the star as a real life' individual from the roles he plays. As we have seen, the magazine itself invited readers to draw parallels between the star's life and films. (In the next chapter I discuss how the roles themselves invoke the 'biography' of the star.) The message of the star's response is that fans should not commit the blunder of unapproved comparisons between the real and fictional. By extension, their activities should not adopt forms which are not legitimate. Chiranjeevi added:

> Don't pick fights with fans of other stars. It is not good to do so. 7 *have said so a number of times.* Here [in the industry] all the heroes are very friendly and cordial with each other. You fans, being the admirers of such heroes, should not abuse each other.
>
> So, hereafter, / *hope you will be an admirer I admire.* Don't even think of committing suicide (emphasis added).

The admirer Chiranjeevi admires, the good/true ran, is one who responds to the star's signal ('I have said so a number of times' and you should have acted accordingly). Notice mat the star's intervention is necessitated by the fan's excess' or rather the suicide threat which is most obviously an excess. But

other stars. And Chiranjeevi is a far more efficiently managed institution than most other stars of his generation. Like fans, the backroom boys of the institution function in the star's name. The crucial difference is that this use of the star's name is legitimate. Just how much of what is done by the star' actually emanates from the individual is not of interest to me. For this reason I have ignored the fanzine's claim on more than one occasion, that it was autonomous and did not necessarily represent the views of Chiranjeevi.

the fights with other stars' fans are taken more seriously than the suicide threat, which in the fan culture of Andhra Pradesh has been little more than an expression of anger or frustration rather than a prelude to actual suicide.[64] However, the fan's perceived right over the star's image (evident from the simplicity and directness of the demand to delete the song from the film) is at the bottom of the problem. I will return to this in a while. Before that I wish to draw attention to the discussions on the image' of the star in the magazgine.

From the June 1992 issue frequent references were made to Chiranjeevi's image as a hero of the masses and the supposed problems arising due to it. This issue reported Chiranjeevi's angry retort to a certain Punjabi woman, an army Major's wife, during the shooting of *Aaj ka Goondaraj* (Ravi Raja Pinisetty, 1992). Apparently, Chiranjeevi was piqued by her comment that she pitied Chiranjeevi, Amitabh Bachchan and Rajnikanth who played only stereotyped roles."' Why dont you act in art films?'" the Megastar was asked Chiranjeevi replied caustically that his films were meant for the masses, toilers who watch a film to forget their worries, not the `class-audience' like her, comprising of less than 5% of the audience who in any case watch films on video, not in the theatres. After her departure however, Chiranjeevi confessed to the reporter that he did in fact want to play roles with a difference but his audience hated such experiments. The article concluded by quoting Chiranjeevi, "Maybe I will make my own films if the urge to do artistic class-films increases...let us see".'

This was followed by Chiranjeevi's first person narrative *{Megastar Chiranjeevi*, August 1992) in which he stated that acquiring a stage-image' was greater than being appreciated by critics. The statement, which came in the wake of the phenomenal success of *Gharana Mogudu* and even as *Aapadbandhavudu* was being made, went on to assert that he was being cast in stereotyped roles and

[64] Even while I was working on this chapter a front page report of *The Indian Express* (Hyderabad, 16 June 1997) stated that a Krishna fan who failed to meet the star consumed poison and ended his life, unable to bear his disappointment. I do not indend to dismiss suicide threats by fans but I shall still hold that they are generally not taken very seriously. Letters conveying fans' suicide threats, for instance, rarely even reach the star. The ghost-writer handles them.

it was thus very difficult for him to exhibit his acting abilities. He regretted that the audience rejected his off-beat roles in films like *Chiranjeevi* (C.V. Rajendran, 1985) and *Aradhana* (Bharatiraja, 1987), even before he acquired his current star status.

Unease with what has been dubbed the 'image problem' was to find clear articulation in the April 1993 issue, only months after the commercial failure of *Aapadbandhavudu* which we have seen was actively boycotted by fans in some places. Chiranjeevi asked his fans the following question:

> I need not tell you that I have an 'image' as an artiste. It is being said mat no role, despite the best efforts of any director, will be appreciated by the people if it does not conform to this image. Is it healthy for an actor to be framed by an image? Should I bow to the audience's opinion and reproduce the image in my roles? Or is it better for me to do a couple of films in which roles do not conform to the image and instead give me the opportunity to exhibit my talent and earn a name [as a good actor]?

The question was necessitated by the refusal of fans and mass- audience (the people') to appreciate his attempts to exhibit his talent The question therefore was whether fans, who had failed to respond to the star's signal vis-a-vis class-films, were prepared for a display of his acting skills. The unstated injunction was that they should support his class-films, and the question was framed in such a way (is it healthy. .7) as to anticipate the correct' response. Ample evidence existed even in *Megastar Chiranjeevi* that the star was desirous of doing offbeat 'talent oriented' roles (cf. *Megastar Chiranjeevi,* June 1992).

Nor surprisingly, most of the responses published went along with Chiranjeevi *(Megastar Chiranjeevi,* June 1993). The star received overwhelming support from those who wrote in to go ahead with his experiment Of the three F As whose representatives wrote back, only one wanted him to continue doing 'mass roles' without trying to alter his image. Nobody suggested that he give up mass attraction films' (which wasn't the question anyway). Less than a third of the eighteen respondents felt that he should stick to action films

How do we understand the support for class-films in a *fan* magazine at a time when the star's 'imageless' roles were being rejected in favour of the supposedly stereotyped (`mass attraction') roles? In part, the way the question was framed determined the response. But more importantly, the response is an indication of the success of *Megastar Chiranjeevi's* intervention in the fan movement. The magazine entered the domain of fans as a bearer of the star's opinion which coincided with that of the elite public in significant ways. Expanding the areas of intersection between FAs and the elite public, the fanzine sought to mediate between the two even as it ensured the magnification of certain traits of fans (hyperbolic praise as is evident in the inaugural issue which explained why Chiranjeevi was a Megastar, for instance). Simultaneously, the fans' articulation of the discourse of rights, regarding the star and also in other domains, was produced as an excess and delegitimized. In fact the emphasis on the image problems of the star was a displaced critique of the fans' discourse of rights itself, which often manifested itself in criminal activities. The twofold thrust of the star's reformist endeavour captures the anxiety of the elite about cinema and its mass-audience. The effort was to transform the fan by ensuring that he was a subject of the star's will and to change the shape of cinema which was perceived to be responsible for the actions of a sizable portion of the audience (the mass-audience).

The technique employed was to bring about a splitting of the (ideal) fan and non-fan (marked by undesirable excesses). This was to be replicated in another split between the fans and the mass-audience, with fans identifying with the elite in some ways instead of with the mass-audience. The fan magazine's didactic thrust was supplemented by the star's statements in other film magazines and has had the effect of ensuring mat fans, at least in public, dissociate themselves from the rest of the mass-audience which is perceived to exist externally, beyond the realm of fans. One indication of this development is the attitude to the star's class-fans. Most fans I met claimed that their favourite Chiranjeevi films included at least two class-films, although none of them said mat they watched the latter as many times as their favourite mass-films. It is possible mat their response was partly shaped ty my identity as a member of the elite (research', education, occupation as university lecturer, and

my particular Telugu accent being some of the signs of this identity). However, it is important to note that the elite's opinions were already pressurising fens to disclaim some of their own activities precisely because of the nature of the star's own interventions which seriously undermined the autonomy of the public sphere created by them.

The star managed to produce this attitudinal shift, which was also a political shift because what was at stake was the question of rights and of alliances, by presenting himself as a mediator between the fans and also between fans and the elite. The star as mediator was a construction already' available to Chiranjeevi (as we shall see in the next chapter when I discuss his films). The star, as he appeared in this magazine, aligned the fan with and came close to identifying him as a member of the class-audience (and by extension the elite which was itself characterised by its preference for class-films).

To ensure compliance with the remapping of the fan realm, the magazine mobilized the construct of the true fan ('the admirer I admire', for example). The fans' consent was sought to be manufactured by a *literal reading* of the fans' own declaration of their devotion and proclaimed willingness to subject themselves to the star's will. Needless to say such claims are foregrounded in much fan activity. The attempt was to trap the fan in the rhetoric of fandom which as we have seen is often a pretext for articulating other aspirations. The thrust of this literalism was to foreclose FAs to their unofficial agendas. The ensuing creation was to be a cadre who followed in letter and spirit the official agenda, laid down by the star and disseminated by the magazine.

It is important to note that in the course of his interventions the star was produced as a real' person and the fanzine's signalling of the real star vested the figure of `Chiranjeevi' with the authority to intervene in fan activity. The manner in which the real was mobilized ensured that the star's institutional affiliations--as a key player in the film industry and a member of the dominant class/caste alliance, in short a member of the very elite against whom the members of FAs often direct their activities--were rendered invisible As a result the demands made by the elite public of cinema on the medium could be passed off as emanating from the star's deep dissatisfaction with his career or films

or fans and were thereby presented as meriting careful consideration by fans. In these interventions, even as the star is freed' from his institutional affiliations, fans are imaged as having nothing to do with others who share similar socio-economic backgrounds (the `masses', so to speak). The star and fans were thus seen as constituting one unified imagined community. Read in the light of the larger attempt by the star-institution to produce the fan as a cadre, the latter (fan-cadre) appears in the *Megastar Chiranjeevi* as one who has direct access to the (real) star and the ability to have access to the star's person and mind is what distinguishes the true fan from the rest.

The fanzine itself could lay claim to a superior status among texts which produce the star (like other film magazines) because it was the vehicle of Chiranjeevi the living person. Its function is best understood in terms of what Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott (1987) call a `textual shifter' which organizes the frameworks of ideological and cultural reference' within which other texts (related to the star, in our context) may be interpreted (58). Textual shifters function alongside other `systems of inter-textuality', add Bennett and Wollacott,

> to organize *the relations between texts and readers.* They do not act solely upon the reader to produce different readings of the same text' but also act upon the text, shifting its very signifiying potential so that it is no longer what it once was, because in terms of its cultural location, it is no longer where it once was' (248, original emphasis)

Modifying Bennett and Woollacotfs notion somewhat, I wish to suggest that *Megastar Chiranjeevi's* function as a textual shifter lay in its reorganization of the relationship between fans and films (both mass-films and class-films) of the star but also between fans and the star. While refashioning the fan as a cadre, the fanzine enabled the suturing of antagonisms that surfaced between fans and sections of the industry and the elite public. This suture was sought to be accomplished by producing the domain of the real star as that imaginary location where all antagonisms disappear. The real star and the caderized fen are thus products of the same ideological manoeuvre. (See chapter 2 for a discussion on the mobilization of the real star in the mass-film.)

All this is not claim that the magazine was an unqualified success. Renewed attempts were made to caderize fens from 1995 with the establishment of the Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association, even after the journal ceased publication, indicating that the task was still unaccomplished. I am not even suggesting that caderization of fans had been or is close to being achieved Although it is too early to decide whether or not the major attempts at `disciplining' tans via *Megastar Chiranjeevi* and the Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association have been successful, it is worth pointing out that FAs are under considerable pressure to 'reform' themselves. The trajectory of the star's interventions alerts us the fact that the spaces created by fens are always contested spaces and as a public fans are under constant threat of being transformed into a non-public. There is no guarantee whatsoever that the public sphere of fans will retain its publicness and FAs their unofficial sociopolitical agendas for all time to come. The social and political implications of fan activity can only be ascertained by a close examination of its specificity—what being a fan means in a particular context—not by an *a priori* declaration of what fandom is or by reading resistance into fan activity as a way of reposing our faith in the subaltern's limitless capacity for defiance.

In the next chapter I shall examine Chiranjeevi's mass-films which were at once a response to the socio-political context in which they were made and perceived by certain sections of the audience as contributing to the 'degeneration' of fans and the masses in general. How do these films construct the spectator and anticipate his/her response to the narrative? How is the mass-film meant to be read? And why did these films generate so much anxiety among the upper caste, middle-class elite?

Chapter 2

Star, Spectator and Mass-film

Mass-film is the name given by hostile critics--professional or otherwise--of Telugu cinema as well as the film industry to a whole range of films which are supposedly patronized by lower class/caste audiences. While the term may have existed before the eighties and continues to be current even today, in the eighties and early nineties it was commonly used to describe specific kind of films. I wish to argue that these films can be seen as constituting a genre with discernible thematic and formal features.

The mass-film served as a 'vehicle' for the production of Chiranjeevi the star from one film to the next. The star vehicle, according to Richard Dyer, might provide `a character of the type associated with the star..., a situation, setting or generic context associated with the star...; or opportunities for the star to do her/his thing...' (1979: 70). Dyer thus reminds us that films of a particular star have common features which result from the films' attempt to signal the presence of the star. He goes on to argue that not all the star's films are vehicles but

> vehicles are important as much for what conventions they set up as for how they develop them, for their ingredients as for their realisation. In certain respects a set of star vehicles is rather like a film genre such as the Western, the musical, the gangster-film. As with genres proper, one can discern across a star's vehicles continuities of iconography ... visual style ... and structure (71).

My reason for the treating mass-film as a genre is not because it served as a vehicle for Chiranjeevi, who is the focus of the thesis. In fact, at one point or another mass-films featured all the

major Telugu stars of the eighties. However each star's mass-film would be different from the other's. Dyer's notion of the vehicle helps account for these differences but not the mass-film as a whole. Although I do not intend to discuss the films of other stars in this period or variations of the mass-film such as the naxalite-film' which made its appearance in the late eighties and created box office history in 1997 with *Osey Ramulamma* (Dasari Narayana Rao), I should point out that the mass-film is not another name for the 'Chiranjeevi film'. While Chiranjeevi is indeed synonymous with the mass-film, he continued to act in other kinds of films as well. (In the next chapter I examine his class-films.) As Andrew Britton points out, it is important to recognize that stars repeatedly cross genres and the star's work does not constitute a generic entity (1991: 202-203). To treat the star vehicle as a genre, warns Britton, would be to ignore both the irreducibility of genres and their reciprocity:

> The condition of the irreducibility of the genres is precisely their historical reciprocity: in an apparently paradoxical but very real sense, they are different *because* of what they have in common, not in spite of it The common ground is that profound conflict of interpretations within the culture--which assigns conflicting meanings to a single term or set of terms. Each genre seeks to regulate this conflict by organizing particular `forms and keepings', and appropriate expectations, whereby specific manifestations and resolutions of contradiction appear as properties of the generic world (Britton 1991: 200, original emphasis).

It is therefore important to note that a star's *oeuvre* does not constitute a genre and raise a given set of expectations among spectators but films which can quite validly be treated as different generic entities. I would like to go one step further and ask in the next chapter (where 1 examine films which cannot by any justifiable generic criteria be classified alongside the mass-film) what the star brings with him when he crosses genres.

According to its critics (as opposed to its patrons) the mass-film is recognized by its `vulgarity', violence' and address to its intended audience, the masses. While there can be little justification in accepting this description at face value, it points at the larger processes at work in generic classification. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott suggest that classification of genres does not result

from some essential formal or thematic features of a given set of texts but instead provides 'an intellectual grid of intelligibility' through which texts are read (1987: 83). After Stephen Neale (1980) they argue,' [G]enres can... be viewed as sets of expectations through which the possibilities of reading are organized' (81). David Bordwell too asserts that genres 'justify an expectation or influence' on the part of the spectator. He adds that such expectations are *trans-textually* grounded in that they draw on the spectator's awareness of other recognizably similar texts (Bordwell 1988: 37).

Mass-film is a genre in that it *offers itself* "to be read in particular ways. In other words, it constructs a spectator position which offers certain frames of intelligibility at the expense of others. Although it is possible to identify the formal and thematic concerns of a mass-film, these features alone are not sufficient to make a case for treating it as a genre. The 'Telugu western' for instance was made with Krishna and Chiranjeevi in the lead roles in the 70s and 80s respectively The formal similarities between these `westerns' do not imply they belonged to the same genre; the mass-film is composite, containing numerous generic tendencies which are not considered by their audiences as separate genres. (I have in mind categories such as stunt films which have been subsumed by the mass-film.) By virtue of its production and circulation in a period when the mass-film was a supergenre, in a manner of speaking, the Chiranjeevi western is more likely to be seen as a mass-film rather than as a western Similarly the mass-film's thematic concerns, breakdown of the family as an institution for example, is shared by the class-film which by all existing accounts is dissimilar to the former. The differences between genres therefore have more to do with what is expected of them than with their formal or thematic concerns.

M. Madhava Prasad raises an interesting question with reference to genres in the Indian cinema where for decades only two genres-the mythological and social--subsumed all other generic tendencies. He argues that it is important to explore 'the social significance of differentiation, the cultural logic that may be asserting itself in the phenomenon of genre-formation' rather than attempt to identify generic tendencies (Prasad 1994: 253). He goes on to argue that the Bombay film industry

has tended to prevent the disaggregation of the audiences, a tendency Prasad relates to the refusal of the industry to adopt to the capitalist mode of production.

Although I am interested in the 'cultural logic' of genre formation, my focus unlike Prasad's is not so much on what he calls the economics of ideology' but rather the *politics of spectatorship*. I would argue mat the mass-film and class-film which emerged as distinct generic categories around the same time (the 80s) complement each other in that they offer differing resolutions to what is seen/produced as the crisis in the social Each adopts distinctive formal and narrative devices which constitute a spectator position from where the resolution^) offered by the respective genres is both intelligible and acceptable. In this chapter I focus on the protocols established by the mass-film for its own intelligibility and related questions. The protocols of film viewing are crucial to the understanding of the mass-film--and cinema in genera]-because they constitute the actual viewer as a spectator.

David Bordwell's notion of the spectator is a starting point for a discussion on how films offer themselves to be read, although no actual viewer may read them accordingly. Bordwell argues:

> [T]he `spectator' is not a particular person, not even me .... I adopt the term viewer' or `spectator' to name a hypothetical entity executing the operations relevant to constructing a story art of the film's representation. My spectator, then, acts according to the protocols of story comprehension (1988: 30).

I disagree with Bordwell, however, when he adds, `Insofar as an empirical viewer makes sense of the story his or her activities coincide with the process [of comprehension adopted by the spectator].' I wish to suggest mat actual readings of filmic texts need not correspond or coincide with the process of comprehension laid down by a film. The reason being that the many sorts of particular knowledge', which Bordwell acknowledges are brought to bear upon comprehending texts (or hollow' forms as he calls them), are not merely supplementary but central to the empirical viewer's act of reading.

Bennett and Woollacott (1987) point out that the analysis of `formal mechanisms by which a text produces a position or positions for reading' and posits condition[s] of its own intelligibility[1]

does not explain how different groups of readers' read and interpret a given text' (60). Actual readings are grounded on the `situationally determined frameworks of cultural and ideological reference which supply the grids of intelligibility' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 60).

The reason for my attempting to locate the spectator position constructed by the mass-film is not because it (the mass-film) can only be read, or is actually read, according to the *cues* and other *intra-textual determinations* (Bordwell's terms) which constitute the spectator. On the contrary, this genre evoked two distinct responses--elite condemnation on the one hand and promotion by fan associations' on the other. Condemnation of the genre would have been impossible (as would failure at the box office in the case of individual films which are seen as not being fit for promoti on/patronage of the mass-audience) if actual upper caste, middle-class viewers (and of course their lower class/caste counterparts) watched these films from the *spectator's position.* From the spectator's position a film is not only fully comprehensible but, I would add, also immensely pleasurable. Going one step further, I would like to argue that *both* fan and elite responses to the mass-film result from the rejection of, or at least an active negotiation with, the spectator position constructed by the filmic text/apparatus. The larger question I am interested in examining alongside the locating the spectator position of the mass-film is the relationship between actual viewers and the spectator posited by a film.

One of the most striking features of the mass-film is the way in which the `protocols of viewing' establish a relationship between the star and the spectator. The following discussion draws on Ashish Rajadhyaksha's `The Four Looks and the Indian Cinema' (19%) where he examines the star-spectator relationship at some length.

Rajadhyaksha argues that the Indian cinema, generally speaking, 'prohibits the third look' (19%: 32). The third look' is the last of the looks proposed by Laura Mulvey (1975). According to Mulvey, the first look is fee look of the camera at the pro-filmic event; the second is of the viewer at the screen and the third is of the characters at each other. In the Indian cinema, Rajadhyaksha Proposes, the viewers *donate* their gaze to a character, often the male protagonist who is also a star

of significant standing, nominating him as the relay of the second look (the look of the audience at the screen). This process of donation is a necessary precondition for the existence, as and when it occurs, of the third look in the Indian cinema.

One of the questions Rajadhyaksha raises is under which conditions does the star-protagonist become the 'looking agency (instead of the object that is looked at) who is temporarily "mandated" to stand in for the viewer's gaze but who in the end--and usually at various other points as well-delivers the gaze back to the audience"? (Rajadhyaksha 1996: 8-9). Before we examine that, what are the implications of the transfer of the gaze (from viewer to star and back)? According to Rajadhyaksha, the nomination of the actor as looking agency results in `a point of view which does not directly replicate [the audience's], but one that inscribes the audience into the texf (1996: 9). This is therefore one possible means for the production of what Paul Willemen (1994) calls the ' inscribed reader[1] (inscribed viewer for our purposes). The inscribed reader/ viewer corresponds with Bordwell's spectator who performs a set of operations in order to comprehend the narrative. The donation of the gaze therefore produces the actual viewer as a spectator: it is a prerequisite for comprehending the progression of the narrative.

Why should the (actual) viewer surrender his/her gaze and become an inscribed viewer/spectator? The 'fourth look' postulated by Paul Willemen (1994) furthers our understanding of this problem. The fourth look is the 'look' of the screen at the viewer. Quoting Lacan, Willemen describes the fourth look as being 'not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other' (106). This look surprises [me] in the function of voyeur, disturbs [me] and reduces me to a feeling of shame' (106). The fourth look, contends Willemen, constitutes the viewer as a visible subject'. Rajadhyaksha adds that more than inducing a feeling of shame, or indeed because it induces a feeling of shame, the fourth look also constitutes the viewers as a collective:

> *That* function of `constitut[ing] the viewer as a visible subject' is literally one where the subject, far from acknowledging any embarass-

> ment, indeed asserts a further right over the narrative: the right to demand an acceptable (to him) grounding of the abstract fourth look into a set of negotiable sites where the viewer gets reconstituted and often as a member of a *collective* audience (1996: 17, original emphases).

As a result, the actual viewer is at once interpellated as a spectator (who is inscribed into the text, posited by it) and a member of an imaginary collective of other viewers who too have been constituted as spectators. In Chapters 4 and 51 will return to the question of what happens when the actual viewer meets a version of him/herself in the theatre, during the course of film viewing. For the present I would like to take up the question of how in the mass-film the star relays the viewer's look into the narrative. First, what devices are employed in the mass-film to underscore the mandate of the star as the looking agency? How then does the mass-film *constitute the viewer* (Rajadhyaksha 1996: 14) as a looking subject who is also a visible subject and a member of a collective?

The Opening Sequence

The opening sequence of the mass-film initiates the exchange of looks between the viewer and the star. The progression of the narrative depends on the nomination of the star as the looking agency,' a process which allows the star-protagonist to function as the supreme agent of action in the narrative. The status of the star as the agent of action is grounded on his being the looking agency of the spectator. The point to be noted here is that the pact of looking *produces* the spectator because for a narrative to be comprehensible (in any film, not just the mass-film) what is required is the constitution of the actual viewer as a spectator. The viewer who exchanges looks with the star is a spectator. Retrospectively, we may say that the exchange is the first *operation* by the spectator (in Bordwell's terms). Retrospectively because s/he who is addressed by the screen is the actual viewer as if s/he were already always the spectator.

The mass-film's opening sequence plays a key role in facilitating the production of star-protagonist as agent (of looking and action). This is also the process by which the viewer is produced as spectator. The opening sequence (at times over 15-20 minutes long in a two-and-a-half-hour film) tends to arrest the narrative in order to facilitate the exchange in which the star's agency and viewer's spectatorship (or ability to act according to a given protocol) is signalled. This can be illustrated with reference to the devices deployed to introduce the star-protagonist. In *Slate Rowdy* (B. Gopal, 1989) and *Alluda Majaka* (E.V.V. Satyanarayana, 1995) for instance, the star is presented in a series of tilt up shots in close-up, starting with his feet. In the latter film these shots are interspersed with shots of crowds of eager diegetic viewers jostling to look at him The point is that even before the star's face is shown the viewer *recognizes* the star as Chiranjeevi and the protagonist of the film, thereby performing the most crucial operation required by the spectator. The actual viewer therefore turns into the spectator. In *Chiranjeevi* (C.V. Rajendran 1985) the viewer witnesses the star-protagonist rising into an empty frame in close-up and slow motion, smiling at the camera/viewer. The entry of the star into the frame, filling it quite literally, not only signals the entry of the protagonist into the narrative but serves as a cue for the donation of the gaze to him Whether or not the star-protagonist looks at the camera, the introduction of the star generally arrests the narrative. The exchange of looks, the process of nomination and the production of the spectator is deemed to be complete when the star-protagonist kick-starts the narrative which by this time has him firmly established as its moving force.

The process of establishing the star and spectator in their respective places, as it were, as recipient and donor of the gaze, agent of action and participant-observer[1] could be spread over the opening song and fight sequences (which often do not contribute to the plot). In *Gharana Mogudu* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1992), arguably the most popular Chiranjeevi starrer till date, none of the characters featured in the long opening sequences (which includes the film's most popular song,

[1] The spectator is a participant-observer insofar as s/he makes the star's agency possible.

Bangaru Kodipetta'), except the hero, reappear in the latter part of the film. However, not all films of this genre are characterized by such opening sequences. Moreover, as Rajadhyaksha points out, the gaze is returned to the viewer at certain points in the latter part of the film as well. I would modify Rajadhyaksha's formulation a little and argue that at various points in the film the spectator is reassured by means of the fourth look which is the form of a direct address to the extra-diegetic viewer, that the star-protagonist is indeed capable of functioning as the looking agency. The opening sequence of *Khaidi* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1983) is an example of how the narrative is frozen to ensure the pact between the star and spectator without deferring plot development

Khaidi is one of the first mass-films, if not the very first Retrospectively speaking, the sequence is an atypical one since later mass-films quite systematically separate the plot and the opening sequence. In *Khaidi* the sequence introduces a number of crucial details and characters in addition to facilitating the exchange of looks.

In *Khaidi* Chiranjeevi is cast as Suryam, the city educated son of a poor peasant who falls in love with the local landlord Veerabhadraiah's (Rao Gopala Rao) daughter--his classmate in college. Trouble begins when the landlord comes to know about the love affair. Failing to coerce the hero's father into breaking the affair, the landlord kills the hero's father. His crony, the village munsif kills Suryam's sister and Suryam is accused of the crime. Suryam is tortured by Veerabhadraiah for his crime' but escapes before the police arrive to arrest him. Most of the film revolves around Suryam's attempt to escape from the police and avenge the murders of his father, sister and later Doctor Sujata (Sumalata) who shelters and helps him After a series of arrests and escapes he kills the villains and surrenders to the police.

The film opens with Suryam returning to the village (after his first escape from police custody, as it turns out later). He is arrested by the police on the suspecion that he is the 'dangerous criminal' who has threatened to kill Veerabhadraiah (indeed he is returning for the very purpose). The police decide to torture him for refusing to answer their questions and sign a false confession. But he does

not retaliate until a barber summoned by the police to torture him approaches him with a razor.

The sequence is important for three reasons. It establishes the star hero as victim and rebel, roles he had performed earlier in *Praanam Khareedu* (K. Vasu, 1978) and *Chattaniki Kallulevu* (S.A. Chandrasekhar, 1981) and would go on to repeat in dozens of his later films including *Gangleader*, *Gharana Mogudu*, *Mutha Mestri* and *Alluda Majaka*. Further, he is seen pitted against the police and the landlord who are presented as allies. Secondly, in contrast to the alliance of the state and feudal interests, the hero is aligned with the spectator. Thirdly, the spectacular action sequence which leads to his escape seals the pact between the star and spectator, drawing the opening sequence to a close.

The very first shots of the film show the star-hero in an otherwise empty frame (ie., without other characters) anticipating the tendency of the mass-film to empty the frame of every one else whenever a star is introduced.[2] While later films go to some length in playing with the ability of the spectator to recognize the star, in *Khaidi* too the key facilitator of the narrative's progression is the recognition of the star.

I wish to draw attention to two other devices which establish the star-spectator relationship. The first may be called the biographical reference' for the sake of convenance. It is a regular feature of the mass-film although it predates the genre. During his interrogation of the hero, the police official suddenly snatches an amulet hanging from Suryam's neck and remarks: `So you are a devotee of Anjaneya' Eliciting no response he proceeds with the interrogation. The comment by the character is quite clearly aimed at drawing attention to the widely known biographical detail of Chiranjeevi's devotion for Lord Anjaneya. The point is not how many among the audience actually make sense of this comment but the film constructs the spectator as one who does indeed know that Suryam is Chiranjeevi who is a devotee of Anjaneya. I will return to the biographical reference shortly.

The second device is the flashback fragment, here literally of shots parallely edited with the

[2] This includes the male and female leads, the villain and the star of the comedy track.

shot-reverse-shot scries of the barber approaching the hero and the hero's reaction. The flashback fragment shows Rao Gopala Rao, who is expected to be recognized as the villain (although he has not been introduced as Veerabhadraiah he is a well known screen villain) approaching the hero, tied to a bullock cart and slashing his chest with a razor. The striking similarity between the torture in the police station and the one in the village points to the similarity between the police and the landlord. (When the full flashback is narrated later in the film, it turns out that the police are actually in active collaboration with landlord.) The flashback fragment also recruits the spectator as an ally of the hero because the former, unlike the players of the torture drama, sees it and learns of the hero's victimization. A thrilling fight sequence follows immediately, demonstrating that the hero is indeed worthy of the gaze donated by the spectator. The spectator is thus reassured that s/he has after all made the correct choice.

Interestingly, unlike the complete flashback which is narrated to a diegetic listener, the fragment is seen only by tbe hero and the spectator. The spectator is recruited as an ally because he sees what the hero sees. Conversely, the hero acts/ fights the police only because the spectator already anticipates and even wills the retaliation.[3] Further, the star can be seen offering *his* gaze to the spectator, underscoring the reciprocity as well as the advantage of nominating him as the looking agency.

A variation of the spectator seeing through the star's eyes (i.e., a reversal of what happens when the flashback fragment is deployed) is witnessed when the hero knows because the spectator has seen. The most common occurrence of this can be found in the stunt sequence. The villain rushes to the hero to strike him from behind (in full view of the spectator but not the hero) only to be mowed down by the latter at the crucial moment From the stunt sequence where it has been in use since the seventies (if not earlier), this device has been accommodated into the main body of the narrative in

[3] I discuss the deployment of the flashback fragment in Chapter 4 as well, in my discussion of *Alluda Majaka*.

the mass-film. In the process, one of the tasks of the diegetic allies of the hero has been made redundant, making the star protagonist something of an omniscient presence throughout the film. In *Attaku Yamudu Ammayiki Mogudu* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1989) and *Alluda Majaka*, the hero foils the plans of his adversaries, exhibiting his awareness of these plans although the narrative does not indicate that he has either overheard the plotters or been informed by another character.[4] He knows because he is Chiranjeevi-the star protagonist who has made a pact with the spectator. Kalyan/Chiranjeevi in *Attaku Yamudu Ammayiki Mogudu* warns his mother-in-law not to provoke him by plotting against him. He then looks into the camera and says, `you know who I am'. Surely the spectator knows.

The biographical reference and the moment of direct address are both instances of the fourth look. Like the other devices employed by the mass-film to facilitate the exchange of looks between star and spectator, they posit a discerning viewer. A viewer who knows: knows Chiranjeevi/the star and the protocols of film viewing. While all films posit a discerning viewer in that the spectator is first of all someone who knows how to watch films of a particular kind, the mass-film's spectator is expected to be endowed with a specific kind of knowledge—the star's `biography' or extra-textual existence. Dyer argues that the star image is `authenticated as something more—truer, more real—than an image' by referring back to his/her existence in the `real world' (1991: 135). According to Dyer, the mobilization of 'facts' about the star needs to be read as being part of the attempt at the authentification of the star image as a whole. He adds: '[T]he authentification afforded by the ambivalent star-as- image: star-as-real-person nexus resembles nothing so much as a hall of mirrors' (136). Pandian (1992), as we have seen in Chapter 1, quite persuasively shows how the authentic image of MGR was produced by mobilizing both films and biography[1].

[4] See Niranjana and Srinivas (1996) for the discussion of the use of this device in *Bharateeyudu* (Shankar, 1996). The film was originally made in Tamil and dubbed into Telugu. Like the class-film, discussed in the next chapter, this film draws on the mass-film only to distinguish itself from the genre.

The point I am trying to make is not about the 'falseness' of the 'authentic' star. After the pioneering work by Dyer and Pandian it is not difficult to show up the falseness of the image which claims authenticity. I am interested in why, to what effect, the `real' star is a constant referent in the mass-film. Notably, this entity (' real', as opposed to screen, presence) belongs to that non-filmic realm which the camera does not/cannot 'see'. Yet there is a constant gesturing towards this realm. When the star says `you know who I am', the fourth look draws the spectator's attention to that realm beyond the pro-filmic (and thus beyond the first and second looks) in order to inflect the narrative. And once again by positing a discerning viewer.

Among the different devices used to produce the reality of Chiranjeevi, the most striking are the references to the star's real name and surname, or his honorary titles, his religiosity or some other detail from his life and, more recently, his status as a matinee idol.[5] In *Alluda Majaka,* Toyota is introduced by his sidekick Mandela (A.V.S. Subramaniam) as 'Megastar' Toyota. *Kodama Simham* (K. Murali Mohan Rao, 1990) has a song in which the refrain is 'Star, Star, Megastar'. Megastar is Chiranjeevi's best-known title and it is usually prefixed to his name in the credits of his films. In a song in *S.P. Parasuram* (Ravi Raja Pinisetty, 1994) the character he plays is referred to as Chiru' (diminutive of Chiranjeevi) by the heroine. *Alluda Majaka* shows Chiranjeevi (as Toyota) driving his real life imported luxury car. In any number of bis films including *Khaidi* and *Jagadeka Veerudu Atiloka Sundari* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1990) the characters be plays are devotees of Hanuman, supposedly his favourite god In *Gangleader* (Vijay Bapineedu, 1991) and *Mutha Mestri* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1993) the chief protagonists have the surname Konidela, the same as the star's.

[5] References to other films by the same star were common in Telugu films even before the mass-film came into being. Paidipaala (1992) draws our attention to a remarkable song in the NTR starrer *Manushulanta Okkate* (Dasari Narayana Rao, 1976) whose words consisted entired of the titles of previous NTR starrers (76). In fact dozens of films featuring NTR, starting with *Aggiramudu* (1954), have `Ramu', `Ramudu' or `Rama' (all dimunitives Rama Rao). For example, *Ramudu Bheemudu, Ramu, Tigerramudu* and *Advairamudu*. It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into a discussion on how differently the biographical reference and cross-references to the star's other films were deployed in genres which preceded the mass-film.

Big Boss (Vijay Bapineedu, 1995) actually has a song, shot partly in the midst of a gathering of his fans, which features Chiranjeevi playing himself. Indeed, this film features the comic Ali as a Chiranjeevi fan who `mistakes' the protagonist for the star!

Such references would not have resonance in a context in which filmgoers were unaware of a whole range of minor and major details about the star. In a sense the explosion of popular film magazines facilitated the mass-film's play with the star-as-image and star-as-real-person duality. Indeed one of the pleasures of the mass-film is a result of the spectator's ability to catch these references.

Simultaneously, it is important to notice that the spectator is produced as a *fan* who in turn is seen as someone who is obssessed with the star's `life' and of course screen image. In the genre not only does the relative importance of the star protagonist increase progressively from one film to the next but the star's performance is actually offered as the primary attraction. This is evident from what was in the film industry circles termed as the 'formula' of the mass-film by the early nineties. It often meant packing the film with 'four fights and six songs' including an opening song and fight Needless to say the star-protagonist was crucial to the appeal of these filmic components. But this does not explain the import of imaging the spectator as a fan.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that the fan by the late 80s was seen by the `star' (not the person but the institution) as someone who needed to be disciplined because he embodied an excess. *That* image of the fan is crucial to the understanding of the spectator posited by the mass-film The mass-film anticipates Chiranjeevis's attempt to discipline his fans insofar as it too mobilizes the `real' Chiranjeevi (or any other star) as a discursive category. On the one hand the real Chiranjeevi authenticates, as Pandian would argue, his roles as the subaltern because of the widely known 'facts' about his humble origins and struggle to succeed Further, the star is invoked as an *author* (Foucault 1984a), as we shall in the following pages, for delegitimizing readings which may destabilize the preferred message' of the mass-film The star as an extra-textual authorial agency is therefore a necessary prop for the kind of resolution(s) offered by the mass film to what are often explicit and

highly contested political questions.

I would argue that the figure of the fan is crucial for popular Telugu cinema as an institution because the address of the filmic narrative and the star (in the course of his intervention) to the lower class/caste, *mass*-audience is mediated by the fan. As we shall see in the following pages and in Chapter 3, in order to address the masses', contemporary popular cinema constructs the members of the mass-audience as *fans*. The mass-film anticipates Chiranjeevi's attempt to discipline his fans insofar as it mobilizes the real' Chiranjeevi (or any other star) as a discursive category. Attempts made in the name of Chiranjeevi' to discipline/reform fans assume importance because the star's message to his fans are displaced appeals/instructions/commands to the masses or the 'population', to use Partha Chatterjee's term (see discussion of Chatterjee in my Introduction). The address to the fan (by the cinematic apparatus and the star) is a means by which cinema as an institution intervenes in the struggles carried out by *political society* (to use Chatterjee's notion once again) at large by interpreting these struggles so as to reformulate the very questions raised by them.

Before I go on to examine this proposition at some length I would like to briefly discuss the song sequence in the mass-film. The song is illustrative of the kind of anxieties invoked by the mass-film as well as the attempts made by the genre to assuage these anxieties.[6]

The Song

While some songs are actually presented as stage performances, this realistic mode of situating them is far less frequent than locating them in the narrative as fantasies: of the heroine, the hero's

[6] Let us not forget that two of the examples of the biographical reference, cited above, are from songs. I wish to add that the song is among the likeliest instances of the biographical reference and the protagonist's look at the camera/spectator.

sidekick(s) or some other characters. I wish to focus on the duet in this section.[7] The duet has been the predominant mode of representing intimacy between the lead characters in popular cinema. The duet produces the courtship between the two as a public ritual. Prasad argues that popular Indian cinema prohibits the private (and thereby romantic love) by prohibiting the kiss which is seen as inaugurating the private (Prasad 1994: 173-216). In the mass-film the publicly displayed romance' becomes all the more public with the introduction of a diegetic audience in the form of extras. Furthermore in *Khaidi*, *Alluda Majaka* and *Gharana Mogudu* the duet is relayed by characters who fantasise about the romance/courtship of the lead pair.[8] In *Gharana Mogudu* Raju's (Chiranjeevi) co-workers (about 20 of them) *collectively* fantasise about the consummation of the hero's marriage (which isn't consummated after all). The gaze of the spectator is remarkably free of shame because what s/he witnesses is not only a public spectacle but also mediated by a diegetic looker/dreamer. Assuaging the spectator's sense of shame becomes necessary because the mass-film's songs are, by the standards of popular cinema, far more sexually explicit than ever before. Most often objections have been raised to the display of the heroine's body. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the mass-film's heroine causes much concern to the upper caste, middle-class public of cinema because she indulges in over exposure'. The heroine, coded as the upper class/caste woman, induces anxiety among the non-subaltern public because she is seen as being sexually available to the lower class/caste audience.

The mass-film attempts to overcome this problem, which is not merely the problem of the

[7] Interestingly, the film industry often categorizes songs as duets and solos. In Chiranjeevi's films the solo song features the hero and, like the first fight, occurs early in the film. Generally the solo song features dozens of extras and is a solo only in that the heroine is not featured. In *Gharana Mogudu* and *Mutha Mestri* vamps play a prominent role in the solo number.

• I have in mind the fantasy of the teenage acquaintance of Doctor Sujata in *Khaidi* which quite disingenously introduces the possibility of romance between Sujata (Sumalata) and Suryam, where none supposedly existed. In *Alluda Majaka*, Abbulu (Brahmanandam) on two different occasions fanUsises about the hero's romances. The latter instance turned out to be quite a scandal as it occasioned the infamous *Atto attamma kooturo*, discussed in Chapter 4.

middle-class audience but also the film makers who too are upper class/caste, by disavowing the heroine's `vulgarity' (`it is only a fantasy). The more important 'solution' is to ensure that the heroine's sexuality is subsumed by the hero's male machismo. At the immediate level this is achieved by the hero's supervision of the spectacle. At the level of the narrative as a whole, the hero `tames' the heroines. Not surprisingly, the hero's machismo has grown in direct proportion to the heroine's vulgarity'. His physical power (displayed in the opening fight and later as well) and his unlimited sex appeal, evident in his ability to arouse the desire of multiple heroines *in the same film* are proof of his superior sexuality. In fact, multiple heroines and the `vulgar' heroine underscore the hero's machismo which is actually produced as an excess.'

Invoking the extra-filmic `reality' of the star becomes necessary because the duet may be misread' as implying that the upper caste/class woman is available to the lower caste/class public which gazes at her. I would argue that the mass-film suggests that the heroine is sexually available to the hero because he is a star/Chiranjeevi. She enters the field of the lower caste/class male's gaze only because the star has been nominated as the agent of the spectator, mediates his/her gaze and in fact authorizes the spectacle.

The crucial role played by the star-as-authorial-agency becomes clearer when we situate this role in the light of the thematic concerns of the mass-film which are closely related the socio-political context in which the genre flourished. In the next section I attempt to examine the cinematic antecedents of the mass-film and go on to discuss the political functions of the star.

[9] About thirty of the sixty odd Chiranjeevi starrers released after *Khaidi* feature two or more heroines. Interestingly the `second' heroine is not always killed or married to some one else in the end, as in the pre-mass-film Telugu cinema. She is abandoned to her fate in *Challenge* and *Gharana Mogudu* as far as the sexual/marital partner is concerned or the hero marries her as well (*Alluda Majaka*). In *Yamudiki Mogudu* (Ravi Raja Pinesetti, 1988) a major change occurred when the hero is left with both heroines who sing a melodramatic song (from an earlier two heroine film) each offering to sacrifice her love for the other. This parody of the earlier resolutions to the excessive sexuality of the hero signals the mass-film's rejection of the `problem' (i.e. excessive sexuality of the hero). Subsequently a number of films, featuring other stars as well ended with suggestions or explicit depiction of bigamy.

Crisis in Feudalism

Madhava Prasad coined the phrase 'feudal family romance' to describe the genre which dominated Hindi cinema in the 50s and 60s. In the feudal family romance, the unity and jouissance of the feudal family, its control over its accumulated wealth, is threatened by usurpers and modern values' (Prasad 1994: 135). He argues:

> [T]he dominant status of this form in popular cinema is a symptom of the nature of power in a ruling alliance in which the bourgeoisie is only one of several constituents. It is a compromise formation specific to the mutually beneficial co-existence, in independent India, of a colonial elite with a precapitalist social base and a bourgeoisie aspiring to the status of dominant (if not sole) partner in the coalition (114).

While agreeing with Prasad I would like to add that the 'feudal family romance' in Telugu co-existed in the 1950s with a populist cinema which was characterized by its distinctly anti-feudal themes.[10] The mythological and fantasy/folklore film were very popular in this period but I exclude them from this discussion because my main concern is to trace the beginnings of the mass-film.

The feudal family romance in Telugu attempted to incorporate some of the thematic concerns of the reformist cinema of this period As a consequence the feudal patriarch and family were not only the object of (gentle) ridicule but also presented as amenable to change. *Shavukaru* (L.V.Prasad, 1950), for instance, begins with a folk song on the evils of miserliness while the film itself deals with the friction between the families of the village money lender and the village chief (who is also a rich farmer). The problems are ironed out at the end and the money lender's son (NT. Rama Rao) marries the village chief's daughter (Janaki) while the mischief maker Ranganna (played by S. V. Ranga Rao)

[10] In *Peda Raitu* (K. Nagabhushanam, 1952) the local landlord's land is distributed to the Poor peasants of the village after a long drawn struggle against the former. In *Rojulu Marayi* (Tapi Chanakya, 1955) the hero (Nageswara Rao) not only succeeds in redistributing the zamindari's land but also marries a lower caste woman, thus inaugurating the era of Nehruvian socialism in his village.

who is an assistant to the village chief, is punished In *Ammalakkalu* (Yoganand, 1953) the city-educated heroine marries into a backward feudal family and goes on to reform it dramatically, putting an end to its oppressive practices.

I would argue that the point about the films of this genre is not so much their presentation of the feudal' as an object of reform (which they did quite often) as their representation of feudal structures, particularly the extended family, as capable of inhabiting the space of the modem nation state. The backwardness of the feudal, it is suggested in these films, is a question of attitude and therefore, the partriach's change of heart is enough to preserve its grandeur.

In the mid-sixties a significant departure from the feudal family romance was witnessed in the 'crime film' and later the Telugu western. Tapi Chanakya's *CID* (1965) although a commercial failure and not, in spite of its name, a crime film, featured N.T.Rama Rao in the role of a police officer whose father, long believed to be dead, turns out to be the gangster he tracks down. Interestingly the hero kills his father, affirming thereby his allegiance to the state rather than to the patriarch. The importance of this film lies in its presentation of the modern state as a legitimizing authority which need not be supplemented and cannot be challenged by other sources of authority. Further, the feudal patriarch of the feudal family romance here becomes the leader of a criminal gang (or a patriarch of sorts) who is an enemy of the progressive modern state. Like Tapi Chanakya's popular anti-feudal films, *CID* calls for a complete break with the feudal as it is a formation that is incommensurate with modernity.

The crime film, generally associated with Krishna, does not explicitly concern itself with political questions. However, like *CID,* films like *Goodachari 116* (M. Mallikarjuna Rao, 1966) can be seen as attempting to dissociate themselves from the feudal family romance. Set in an urban context, they were inspired by the James Bond films. In fact one of the most popular crime films was called James *Bond 777* (K.S.R. Das, 1971). The hero's authority did not result from his belonging to the feudal family but from his status as a servant of the state. Indeed, the hero's origins did not matter.

The modern age was imaged as a realm in which regardless of class and caste distinctions the state (alone) lent authority to its servants and punished its enemies.

Yet another emerging genre, the urban middle-class film of the seventies, attempted to steer away from the feudal family romance. The lead pair's nuclear family was the focus of the narrative with the hero and heroine shown as urban and middle-class, as for example in *Sreevaru Maavaru* (B.S. Narayan, 1973). The hero's humble origins and current status as successful professional were underscored [*Gorintaku*, (Dasari Narayana Rao, 1979) and *Radha Krishna* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1978) respectively], rather than his link with the feudal family, even if such a link was shown in the film.

By the mid-seventies N.T. Rama Rao began to act in the Telugu remakes of successful Amitabh Bachchan films, notably *Nippulanti Manishi* (S.D. Lal, 1974) and later *Yugandhar* (K.S.R. Das, 1979), based on *Zanjeer* and *Don* respectively. The success of the first film resulted in a spate of vigilante films featuring different actors such as Krishna, Krishnam Raju and Sobhan Babu. It seemed as if the film industry had lost its fascination for feudal grandeur and withdrawn its support to the landed elite.

The generic formation and films discussed above were produced and watched in a context that was shaped by the debates on feudalism which re-entered the political discourse of Andhra Pradesh in the wake of the Srikakulam uprising (1967) and thNaxalite movement.[11] With the spread of the Naxalism in the early seventies to the plains of the Telangana region, the anti-feudal struggle and demands for land reform became central political questions. The Congress government in the state responded with severe repression on the movement but also made a reluctant attempt at land

[11] See Mohanty (1977), Ray (1988), Banerjee (1980) and Das Gupta (1975) for detailed analyses of the Naxalite movement. See Balagopal (1988) for a discussion on the achievements of the movement in Andhra Pradesh.

reforms.[12] The Naxalite groups and their front organizations not only exposed the linkages between the landed elite (which held land *illegally* for there was officially a ceiling on land ownership) and agencies of the state. Further, the conditions of the rural poor as well as the severity of the state repression were brought to light by the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) in its reports which were published in the mainstream press (See APCLC 1996). Moreover, due to the literary and cultural activities of organizations affiliated or symphathetic to Naxalite parties,[13] a popular critique of feudalism became available which spread far beyond the areas where the Naxalites were actually mobilizing the lower caste-class poor.

While the shift away from the feudal is perceptible in popular cinema, as seen above, it was in the eighties that the `crisis in feudalism' became a major thematic concern of popular Telugu cinema.[14] In the wake of the Srikakulam uprising and the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) the pro-Naxalite film *Bhoomi Kosam* (K. Balagangadhara Tilak, 1974) was made,

[12] The Land Reforms Bill was passed in 1972 and came into force in 1973. A number of studies on the implementation of land reforms in the state have drawn attention to its failure. C. Francis (1992) citing the Task Force appointed by the Planning Commission of India lists the following reason for the failure: lack of political will by the government, legal hurdles (which resulted in litigations holding up the distribution of over two lakh acres) and absence of correct land records. He adds that the administrators and politicians belonged to the landlord class and were therefore influenced by and sympathetic to landlords (24).

[13] See Sumanta Banerjee (1985) for an analysis of the anti-feudal poetry and songs by poets sympathetic to the Naxalite movement

[14] Sanjay Baru points out that in the seventies,

> while landlordism of the traditional ramindari variety may have legally been abolished, there [was] a resurgence of caste conflicts, communal conflicts, oppression of the scheduled castes and tribes, re-emergence of zamindari power in electoral processes resulting in the increase of semi-feudal exploitation in many parts of the country (1990: 55).

It is important to note that the growing assertion of marginal groups was met with considerable violence by the rural elite who, as Baru argues, benefitted from the compromise made by the state and the domestic bourgeoisie with those ` pre-capitalist forces.[1] There is thus no reason to believe that the film industry supported the struggle against `feudalism'.

focussing on the struggle of the rural poor for land and against landlordism. While *Bhoomi Kosam* with its explicit political concerns was an exception precisely because of the explicitness of its concerns, by the late seventies popular Telugu films too presented the village landlord as the main villain, as is for example, *Yamagola* (T. Rama Rao, 1977).

Starting with *Sardar Paparayudu* (Dasari Narayana Rao, 1980) and coinciding with the most successful phase of N.T.R's acting career, a series of films were made thematizing the crisis in feudalism. In *Sardar Paparayudu*, N.T.R plays the roles of Paparayudu, a freedom fighter who dies fighting against colonialism, and his son. Here the feudal was not only seen as heroic (Paparayudu is a benevolent feudal lord waging a war against the foreigner) but more importantly, the passing of the feudal was produced as a problem. The question the film's narrative raises is: What comes after the feudal? The solution was presented in the form of the younger NTR who was in every sense the true heir of the heroic patriarch [15] *Kondaveeti Simham* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1981) is set in the present, and in this film N.T.R. plays the double role of a senior Police official and his son. Here, as in *Justice Chaudhuri* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1982) in which N.T.R. plays a High Court Judge and his son, the threat to the feudal patriarch's authority is presented as a crisis in governance—a threat to the state's authority.

These films have been read as laying the ground for the Telugu Desam Parry's major campaign plank in the 1983 election to the state's legislative assembly—Telugu nationalism. I would argue that in all these films the social is imaged as being centred around a lack or absence. The old order, these films suggest, has indeed crumbled and the problem with the present is to find a replacement for the missing centre of authority. That the TOP named this centre as Telugu nationalism is not of immediate interest for us.

[15] In *Bobbili Puli* (Dasari Narayana Rao, 1982), N.T.R. plays the role of a British Army ofQcial turned freedom fighter who eventually dies for the cause of the nation. In this film too the freedom fighter is seen as benevolent feudal lord. Interestingly, the corruption in the Police Department plays a decisive role in converting the army official into a rebel.

Unlike N.T.R.'s last set of films before the establishment of the TOP, Chiranjeevi's *Khaidi* does not attempt to resolve the crisis in feudalism by finding an heir for the feudal patriarch. Instead the state's authority is depicted as being undermined by its linkages with a decadent feudal order. The hero in *Khaidi* severs the link between the landlord and the state by killing the landlord, in the process legitimating the state's authority. The state is thus freed from feudalism so that it can get on with the business of governance. Suryam in *Khaidi* is a transitional authority figure, literally an embodiment of the anti-feudal struggle abandoned by the state, who surrenders (to the police) his agency after killing the landlord, i.e., after laying the ground for the formation of the modem bourgeois state. As we shall see presently, in later mass-films, the star-hero not only reestablishes the legitimacy of the state but also becomes an alternative to the absent feudal authority.

While the crucial importance of *Khaidi* cannot be denied, the film drew on previous Chiranjeevi starrcrs to reinforce some of their thematic concerns and their construction of the heroic rebel. R. Nandakumar points out `On the part of the spectator, it is not the individual roles in which the star is cast so much as one cumulative image that emerges from the totality of his various performances that comes in handy to be accepted' (1992: 44). The 'cumulative image' of Chiranjeevi that emerged in *Khaidi* was a result of a selection (from his earlier films), or rather, a narratrvization of his previous roles and 'life' to construct an authentic rebel-hero I would like to add that as early as 1979 details of Chiranjeevi's humble origin were well-known biographical `facts'[16].

Chiranjeevi's first film *Praanam Khareedu* (K. Vasu, 1978) was set in pre-independence India and was clearly situated in the politico-aesthetic space created by the `new cinema' of the seventies. [17] This anti-feudal film was shot in black and white, and almost entirely on location at a village in West

[16] Venugopal's interview, 1 May 1997. As Dyer and Pandian point out, the authentic subaltern hero is produced by a symbiosis between the real and the screen role. See also Chiranjeevi's `biographies' by Ambapudi (n.d.) and Kasivisweswara Rao (1994).

[17] See Prasad (1994: 340-386) for the representation of the feudal in the new cinema.

Godavari district It depicts the atrocities of a landlord and ends with the rebellion of the rural poor against him. Chiranjeevi's role as Narsi, the rebellious former servant of the landlord, was small but significant. He returns from the city, where he migrates in search of work, and by killing his former master avenges the deaths of the landlord's benevolent wife (who is, notably, from a poor family) and the deaf-mute protagonist of the film..

In *Chattaniki Kallu Levu* (S.A. Chandrasekhar, 1981) Chiranjeevi plays the role of Vijay, a vigilante who tracks down his father's murderers and kills mem. His sister Durga (Lakshmi), a police officer, attempts to capture their father's killers, who escaped punishment by producing fake alibis, and have them punished legally. Although she has the case reopened, she fails to gather evidence against them and fails to prevent Vijay from killing them. Further, Vijay gets away with the triple murder as there is no proof of his involvement He therefore proves that the law is blind (which is how the title translates into English) but in doing so ensures that society is rid of its most dreaded and powerful criminals.

In *Intlo Ramayya Veedhilo Krishnayya* (Kodi Ramakrishna, 1981) the hero, a government servant, marries the haughty, college educated daughter of a rich fanner. The narrative revolves around misunderstandings between the lead pair caused by the heroine's refusal to trust her husband. She is easily misled by the villain, a scheming neighbour. The couple is reunited after the hero foils the villain's plan to rape the heroine. Interestingly, the hero's parents neither appear in the film nor are they even mentioned.

Like *Chattaniki Kallu Levu, Intlo Ramayya Veedhilo Krishnayya* has a hero who did not claim legitimacy by virtue of belonging to a feudal family. Instead, the heroes are seen as inheriting nothing from earlier generations. Discussing Amitabh Bachchan's films, Prasad remarks, '[T]he orphan is a figure of marginality, deprived of normal familial pleasures by the intrusion of evil' (1994: 269). In the mass-film too orphanhood is a common trope for representing marginality. The dead father/parents arc also mobilized to underscore the hero's distance from the feudal. *Khaidi* draws on

the construction of the hero in *Chattaniki Kallu Levu* and *Intlo Ramayya Veedhilo Krishnayya* where the heroes, being cut off from the feudal patriarch, do not inherit his authority but become alternative seances of authority instead The machismo of this new hero does not merely supplement his authority but is in fact its chief source.

Khaidi's departure from these two films lies in building on the marginality of the orphan/fatherless hero and producing him as a lower *caste* figure, in the sense that lower caste origins can be attributed to the hero by the audience, despite absence of any mention of his caste status. As we have seen in an earlier chapter (Introduction), the national-modern bracketed caste and community as pre-modern traits. These traits were sought to be left out of the sphere of the national-modern as the citizen-subject is unmarked, or invisibly marked, as upper caste, middle class, Hindu and male. Post-independence popular Telugu cinema rarely contains explicit references to caste although a whole range of caste-signifiers are deployed to suggest the caste of a character. Cinema could thus aspire to the status of a modem institution by disavowing the existence of caste, even as caste hierarchy was reinforced by ensuring that the hero represented the `casteless' citizen-subject. (The seating arrangement in cinema halls, I have argued in Chapter 1, is another instance of cinema's claim to modernity.)

In *Khaidi* a standard caste-marker—complexion—is deployed to underscore the hero's subahemity. The hero becomes an authentic subaltern figure because he is poor, an orphan, a victim and because be is lower caste. Fair complexion enhanced by make-up has been *the* signifier of the hero's upper caste status in popular cinema. In *Khaidi* the medium complexioned star not only remained so on screen but in the opening sequence the make-up enhanced the darkness of his skin. Further, in the absence of other signifiers marking him as upper caste, *Khaidts lower class* hero is also represented as *lower caste.* More than complexion, which in a sense is common to all Chiranjeevis films, the representation of the hero as fatherless (or as an orphan) is a key signifier of the hero's lower

caste origins. *Khaidi* itself is a good example of the mobilization of orphanhood as signifying Suryam's lower caste status. Even in his class-films where Chiranjeevi plays a lower caste character (caste in such films is indicated by occupation as we shall see in the next chapter) he is also shown as an orphan. In films like *Vijeta* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1985), *KodamaSimham* (K. Murali Mohan Rao, 1990), and *Chantabbai* (Jandhyala, 1986) where his father (or parents) is alive, he is also middle or upper class and upper caste.

This is not to claim that the dead father is always mobilized to suggest the hero's lower caste origins. In some films like *Challenge* and *Gangleader* despite his fatherlessness the hero cannot be seen as a lower caste figure. I shall briefly examine these films to illustrate how caste, fatherlessness and the feudal are linked in the mass-film.

Challenge (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1984) begins with Gandhi (Chiranjeevi) losing his mother due to his failure to bring her medicines on time. The opening sequence is a powerful indictment of the exploitative nature of the existing system: from the autorickshaw driver and pharmacist to the ward boy in the government hospital morgue, everyone demands additional payment (in the last case, a bribe) to cash in on the emergency situation. After the death of his mother (his father being presumed to have died before the film begins), the poor, educated but unemployed Gandhi makes a bet with the millionaire Ram Mohan Rao (Rao Gopala Rao) that he will earn fifty lakh rupees in five years Rao, offended by the youth's self-confidence, offers his daughter Harika (Vijayashanti) in marriage if he wins. Gandhi, with the help of Laxmi (Suhasini) a poor university gold medal list whom he saves from drowning, initially sells ideas and helps clients establish businesses. He later starts an industry with the help of unemployed educated youth turned Naxalites after first reforming them. He then enters into a partnership with an unemployed engineer Vidyarthi (Rajendra Prasad) and starts a paper factory with a loan from his enemy, Ram Mohan Rao, outwitting the man who makes all efforts to destroy his business ventures. With some help from Harika, who falls in love with him, he manages to earn the fifty lakhs. However, a major misunderstanding develops between him and Laxmi when the latter

supports the workers in the course of a strike instigated by Ram Mohan Rao's men. In an attempt to avoid conceding defeat, Ram Mohan Rao attempts to flee the country Gandhi catches him after a chase but refuses to take his prize' (Harika) saying he only wanted to prove that money is less important than human relations. Meanwhile the money which spills all over a hillside is picked up by the poor. Having proved that any intelligent person can earn money Gandhi returns to Laxmi and marries her.

In this film education is deployed as a marker of upper caste status. Educated unemployed youth (gold medallists included in that category) who appear at regular intervals throughout the film are shown as standing examples of the failure of the welfare state. However, Gandhi and Laxmi reject the state as an agency of employment/welfare and turn to capitalism. Interestingly however, Gandhi's entry into the capitalist world is *preceded* by his condemnation of it as inhuman (which is why the bet is made in the first place). The temporary separation between Gandhi and Laxmi is caused by the tatter's apprehension that Gandhi has turned into an inhuman capitalist instead of exposing the system's shortcomings. Throughout the film, even as the narrative races ahead, there is a deep sense of loss: a suggestion that something is missing in the world of big money. Gandhi and Laxmi at different points name this absence as human relationships'. I would suggest that it is a sense of community, presented as the absence of the family--there isn't a complete family, not even a nuclear family, in the film Harika for instance, is motherless while Gandhi, Laxmi and Vidyarthi are orphans. The family, the film shows, has been destroyed by capitalism. The film thus nostalgically looks forward to the formation of the family with the marriage of Laxmi and Gandhi. While the feudal is totally absent in the film, mis absence acquires the status of an omniscient being as the hollowness of the capitalist system is repeatedly exposed Although the narrative docs not stage a return of the feudal, the fractured family- an index of the lack of human relationships' in the film-- becomes an indication of what is lost with the passing of the feudal. Moreover, state socialism/welfarism and capitalism are rejected as poor replacements for the feudal. In *Challenge* the *nuclear* family in the making (Gandhi

and Laxmi) is burdened with the responsibility of the community's reorganization as various orphans are drawn towards the hero and heroine. In *Gangleader* and most other later mass-films, the extended family's reorganization around the star-hero is seen as a replacement of the feudal society's organization around the patriarch.

Raja Ram (Chiranjeevi) in *Gangleader* (Vijay Bapineedu, 1991) is an educated unemployed youth who goes to jail owning responsibility for an accident caused by some one else to raise money for his elder brother Raghava's (Sarat Kumar) education. He belongs to a lower middle-class family presided over by his eldest brother Raghupati (Murali Mohan). His widowed paternal grandmother (Nirmala) becomes the titular head of the family in the absence of the parents. A large framed photograph of Raja Ram's grand father, bearing a striking resemblance to Raja Ram but in expensive clothing and turban, is almost worshipped by the grandmother. Quite obviously meant to indicate the family's feudal origins (and thereby the hero's upper caste status) the photograph is used, interestingly, for comic effect The comic sequences centred around the photograph raise important question about how the feudal figures in the mass-film. On one occasion Raja Ram dresses like his grand father, removes the photograph from its frame and stands behind it to play a trick on his grand mother. Having become his grand father he makes the old woman promise that she would not harass Raja Ram because the youth is his (grand father's) incarnation. Harassment here is understood to mean waking up Raja Ram early in the morning and scolding him for returning home after midnight. On another occasion the 'grand father' makes passes at Kanya Kumari (Vijayashanti). At one level the comic deployment of the dead ancestor points at the uselessness of the feudal past. Raja Ram, after all, goes on to become a taxi driver and falls in love with the disowned daughter of the villain, Kanya Kumari who is depicted as a female rowdy in the early part of the film. However, these comic sequences also anticipate the evolution of Raja Ram into the patriarch around whom the fractured extended family organizes itself. The threatened and incomplete extended family (Raghupati is killed by the villain while Raghava is misled by his upper class wife into disowning the rest of the family) itself becomes

a marker of the crisis in the film. The disintegration of the family, the film suggests, is at once a sign and effect of the passing of the feudal. While there *is* no going back to the feudal, the absence of the feudal itself gestures towards that (imaginary) point of time when the social (the family/community) was not fissured. The feudal thus invokes nostalgia in the mass-film because it is irretrievably lost The crisis in feudalism' is imaged either as the absence of the benevolent feudal patriarch or as the presence of the oppressive feudal lord *(Khaidi).* In the latter instance the feudal has to be destroyed-because it is not *the* feudal but its distortioa [18]

As pointed out earlier in the discussion *of Khaidt,* the mass-film depicts the crisis in feudalism as a crisis in governance. I wish to modify that somewhat and attempt to conceptualize the problem that the genre attempts to resolve The mass-film represents the social as being centred around an absence (as seen above), an absence which is at once the sign of and cause for the disintegration of the social (evident by the threat to the already fractured extended family/community). The state's delegitimization coupled with the calling for urgent remedial measures, is tied up with the ' original' absence of the benevolent feudal which is seen as creating the conditions for its take over by the gangster capitalist *(Gangleader, Gharana Mogudu),* malevolent feudal lord *(Khaidi, Khaidi No. 786)* or a combination of the gangster, politician and capitalist (in most mass-films including *Mutha Mestri* and even *Gang Leader* the gangster is in alliance with other forces of evil including the politician and corrupt government servant). This situation is also depicted as facilitating the emergence of the vulgar (read independent) woman whose asscrtiveness or emergence into the public sphere threatens the family (discussed in Chapter 4). The problem then is the degeneration of the public and private realms by the appropriation of authority or wealth by illegitimate claimants.

[18] In *Khaidi No.786* (Vijaya Bapineedu, 1988) for instance shows a bad fuedal lord who actually acquires his wealth by killing the hero's father. The hero himself makes no claim to the wealth although he knows about his father's murder and instead becomes a music teacher. He turns into a convict when falsely accused of murder and at this point he declares war on the feudal lord and his crimes.

The rebel-hero, often represented as a criminal as well, is depicted as a manifestation of the crisis in authority (in that he is a product of the resultant criminalization of the public sphere and all-round degeneration) but also the agent of reform. And be is a reforming agent precisely because he is also a major part of the problem, representing the subaltern engaged in the struggle for *citizenship*. I wish to suggest that the `crisis', which the mass-film images as the crisis in feudalism/governance, is a direct outcome of the struggles against caste/class domination since the seventies. This struggle for citizenship described by the APCLC as a struggle for `land, liberty and livelihood' by the lower castes/classes is thematized by the mass-film as a crisis in the social. The figure of the rebel/rowdy is crucial to the resolution of the crisis. His war against evil feudal lords, corrupt police/government officials and/or gangster-capitalist-politicians is a means of making the struggle for citizenship intelligible as well as containing it in order to assuage the anxiety it evokes in the very elite it threatens in the process. I would like to illustrate my claim by examining the rowdy-hero of the mass-film and how the narrative is organized around the agency of this figure.

The Rowdy-Citizen

The (in)famous rowdy of the mass-film, who is more closely associated with Chiranjeevi than with any other star is not to be understood as merely an urban petty criminal. [19] In popular usage the rowdy is anyone from a hired muscleman to a member or even a leader of a criminal gang. The activities of the rowdy could include extortion and murder.[30] In the mass-film too all urban criminals

[19] Dhareshwar and Srivatsan (1996) point out that the law defines the rowdy-sheeter as an urban petty criminal who is a criminal by habit.

[20] In Vijayawada, which has a long history of rowdy gangs, the term rowdy is used to refer to anyone from the street corner thug to leaders of criminal syndicates who are also politicians. See Parthasarathy (1995) for a discussion on Vijayawada's rowdies.

are often referred to as rowdies.[21] Significantly, crime: the false accusation of committing it which in turn result in the hero's acquisition of the brand of the criminal as well as the actual criminal act, are seen as markers of victimhood and therefore subalternity in the mass-film *(Khaidi No. 786, Gangleader, Alluda Majaka,* etc.). While lowly class and caste origins are attributes that reinforce the construction of the hero as a subaltern subject, his justifiable rebellion–labelled as a crime by the state and/or the villains–authenticates his subalternity and underscores his heroism. The mass-film revolves around this subaltern-rowdy-hero's struggle to claim/demand rights and privileges which are `naturally' due to the citizen-subject

Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan (19%) argue that the subject occupies the position of the citizen under the condition that there is a certain 'disincorporation of the subjects' positivity.' The subject's particularity does not have any bearing on his/her participation in the public sphere. However, not everyone can participate equally in the logic of disincorporation' because:

> the empowering promised by the logic of disincorporation... has involved in India the deployment of discursive and institutional strategies that have distributed the privilege of disincorporation in a highly uneven and equal way; in such a way indeed that some bodies–like the `rowdy' or the `lumpen'–will not disincorporate, so tied are their shameful positivity to their bodies (223).

As a consequence there is the `*excessive* body of the rowdy and... the disincorporated body of the citizen' (223, original emphasis). In the mass-film this excessive body is the lower caste/class body of the hero; the excess is named by the narrative, not as the lumpen (as Dhareshwar and Srivatsan suggest) but as the subaltern. Further, the popular appeal of the mass-film lies in its ability to image the assertion of basic and civil rights which are seen by the police and the powers that be as a crime

[21] In *Rowdy Alludu*, the rowdy is an auto-driver turned imposter who pretends to be in league with the villains.

in itself.[22] This excess constantly manifests itself as an excessive masculinity represented both as physical power and male sex appeal. This body cannot disincorporate. But it has to if the rowdy is to become a citizen. At some point, therefore, the narrative stages a *disavowal* of the rowdy-hero's subalternity and/or denies his rowdyness. The attempt to shed his excess disengages the hero from the struggle for citizenship.

I wish to briefly discuss some films to demonstrate how the mass-film disavows the hero's subahemity. In *State Rowdy* (B. Gopal, 1989) the hero who is introduced as the rowdy Kalicharan (Chiranjeevi) later turns out to be Prithviraj, a police informer. He is deeply moved by the plight of the local Superintendent of Police, Nagamani (Sarada), whose husband is murdered by the gang of Bhoopati (Rao Gopala Rao). He willingly transforms himself into a rowdy in order to infilitrate and decimate Bhoopati's gang. When the villains find out that Kalicharan is Prithviraj, an informer, he is appointed as a police sub-inspector. He then goes on to destroy Bhoopati's gang. By presenting the rowdy as a policeman in the making, the hero's rowdyism is produced as a masquerade. (I shall return briefly to the notion of masquerade later in this chapter but discuss it at length in Chapter 4.)

The trajectory of the lower class hero's struggle for citizenship, as the narrative progresses, reveals that far from celebrating the emergence of the subaltern's struggle the mass-film produces it as a problem that begs a solution within the framework of the hegemonic ideology. This becomes clear when we examine some of the most popular mass-films in Chiranjeevi's career. Not all the films discussed below deal with the rowdy-hero but they have in common the lower class/caste hero attempting to negotiate his marginality. It is important to note that the rowdy-hero inhabits a political space—a space politicized by the subaltern's struggle for rights, howsoever such rights are imaged—only to depoliticize it.

[22] In *Gangleader* the opening fight, against a jeepload of policemen, results when the hero's friends are beaten up for walking on the street at night and insisting that there is nothing illegal about it.

In *Donga Mogudu* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1987) the rowdy Nagaraju (Chiranjcevi) is the double of the industrialist Ravi Teja. The latter is plagued by bis wife as well as the villains. Nagaraju is the leader of a small band of petty crooks The rowdy's incorporati on into the symbolic order begins with his discovery of Ravi Teja whom he saves from thugs hired by the villains. Ravi Teja hires Nagaraju to impersonate him while be goes on a vacation with his secretary Priyamvada (Bhanupriya). However, he is framed in the murder of his secretary and upon his return gives away his property to the villains who blackmail him. Unable to bear the humiliation by bis wife Lalita (Madhavi) and her mother (Raja Sulochana) he attempts suicide. He is rescued by Nagaraju for the second time. Hearing the story of his life Nagaraju decides that they should exchange roles. He reenters Teja's life, drives away the villains and tames Lalita (by slapping her).

Nagaraju restores Ravi Teja's wealth for him but also cleans up the degenerate public and private spheres that the latter inhabits. The rowdy's excess disincorporates when he becomes the industrialist while his street-smart ways and his machismo (which help Ravi Teja reclaim his property and wife) are seen as being productively deployed when he is Ravi Teja. As Ravi Teja, Nagaraju is the better capitalist and husband Significantly, Nagaraju's life as a rowdy, depicted in the early part of the film, is produced as *comic* and consequently, as the narrative progresses his struggle to survive is seen as trivial—in retrospect—and dismissed.

In *Gharana Mogudu* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1992) the working class hero is also produced as a lower caste figure (being fatherless and barely educated). Here the problems of class oppression and caste discrimination are seen to stem from the upper class/caste industrialist-heroine, Uma Devi (Nagma). The unemployed dock worker Raja (Chiranjeevi) gets a job in her factory by saving her father (Rao Gopala Rao) from the villain's hirelings. The heroine is not only presented as anti-worker but also, in what is meant to be read as a sign of deep rooted, though displaced, casteism she treats the workers as untouchables, translating casteism into class terms. When Uma Devi learns that Raju had rushed an injured worker to the hospital in her car, she douses her car in petrol and burns it,

suggesting that it has been polluted. The theme of untouchability is reintroduced when Uma Devi marries Raju who has by this time become the leader of the workers' union, hoping to humiliate him. Soon after the wedding she tells Raju that she will not consummate the marriage because he is after all a worker, an untouchable of sorts. Instead, she tells him, he will be her domestic servant.

By converting the caste/class struggle into a domestic quarrel the film shifts the struggle from the public to the private domain, and the conflict is resolved by the hero's domestication of his wife. The working class/caste hero's struggle is subsumed and even legitimised because it is interlinked with the taming of the independent career womaa Indeed the class conflict is resolved when the heroine is incorporated into the symbolic order, that is, when she finally falls in love with her husband. She then decides to give away her factory to the workers.

Nagaraju's handling of the domestic crisis in *Donga Mogudu* anticipates the resolution of *Gharana Mogudu* (which by the way translates as 'Proud Husband') and *Alluda Majaka*. In all these films the agency of the lower class hero is justified only when it is no longer employed to articulate the right to citizenship but instead, directed at curbing the excess of women—generally upper caste/class whose actions are produced as a threat to the family and the society. I shall return to the 'responsibility[1] of the rowdy-hero towards transgressive women presently. For the moment I would like to discuss *Mutha Mestri* to underscore some of the other issues raised by the mass-film.

Mutha Mestri (A, Kodandarami Reddy, 1993) is a far more explicitly political film than any other mass-film featuring Chiranjeevi. Here the lower class/caste hero enters politics, becomes a minister and cleanses the political establishment of corrupt politicians. It is perhaps the self-evidently political theme of this film that necessitated a blatant disavowal of the hero's political career. This film, arguably popular Telugu cinema's most sympathetic response to the emergence of the lower caste-dalit alliance in the post-Mandal period, casts Chiranjeevi as Subash Chandra Bose, the gangsman in a vegetable market The market community, protected by Bose from thugs and corrupt police officials, is threatened with eviction when the city's corrupt mayor, in league with some politicians and the

villain Atma Ram (Sharat Saxena), decides to sell the market yard to real estate developers. Atma Ram's men burn the market In a protest organized by the community, Bose, badly beaten up by the police, comes to the notice of the honest Chief Minister (Gummadi). Owing to the intervention of the pro-poor local MLA, Sunderaiah (Somayajulu), the Chief Minister cancels the eviction order. Bose is nominated as the ruling party's candidate in the by-election which results due to the murder of Sunderaiah by Atma Ram's men. The hero is initially reluctant despite being pressurized by his beloved Buchamma (Meena) and others, and enters the fray only after Atma Ram's men attempt to intimidate him. Winning the by-election, he is made a minister. A true friend of the poor, he distributes title deeds to the landless, leads commandos against Atma Ram's men (who harass poor fisherfolk in addition to being smugglers) and on one occasion `inaugurates' an old friend's new cow by milking it in front of the legislative assembly.[23] He however, resigns from the ministry to avenge the suicide of his sister, framed in a prostitution case by Atma Ram's men After killing Atma Ram and his criminal son, Bose returns to the market yard. He refuses to return to politics even after the ruling party elects him as the Chief Minister. The film ends with Bose saying that he will return to politics, when needed, as the mutha mestri' (literarlly gangsman but in this context leader, protector and/or friend in need like Bose/Chiranjeevi) of seven crore Telugus, not just seven hundred porters (of the market). Implying that for the moment he would rather remain in the market.

Base's resignation underscores the pointlessness of his political career. He can eliminate the villain, who not only corrupts the public sphere but also take away his sister's life, only by leaving politics and becoming a revenge-seeking vigilante. The film suggests that the lower class/caste hero can best save the political from degeneration by remaining outside it Having thus rid the body politic

[23] Interestingly the film contains references to the actions of Bihar's former Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav. Bose as minister speaks in a rustic `non-standard' Telugu and constantly shocks the bureaucracy and his ministerial colleagues with his unsophisticated ways. The milking of the cow is a reference to a much publicized photograph of Yadav milking a cow after he became the Chief Minister.

of its destroyers he leaves politics to good politicians like the Chief Minister. Indeed throughout the film, particularly in the parts where he is a minister, Bose's populist pro-poor welfarist activities arc combined with his vigilante actions.[24]

What is remarkable about *Mutha Mestri*, which is a typical mass-film in many respects, is that it underscores the political nature of the working class/caste hero's struggle (while most other mass films underplay this aspect). In spite of this, there is a considerable degree of ambivalence about the production of the hero, a point to which I will return. *Mutha Mestri*, situated in the politico-aesthetic space created by the mass-film, shares a number of features with other mass-films, particularly those featuring Chiranjeevi.[25] The resolution of the film too, as discussed above, is characteristic of the mass-film.

Unlike *Gharana Mogudu* and *Rickshawvodu* later and like *Challenge*, the surplus heroine (i.e., the heroine who does not marry the hero) is the upper class/caste woman. Not only does the hero's choice' of the lower class/caste Buchamma ensure that the narrative situates the class/ caste struggle outside the private realm (unlike *Gharana Mogudu, Alluda Majaka* and *Rickshawvodu)* but also marks the departure from the mass-film's tendency to direct the hero's agency towards the denial of the heroine's agency. As I have suggested above and discuss in detail in Chapter 4, the heroine's relative independence from or rejection of upper caste patriarchal norms is produced as a greater evil in the mass-film. This is because in the mass-film, as with most other genres in popular Telugu

[24] In addition to leading the Commandos against Atma Ram's men, he also prevents Atma Ram's son from leaving the city by pulling him out of a plane after a long chase. The youth is earner shown initiating a communal riot by attacking a procession during a folk festival.

[25] It is possible to argue A. Kodandarami Reddy who directed this film actually made the first mass-film (*Khaidi*). Whether or not *Khaidi* is the first film of this genre, Reddy had worked with this genre for almost a decade before *Mutha Mestri* was made. His other successes include *Donga Mogudu* and *Challenge* discussed above. The components of the mass-film like the opening solo-song and fight sequences, the surplus heroine (underscoring the hero's sexual attractiveness) and of course the lower class/caste hero, who is an orphan but for his sister, are all present in this film.

cinema, the family (generally understood as the extended family) is the most important social institution and the transformation of or threat to the family often stands in for the larger problem of disintegration of the social. The transgressive woman is therefore seen as threatening the society at large by undermining the well-being of the family. Consequently the hero's transgression of class/caste norms is justified in the narrative because this transgression undermines the heroine's more dangerous subversion. In films like *Gharana Mogudu* and *Alluda Majaka* the subaltern hero's defiance of class/caste norms (and the state in the latter film) is one of the pleasures offered by the narrative. Simultaneously, a link is made between his assertiveness and the heroine's (or another important female character's) `aggresiveness' in a manner that ensures the *domestication* of the latter, as the narrative progress. In *Gharana Mogudu* the resolution of the workers' problems is tied up with Uma Devi's acceptance of Raju as her husband and, by implication her subservient status in the home. She also gives away her property to the workers and loses her superior position in the public realm as well. In *Mutha Mestri* however, there is a significant departure from the mass-film's tendency to produce women, particularly middle-class women who, by taking up a career, move into the public domain (i.e., outside the home) as a problem.

The surplus heroine Kalpana (Roja), Bose's Personal Secretary during his tenure as minister serves an important function. She relays upper caste, middle-class anxieties of the lustful gaze of the lower class/caste male other. Being Bose's Personal Secretary she often finds herself in close physical proximity to him. Kalpana is both attracted by the macho good natured hero but also terrified by him as Yesu (Bose's sidekick) tells her that Bose becomes a sex-maniac after sunset (in order to prevent her from becoming intimate with Bose). On one occasion both Bose and Kalpana spend a night in the same guest house. Kalpana's feelings towards Bose are depicted in a dream song sequence in which Bose dressed as a beast threatens (though only briefly) to rape her. This masochistic fantasy is preceded by another, earlier in the film when Kalpana struggling against an imagined rape attempt by Bose is brought back to her senses by the startled Bose who goes on to advice her; in all sincerity, to

sec a doctor and seek medication for weakness of the nerves'. Bose's advice about seeking medical advice can be read as arising from his awareness of the role she has cast him in.[26] He thus gently rebukes her for attributing a lustful gaze to him.

These scenes in the film need to be seen in the context of the production of the lower caste, particularly Dalit, male as the sexual aggressor who habitually subjects upper caste women to sexual assault This construction of the lower caste male assumed tremendous significance in the wake of the Chunduru massacare.[27] The upper castes sought to justify the killings by claiming that Dalit men had for years harassed upper caste women and therefore deserved to die. Upper caste women complained that they needed protection from sexual assaults by dalit men and even attacked visiting politicians for failing to protect them.[28] I wish to suggest that this construction is linked to the increasing presence and *visibility* of the lower class/caste male in public spaces hitherto out of his bounds. What the film presents is the encounter between the lower caste minister and the upper caste working woman who are *both* out of their 'place' in society. Although the representation of Kalpana is deeply problematic (even in the song referred to above her desire for Bose is self-evident as is the presentation of Kalpana as being sexually available to him), Bose's comment can be read as a polemical engagement with the stereotyping of the lower caste male. The stereotyping, I would add, results from the anxiety induced in the middle-class, upper castes by the kind of encounter depicted here between the normative `woman' and the lower class/caste male.

Much more so than other mass films this film seems to support and even celebrate the entry

[26] As pointed out earlier in the chapter, the mass-film's hero knows because the spectator has seen.

[27] On August 6, 1991 a well planned attack was launched by upper caste Reddys on the dalits of Chunduru village. As a result 13 dalit men died. See Balagopal (1991), K. Murali (1995) and Samata Sanghatana (1991) for details of the incident.

[28] See also Tharu and Niranjana 1996 for the implications of this construction of victims and aggressors for feminist politics. I discuss this question in Chapter 4.

of the lower classes/castes into the institutions of the public sphere. Other mass-films too depict the hero, representing the masses (i.e., standing in for them), taking over public spaces such as the street, the college, the city etc. which do not otherwise acknowledge the presence of the members of his socio-economic background In *Mutha Mestri* the contest over the vegetable market is an instance of the mass-film's celebration of the assertiveness of the subaltern. Very early in the film Bose drives away thugs and police men who demand protection money from the vegetable sellers. The point here is that Bose as the gangsman owns *nothing* in the market. From here, he goes on to making himself completely at home in his office and then, quite literally, begins to run the government This is indeed remarkable since in much contemporary Telugu cinema the caste and corruption narratives are interlinked because the corrupt government servant/politician is imaged as lower caste. [29] In the recent Mohan Babu starrer *Collector Garu* (B. Gopal, 1997) the hero actually tells the local Dalit politician (played by Babu Mohan who, not coincidentally, happens to be a Dalit in real life) that reservations have been provided to people like him (i.e. Dalits) so that the beneficiaries help others who are oppressed, not accumulate wealth. While explicit references such as this one to the corrupt Dalit 'backward caste official or politician are rare in popular cinema, it is possible to argue that on the whole recent popular cinema has been hostile to the increasing presence of the members of these castes in politics and government offices. [30]

The disavowal of Bose's political career therefore raises an important question. And a question which does not merely have to do with *Mutha Mestri* but the mass-film in general. I have suggested that it is characteristic of the mass film to disavow the hero's struggle. I have also pointed out how this

[29] See the discussion on the `quota officer' in Niranjana and Srinivas (1996: 3130) for one such instance.

[30] G. Rami Reddy (1989) notes that throughout the seventies and eighties there was a significant increase in the number of Dalit and backward caste officials and elected representatives in Andhra Pradesh largely due to the reservation policy which covered educational institutions, government offices and elected bodies.

is done. I wish to add that in *Mutha Mestri* despite the remarkable opening up of the genre to address explicitly political questions, throughout the film the narrative undermines the issues at stake by presenting them as apolitical. Bose's entry into and exit from politics arc illustrative of the film's handling of the issue (he enters to prove that Atma Ram's men don't scare him and leaves to avenge his sister's suicide), both decisions being seen as proofs of his manliness.

M. Madhava Prasad's analysis of Amitabh Bachchan films can be a starting point for further discussion on the problem of representing the subaltern (and his agency) in the mass-film. In Bachchan films, belong to the genre Prasad calls the `re-formed social', `[t]hc star became a mobilizer, demonstrating superhuman qualities and assuming a power that transformed the others who occupied the same terrain into *spectators'* (Prasad 1994: 250 original emphasis). Further, the subaltern figures in the narrative as a `mobilized subject[1] (Prasad 1994: 268). There is a remarkable degree of similarity between the re-formed social and the mass-film as far as the deployment of the star is concerned. (It needs to be remembered that Bachachan's films were remade with NTR and the Telugu mass-film begins where NTR's career ended) In the mass-film there is a splitting of the subaltern into the star-hero and those he represents (i.e., fights for). Notably, the star-hero is inevitably produced as the authentic subaltern. That production of the star-hero as authentic subaltern is crucial to the denial of the subaltern's subjectivity.

At this point I would like to return to the spectator of the mass-film As pointed out earlier, the mass-film has highly developed mechanisms which alert the spectator to the presence of the star. (In *Mutha Mestri* for instance there are three biographical references, the most prominent of which is the protagonist's surname: Konidela The film ends with Bose's comment, addressed to the camera, on the importance of being the `mutha mestri'– of seven crore Telugus. What then are the implications of the star being the authentic subaltern when the spectator knows that the star in real life' is not a subaltern at all? In my discussion of the biographical reference I noted that the genre posits a real' star. To that I wish to add that the `real' star as a discursive category is deployed in such a way as to

disavow the working class/ caste *subject's* agency. Let me explain this with reference to *Mutha Mestri*. Bose is undoubtedly the agent of action/transformation of the public domain and moreover he is shown as transgressing caste/class norms by exercising power in a manner which is generally not available to those in his socio-economic position. However, he who transgresses is not the subaltern Bose but *Chiranjeevi as Bose*. Bose the subaltern subject, the spectator is repeatedly reminded, is a derivative of the star Chiranjeevi. I am not suggesting that the spectator forgets this fact or is likely to and therefore needes to be reminded of it While all characters can be seen as derivatives of stars (minor or lesser stars maybe but stars all the same), the mass-hero alone is systematically produced as *the star in disguise*, masquerading as someone he is not (see also the discussions of the masquerade in Chapter 4). The biographical reference, the star's look into the camera, the way in which he is introduced--together ensure that the star serves as an anchor, functioning like the text/caption of a photograph. Roland Barthes argues that the text is used to 'counter the terror of uncertain signs' (1977: 39), since it *`directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him [sic] to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance' (40). When the subaltern hero is named as the star within the narrative, the image offers itself to be read as a proof the star's ability to disguise himself. Consequently the star is given to be read as the chief co-ordinate on the grid of intelligibility made available to the spectator. This is a grid which attempts to depoliticize the mass-film since stardom becomes the condition under which the working class/caste subject acquires agency. Notice what happens to other workers in the mass-film: they are either comic figures, like Yesu (Brahmanandam) in *Mutha Mestri*, or spectators, as Prasad suggests in another context, of the hero's heroism. The struggle of the worker is seen as legitimate primarily because it is carried out by the *star* hero.

When the star embodies the 'lumpen', the excessive body of the rowdy' appears as and becomes consonant with the excessive body of the star. Dhareshwar and Srivatsan point out that one of the effects of the 'politics of disincorporation' is the 'reineorporation [of some bodies, notably stars

and politicians] in the public sphere as fantasmic embodiments or icons of power' (1996: 223). Paradoxically, the lumpen's body is disincorporated since it is *always already* the body of the star. The particularity of the lumpen no longer matters precisely because of the particularity of the star. In the mass-film, the subaltern's excess translates as surplus masculinity-he succeeds because of his machismo. Simultaneously, the spectator is aware that the surplus is an attribute of the star.[31] So in *Khaidi*, the body which refuses to be broken down by torture is, the spectator is told, the body of the star. Further, when someone other than the star aspires for the latter's heroic status the sequence is inevitably produced as comic. In *Big Boss* for instance, the actor Ali— playing a petty shop keeper who is also a fan of the star Chiranjeevi— imitates the star's gestures (picked up from previous Chiranjeevi films). This is seen as funny because the star alone is `naturally' endowed with the ability to carry the surplus masculinity and defiance signified by these gestures.

The presence of the star is thus notified to situate the film within a specific inter-textual field, a field which has as its centre the star as the primary or original source of meaning. I wish to suggest that the star in the mass-film acquires an author function' (Foucault 1984a) as each mass-film refers to the star's other roles/films, his status as a matinee idol, his biography' etc. The discerning viewer understands a particular film (or even a gesture or reference) because he `knows' that the screen image emanates from the *real* star who is simultaneously like and unlike the screen image. Discussing the functions of the author' as constructed in literary criticism, Foucault notes:

> The author allows a limitation of the concerns and dangerous proliferation of signification within a world where one is thrifty not only of one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning (1984a: 118).

[31] In Chiranjeevi's case this is explained by fans and critics alike in terms of his ability to dance and fight (better than all previous heroes and most present ones). The machismo of the character is thus directly attributed to the star's performance skills.

The author-function of the star is also closely linked to the economics of stardom (discussed in the next chapter). Prasad notes that in the Amitabh Bachchan films the star is produced as as a semi otic remainder of the narrative process for future exploitation'. Prasad adds:

> The value deriving from the star persona is part rent and part profit From the star's perspective, his/her body is a source of rent, since its principal quality, charisma, is coded as a possession that he/she is born with, notwithstanding the work that goes into producing it From the perspective of the film-makers, the payment of rent enables the exploitation of this `ground' in profit-making ventures. The star's persona thus accumulates within itself attributes that are specific to various instances of performance, as well as various value-laden associations deriving from personal history (1994: 264).

It is however important to note that there are crucial differences between the `author' proposed by Foucault and the star. As Bennett and Woollacott (1987) write with reference to the texts of James Bond, the figure to which a text is made to point and which serves as a support for its meaning is not one which is outside and precedes it (author) but one which is simultaneously outside and within it (the actor/actress as a cypher for the character played)' (233). Nevertheless there is no denying that the star's non-filmic existence, his realness, takes precedence over his individual roles because the real (star) is mat extra-textual point which offers coherence to the individual role. Moving back to the discussion of the star's intervention in fan activity, it is possible to argue that the star's authority (to intervene) stems from his operation from this non-filmic realm of the real--it is *Chiranjeevi* speaking. He can only achieve this position of authority because of the assumption that there is an essence which exists outside the circulation of the image.

Notice that the real is mobilized to contain the instability of the image, or proliferation of meaning, as Foucault suggests in the `authentic' statements made by real stars. A. Nageswara Rao is reported (by his official biographer) to have said mat mere was a need for actors and other professionals to `develop a split personality' to ensure the separation of the real from the role. He added that he could play the role of the devotee and drunkard convincingly because he was an atheist and teetotaller in real life (Krishna Kumari 1992: 192-193). Chiranjeevi writes in his

Autobiographical Note' (1994):

> My friend, philosopher, guide and guru is Siva Shankara Vara Prasad i.e., my real self. He will always act as a check over me preventing me from going astray. It is only when I am before the camera that he doesn't interfere... He cajoles, encourages, praises, warns, threatens, admonishes and checks 'Chiranjeevi' in order to make him remain on the right track, depending on the situation (52).

The `real self, which is never captured by the camera, is what makes the role possible. The mass-film gestures towards this eternally regressing real self of the star as the ultimate source of the image (on the screen). The spectator's task is to trace the image of its source to arrive at its meaning.

The spectator of the mass-film, as suggested earlier, is a subject of the dominant ideology. This is because the mass-film situates itself within the dominant ideology by producing as a problem the challenge to the class/caste domination of the ruling elite The mass-hero, around whom the social is re-formed during the course of the film, is a means of managing the democratic aspirations *of political society* (Chatterjee). The star is thus a crucial site for the production of the spectator's consent to the resolution offered by the genre.

What the mass-film (or any other genre or film for that matter) cannot guarantee is the transformation of actual viewers into spectators. In other words, films may not be read on their own terms and actual viewers may refuse to be constituted as spectators. This is evident from the response of the elite and non-elite publics of cinema to the mass-film in general and individual films tike *Alluda Majaka*. The mass-film, despite its political conservatism, is seen by members of the elite public as being a part of the problem (of the breakdown of the social). This is at least partly because the mass-film is perceived as celebrating the emergence of the lumpen and indeed contributing to the increasing lawlessness in society.

There is evidence to show that the mass-film's resolutions fail to ensure the stability of its meaning in circulation. For instance, *Mutha Mestri* actually generated considerable discussion on the Chiranjeevi's possible entry into politics. Rumors about the star's political career also alert us to the

success of the genre in its attempt to posit the real star as the ultimate source of a film's meaning. But, as noted in the previous chapter, the star is deployed by fans to justify the formation of an alternative public sphere which enables fans to articulate *their* socio-political aspirations. The mass-film, I wish to suggest, therefore needs to be understood as a sign of the politicization of the non-elite public sphere around the figure of the fan This politicization is coeval and homologous with the emergence of political and social movements which destabilized caste and class hierarchies. Consequently, even as these movements were presented by certain influential narratives as resulting in crime, lumpenization of the public domain, etc.— in short, the disruption of the social order--the mass-film itself was seen as contributing to this state of affairs. I would argue that the response of critics within and outside the film industry to the mass-film is a response not just to its (filmic) narrative but also to fan activity and the `churning in political society', to borrow Partha Chatterjee's phrase, in the post-emergency period.

In my examination of Chiranjeevi's class-films in the next chapter, I shall draw attention to how mis genre perceives the mass-film as being apart of the larger problem of the disintegrating social. As noted earlier in this chapter, the differencebetween the class-film and the mass-film paradoxically lies in what they share in common. Like the mass-film, the class-film too produces the masses' as a problem. The resolution offered by the class-film too hinges on the manner in which the star is deployed. By redeploying the star, the class-film constructs a spectator position which *is* avowedly different from that posited by the mass-film. The class-film's spectator is one who is deeply disturbed by the mass-film and its star(s) because of the detrimental effect they have on the masses. Curiously enough, mis anxiety results from a reading of the mass-film as a failure insofar as the resolution to the crisis in the social is concerned To put it provocatively, one response of the actual audience coming face to face with the spectator of the mass-film is the rapid growth of fans' associations The class-film is another. The anti-obscenity campaign is yet another. I shall return to the encounter between actual and inscribed viewer via the class-film (Chapter 3) and the anti-obscenity campaign (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3

Reform, Self-help and Citizenship: The Class-film

In bis study on Tamil cinema, S. Theodore Baskaran observes:

> Cinema's very accessibility to the lower classes alienated the elite of society from it. Added to this, the stigma that was attached to the popular stage and those working in it was extended to the world of cinema... (1996: 10).

Baskaran's observation however does not explain *why* the accessibihty of the medium to lower caste/class audiences alienated the upper caste, middle-class elite and *how* the latter's unease is articulated in debates on popular cinema. Ravi Vasudevan's concept of 'cinephobia' furthers our understanding of the hostile response of the elite to the cinema by enabling us to read this response as resulting from the elite's attempt to retain its control over the public domain. Vasudevan (1995) argues that the cinephobic response, 'amounts to a freezing of public identity within a specifically political set of demands articulated through lobbies addressed directly the government and through the press' (2). As we have in Chapter 1, this is precisely the kind of public identity' that is undermined by fan activity in the 1980s. Vasudevan goes on to explain that cinephobia refers to

> the paranoiac dimensions of the public eye, that opinion which fears that boundaries it seeks to build around itself are subject to penetration by the other space, the shadow domain in which images flit by on a screen; *incorporeal as these may be they are rematerialized in the audience and in the figures that surround this other space.* This knowing opinion, composed of the respectable, has a presentiment that this area lies beyond the social pale and may in fact constitute a realm of criminality, but also expresses the anxiety that the respectable may

> go over to the other side, a fear invariably projected around the destiny of children (1995: 3, emphasis added).

Vasudevan's formulation allows us to perceive the linkages between seemingly distinct but closely related elite anxieties of contamination/pollution by the other (who let us not forget, is physically present within the cinema hall as the lower *caste* viewer); degeneration of the public sphere; criminalization of the masses and corruption of children. It is important to note that the cinephobic response involves the articulation of political and moral anxieties arising from the state of `society' *as if these anxieties had their origin in a given set of filmic texts or the medium in general.*

However, Vasudevan's analysis addresses a historically specific response (1913-1943). Therefore studies of cinema in other historical or cultural contexts need to ask: *what* developments on-screen (in the form of transformations of the filmic narrative) and off-screen (in society, particularly with reference to the ways in which the masses are imagined) give rise to responses which we may name as cinephobic? Unless we conceive of cinephobia as a context specific response the hostility of the elite to cinema may indeed seem so `universal' that it would be pointless to subject it to serious examination. What is interesting about cinephobia is not the family resemblances between elite response to cinema in different places at different times but the sources of anxieties which are founded on the perceived symbiosis between the cinema and the masses.'

I wish to suggest that during the 1980s, the mass-film on the one hand and the expansion of tans' associations (which I read as being symptomatic of a larger transformation of the subaltern public sphere) on the other, played an important role in shaping the debates on Telugu cinema within the non-subaltern public sphere. The class-film, I shall argue, situates itself in opposition to the mass-film and the subaltern public sphere formed around the genre and in the process mobilizes the support of

[1] Sec Kuhn (1988) Hansen (1994) and Pandian (1995a) for a discussion on elite responses to Hollywood and Tamil cinema respectively. The authors focus on particular historical and cultural contexts and as a result situate what we may call cinephobia within socially and culturally specific contests over the public sphere.

the elite of society' (to borrow Baskaran's phrase) for a reformed popular cinema. I will begin by drawing attention to the conditions under which upper caste, middle-class public supports the cinema and how the class-film mobilizes this public's patronage.

Baskaran (1981 and 1996) and Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1993) point out that patriotism lent cinema a respectabilty (as well as increased its profit margin) which it otherwise lacked. The mythological, for instance, was a sure way to attract local audiences' (Baskaran 1996: 7), to wean them away from American and British films, but it was also advertised as patriotic cinema (Rajadhyaksha 1986: 39). After the non-cooperation movement (1919-1922) both theatre and cinema acquired respectability because they began to spread the message of nationalism (Baskaran 1981).

In addition to its thematic concerns, respectable cinema is characterised by the kind of the audience it attracts. Debates on Telugu cinema make it adequately clear that cinema is corrupt because its audience is either seen as already degenerate or prone to corruption.

Film critics and observers of the industry (some of whom have been closely associated with the industry) are unanimous that by the 1980s the medium was degenerate', 'corrupt' and dangerous'. At no other point of Telugu cinema's history, after its tryst with nationalism in the 1930s, were accusations on a similar scale levelled against it And with every passing year, all the way upto the mid-nineties (if a date can be fixed, I propose the *Alluda Majaka* controversy, discussed in the next chapter, as the turning point) the accusations increased in intensity. This period saw the emergence and domination of popular cinema by the mass-film, which peaked in popularity in the early nineties but seems to have been on a decline ever since. In a sense, the history of the fall' of Telugu cinema can be read as the history of the mass-film

A brutally short summary of the story of the fall runs as follows: `If the decade of the fifties can be called the golden era of Telugu cinema, it was in the latter half of the sixties that the decline (quality wise) began' (B.K. Eshwar 1986: 77). This was the period of crime films inspired by the James Bond series and other formula' films. They heralded the advent of cabaret dances in Telugu

films' (Kannala 1986: 29). In addition, the obscene comedy track' and the vamp' are contributions of this moment.[2] As a result, The sixties saw very few meaningful films being produced, even as commercial successes were completely blotting realism' (Kannala 1986: 29). (Such is the extent of unanimity among observers and critics that Kannala advances the release of the Nageswara Rao starrer *Dasara Bullodu* [1970] by few years to strengthen his argument [see Kannala 1986: 27].)

Thus in the mid-sixties Telugu cinema had quite suddenly and inexplicably confronted a whole range of problems which, according to critics like Gudipoodi Srihari, it has not quite overcome even after three decades. To begin with, there was supposedly a deculturation of cinema with the arrival of crime films. In the 1970s the 'western' and later other non-indigenous genres invaded' Telugu cinema. Obscenity, say the critics, was bom in this period Obscenity and other distortions introduced into cinema in the sixties were supposedly amplified in the seventies and took over cinema by the eighties. Srihari thus lamented, 'In the past, films were artistic. They dealt with nationalism, untouchability, widow remarriage, women's problems, alcholism, etc. Now there is only sex, kissing and violence'.[3]

However, it is argued, the degeneration of the medium was not unchallenged. In the sixties directors like Bapu, `who learnt all his lessons in the school of life' (Aditya 1986: 116) and K. Viswanath who had,` progressive ideas' (ibid: 112) struggled against the current, making tasteful, purposeful and, at times, commercially successful films.

In the seventies and early eighties an unsuccessful attempt was supposedly made by the 'New Cinema' to radicalise cinema. But, unlike neighbouring Karnataka, this movement hardly made an impact on mainstream cinema here. Only two fihnsA4aaBAoo/n/(Gautam Ghosh, 1982) and *Rangula Kola* (D. Narsinga Rao, 1983) made it to the commercial circuit According to a film critic, Shyam

[2] K. Narasaiah and Gudipoodi Srihari expressed similar opinions in the course of their interviews with the author on 19 December 1996 and 24 November 1996 respectively.

[3] Personal Interview with Srihari, 24 November 1996.

Senegal and Mrinal Sen failed (in Andhra Pradesh) because they, handled alien stories' and the actors/actresses were not able to deliver the native flavour* (Kannala 1986:34. See also Sastry 1986: 70).

This narrative would have us believe that by the eighties, therefore, a handful of films and their makers was all that was left of the `golden era'. The film industry was held responsible for this state of affairs (Srihari 1986 and 1994, Ramachandra Murray 1994). But by this time the audience had also been identified by the community of critics as one having a history of irresponsibility. We are told that purposeful cinema' was consistently resisted by the audience. The neo-realist *Todu Dongalu* (Yoganand, 1954) featuring N.T. Rama Rao and experimental films featuring A. Nageswara Rao, *Sudi Gundalu* (Adurti Subba Rao, 1967), and *Maro Prapancham* (Adurti Subba Rao, 1970) therefore, `experienced similar bitter failure' (Kannala 1986: 33). Saddled with such an audience, naturally—or so the critics believe—`film makers [were] afraid that real [realistic?] cinema would land them in losses' (Aditya 1986: 118).

`Real' or `purposeful' cinema then had to put up with a film industry that was perpetually crisis-ridden and unashamedly profit-oriented, as well as a tasteless audience. The bearer of this double burden, from the 1980s, is otherwise known as the *class-film.*

Despite the currency of the term in the popular film press,' class-film' as a descriptive category does not exist in 'serious' critical writings. As I have suggested in the Introduction, film criticism discovered this genre in the eighties while the term may have been in existance before in the 1980s. Tracing its origin to *Sankarabharanam* (K.Vishwanath, 1979), the class-film emerges in critical writings as the point of intersection with old' films, the only surviving link with the golden era', setting itself up in contrast with the overwhelming majority of new' films (which in the 1980s were mass-films). These two contrasting genres acquired definition and came into their own in the 1980s almost parallel to each other. Indeed, it is impossible to talk of one without referring to the other.

Unlike avant garde/art films which for the most part remained outside the mainstream

distribution and exhibition circuit, the class-film is very much a part of popular, if reformed, commercial' cinema. So much so that it is not uncommon to come across the accusation of the persistence of 'formula' or masala' elements in some class-films Kannala, for instance, calls *Sankarabharanam* (K. Vishwanath, 1979) a pseudo-musical... couched in melodramatic melange [sic]' (1986: 35). Generally accepted as one of the most important, if not the earliest, class-films, the film is described as a trend-setter' (Eshwar 1986, Aditya 1986). Kannala himself concedes, the film offered some good music and tried to focus attention towards aesthetics [sic].' Indeed the film's greatest achievement was that it was `able to create genuine interest in classical music even among the unlettered villagers of Andhra' (Eshwar 1986: 77).

The Beginnings

The `class' in the class-films invokes simultaneously the middle-class patrons of the genre and the classical' (i.e., as a short hand for classical music or even traditional high culture). Some of the fuzziness surrounding the genre and disputes over categorizing films as class-films is a result of the attempt to either restrict the genre to neo-traditional films which seek to popularise brahminical high culture or extend it to incorporate all middle-class films. I wish to make a case for describing the genre according to its aesthetic and thematic concerns as well as its polemical engagement with the mass-film.

The addressee of the class-film is undoubtedly the middle-class. However, it is important to recognize that the class-film is a conservative cinema of dissent whose political statements are often inscribed in the critique of the mass-film. The class-film is a genre-in-opposition which constitutes itself and is *read* as the other of the mass-film. It can be traced back to the films of 1950s primarily

because old' films arc supposedly different from new' films.

One possible beginning of the class-film is thus the nationalist cinema of the 1940s and 50s which thematized social reform. Indeed its realism is closer to the fifties popular cinema than that of avant garde/art cinema of the 1970s and 80s. Experimental cinema of the 1960s too was a cinema of dissent. Formally, it is distinct from regular commercial films; its technical sophistication and realism were a mark of its distinction. Interestingly, the experimental films of Adurti Subba Rao were a result of an alliance between the director and A. Nageswara Rao, one of the major stars of the period. They teamed up together and formed a production company called Chakravathi Chitra. Nageswara Rao acted in both the films, *Sudigundalu* and *Maro Prapancham* produced under this banner. *Sudigundalu* was a commercial success but the failure of the latter resulted in the abandoning of the experiment (Aditya 1986: 112). Adurti frequently used new actors and actresses (he launched Krishna) and often dealt with anti feudal' themes.

Around this time (the late sixties) both K. Vishwanath and Bapu began making films. They consciously moved away from urban, western,' tendencies in Telugu cinema, and soon began to produce a distinct Telugu ethnicity known in industry parlance as nativity' (native culture, local colour). Vishwanath's *Siri SiriMuwa* (1976) and Bapu's *Mutyalamuggu* (1976) are examples of the cinema nativity' of the 1970s. In some ways the cinema of `nativity' anticipated the class-film. It packaged an ethnic Telugu culture for urban audiences. While this was by no means new to Telugu cinema, the difference was that tradition' was produced as Telugu' culture firmly rooted in rural, folk cultural practices. (In *Siri SiriMuwa* the protagonist is a folk musician who plays the *dappu,* a drum associated with Madigas who are Dalits. He is however depicted as being poor but casteless.)

The cinema of nativity was an answer to the crime films and other genres which began to make an appearance in the 1960s. Not only were the crime films set in sealed modern spaces but also posited a modernity which erased all markers of regional/ linguistic identity, except for the use of Telugu langauge in the films.

Sections of the industry and the critical establishment were very uneasy with the development. It was read as a sellout to `western'/' Hindi' (film) culture and sign of erosion of Telugu culture (Sastry 1986). When a film like *Sankarabharanam* is held up for 'focussing attention towards aesthetics', it is implied that Telugu cinema by 1980 threatened not only high Brahminical culture but was also perceived as rejecting 'nativity[1].

The class-film, unlike the mass-film, is primarily concerned with propagating culture' (which is not necessarily local' but often a popular version of the 'classical*). The class-film is an answer to the 'vulgarization' of culture in cinema. Addressing a 'national' middle-class created by art cinema which is accessed largely via television (and to an extent by film festivals), the class-film sought to expand its viewership by incorporating elements of popular cinema, the most important one being the star.

The class-film is characterised by its aesthetic and social concerns (thematised in the films); superior (aesthetic) quality; realism' (not to be equated with the realism of art cinema but a certain naturalness' which results from an increased emphasis on verisimilitude *within* the framework of popular cinema) and seriousness' or purposefulness'. It is reformist in intent and is a standing example of what cinema should be because it transmits a `*message*' rather than merely entertaining the audience. It is *not* violent or vulgar and is thus, by the standards of the middle-class, not a corrupting agency.

In the 1980s therefore, cinema and its other co-exist under the aegis of the film-industry. Once the class-film emerges as the other of cinema (i.e., bad, popular cinema, the mass-film), practically *all* old' films are retrospectively equated with it, regardless of the fact that most films of the 1950s and 1960s were in their own time condemned for their aesthetic inferiority, for corrupting the masses etc.[4] The class-film is what cinema was in the good old days.

[1] I am grateful to M. Vinay Bhushan for pointing this out to me.

Crucial to the valorization of the class-film and the demonization of its other are the assumptions that the audience, the masses--`the front benchers'--are vulnerable to corruption, and that bad cinema corrupts them. While it is obvious that the masses watch the mass-film, the class-film is supposedly meant to be watched by *all classes of the society*. The fundamental paradox is that the class-film is meant to reform the masses by reforming cinema but it is rejected by the masses (of course the masses habitually reject good cinema!). The mass-film, it has been argued, *cannot* be watched by `families' (meaning women, generally speaking). In the next chapter I discuss how masses and women/society are constructed as opposing categories in debates on obscenity (and by extension in debates on the mass-film).

The interconnected and opposed series of associations evoked by the two categories, the class-film and mass-film, may be summarized as follows:

CLASS-FILM	MASS-FILM
Sense/Meaning	Nonsense
Message Entertainment	(of the low, dangerous kind)
Culture	Vulgarity, violence
Reform	Corruption
Society, family, women	Masses

What were the conditions which produced the class-film? The obvious answer is of course the degeneration of cinema which in the 1980s is the exemplified by the effects' of the mass-film (discussed in the next chapter). But the attack on popular cinema is only a displaced attack on the masses' who, as pointed in the previous chapters, are the bearers of an excess which renders them visible in the cinema hall, on the street and in other public places.

The mass-film, as I have argued in the previous chapter, produces a heroic rowdy and

addresses the fan directly, ignoring the class-audience. Although the rowdy, as we have seen in the previous chapter, actually disappears even in the mass-film (because class/caste antagonism is often disavowed), the middle-class seems to be adequately disturbed by the gesture towards representing the rowdy as a heroic figure and the production of the spectator as a fan. The point about the rowdy (or other components of the mass') on-screen is that he is seen by the elite as capable of endlessly replicating himself across cultural productions and social spaces. The screen rowdy thus produces fans or lumpen viewers who take over the cinema halls, making it impossible for others (i.e., the middle-class) to visit cinema halls. Of course, there is 'evidence' for this takeover as we have seen in Chapter 1. There is also evidence of real (i.e., off-screen) rowdies taking over towns and cities.[5]

How can this construction of the spectator of the mass-film as a lumpen be questioned? Discussing anti-semitic constructions of the Jew, Slavoj Zizek points out that `it is not possible to shake so-called ideological prejudices by taking into account the pre-ideological level of everyday experience' (1989: 48). It is not possible to discover the rowdy or fan or masses by tracking them down in real life.' The dominant ideological' construction of the masses succeeds because every fact that can be generated about them conforms to the truth' about their being: they are a threat to society. In Zizek's words,' [a]n ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour' (1989: 49).

The question is why various components of the mass appear as threatening to society' (read upper caste, middle-class society) in the 1980s. In other words, what does this particular construction of the masses tell us about the anxieties which produce it?

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) conceptualize *antagonism* as the '"experience" of the limit of all objectivity' which points at the 'impossibility of closure' or the impossibility of "society"' (122). The authors argue, the social only exists as a partial

[5] See Parthasarathy (1995).

effort for constructing society-that is, an objective and closed system of differences.' It is usually assumed, in contradiction to this notion of a partial effort', that the social is a closed system. While ideology attempts the suppression of difference and subsequent closure of the social, antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of final suture, is the "experience" of the limit of the social'. In an antagonistic relationship, the presence of the "other" prevents me from being totally myself (1985: 125). Zizek explains that antagonism is 'a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized' (1989: 45). Like the Lacanian *Real* it is outside language (and ideology), appearing only as a disruption of the symbolic/ideological order.

Returning to the masses, their' very presence is disruptive, since they prevent society[1] (in the sense Laclau and Mouffe use the term) from 'constituting itself.

The point is that in the 1980s, the *antagonistic relationship* (in Laclau and Mouffe's sense of the term) between the `masses' and the elite (the ' citizen') could not be overlooked. When it became clear that the social was deeply divided, the rupture was sought to be sutured by criminalizing the mass, delegitimizing their agency. Further, the appearance of the masses is read as necessarily polluting and corrupting the public domain because their very presence is a sign of the breakdown of existing/established social hierarchies.

The 1980s cinema (re)constructs the social (as does cinema of the earlier decades) by re-producing class, caste and gender hierarchies. However, unlike earlier films, films of the eighties are confronted with the difficult task of producing equivalences between the embattled elite and the aggressive, assertive subaltern subjects. The techniques adopted by the mass-film to handle the problem obviously caused considerable concern to the upper caste middle-classes as the mass-film (and its stars) itself became a focal point of a postulated lumpenism.'

Interestingly, the mass-film was read as contributing to the problem primarily because the traumatic social division' was perceived as being replicated in the preference for this genre by the masses. The masses did not of course make an appearance suddenly with the mass-film since fans and

the lower class patrons of cinema pre-date the mass-film. But old' films are retrospectively designated good' films because they represent an age when this crucial antagonism supposedly didn't exist To complete this narrative, it is necessary to believe that, at present, cinema and the public domain have been taken over by the masses.

The class-film's problem is to reclaim the middle-class for cinema (and therefore the industry for the class-audience that is believed to have and may actually have abandoned cinema)[6] and the public sphere for the middle-class. It contributes to the betterment' of society: it *constructs* the social by reforming cinema. In the class-film, the masses are represented in such a way that they do not embody the antagonism which ruptures society. In other words the masses have to behave themselves, learn to accept class/caste hierarchies. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the mass-film too can be read as attempting this, the class-film seeks to achieve this by redeploying the star since the star as he appears in the mass-film became a focal point of precisely those contests in the public sphere that the genre (mass-film) tried to delegitimize. In the rest of this chapter I discuss three class-films featuring Chiranjeevi after I examine the contexts in which they were produced, to draw attention to how the class-film becomes the point of intersection of different reformist agendas.

Film Industry and the Class-film

Between 1987 and 1992 Chiranjeevi acted in 28 films, including his most popular film *Gharana Mogudu* (1992). Most of these were action-packed, big-budget films with spectacular dance and fight sequences. A majority were box-office hits and, needless to add, mass-films. During this period his fans' associations, already large in numbers, reached their peak, both in terms of number and intensity of activity. Tens of thousands of fans were mobilized for public celebrations of his films' success. There was little doubt that Chiranjeevi was the most popular star of Telugu cinema.

[6] See Narasaiah (1996).

In this period Chiranjeevi acted in three 'off-beat' films, *Swayamkrushi* (K. Vishwanath, 1987), *Rudraveena* (K. Balachander, 1988) and *Aapadbandhavudu* (K. Vishwanath, 1992). In these class-films he was cast in uncharacteristically deglamorizcd roles. Chiranjeevi received more critical acclaim for these roles than for any others. He won the state government's award for Best Actor in *Swayamkrushi* and *Aapadbandhavudu. Rudraveena* won the Nargis Dutt Award for National Integration. By the Megastar's standards, all three films performed poorly at the box-office.

The rise of the mass-film and Chiranjeevi are closely related Similarly, the link between the alleged degeneration of cinema and the increasing popularity of Chiranjeevi is a rather direct one. The mass-film and Chiranjeevi are believed to have brought a number of problems into the industry. It is argued that production values fell because scripts were being written for stars (like Chiranjeevi) and films were made according to formulae, that film making became a gamble because of high remunerations of stars, etc (Raghuram 1994)..

Most of these problems existed before the eighties. I mention them only to point out that it is possible to write a history of the film industry with Chiranjeevi and the other stars of this period as the villains of the piece. There are however some developments coinciding with Chiranjeevi's rise which may have had a bearing on his career. I shall discuss them briefly to underscore the shortcomings of the tendency to find crude economistic explanations for stardom.

It has been observed that the film industry in India has traditionally depended on financier-distributors for investment. This system was in operation as early as the 1940s. Distributors who invested in a film dictated terms to the producers, often resulting in changes in accordance with their demands. When a film was released, the distributor was the first to recover his investment It was only after he recovered the amount invested (with interest) that the producer received a share of the film's earnings which were split between the distributor and him (Fazalbhoy n.d. 28-9, Report 1980: 18-22).

In the Telugu film industry, the situation changed with the arrival of the 'buyer' in the late seventies. The buyer made an outright purchase of exhibition rights in a territory. (Telugu cinema now

has eleven territories which include areas of neighbouring states where Telugu films are watched, the largest and most valuable territory is *Naijam* covering most of Telangana region excluding Hyderabad-Secunderabad, and the smallest is Nellore) An advance *is* paid long before the film is made and upon the completion of the film, the buyer pays the remaining amount The producer thus makes a ' profit' regardless of the success of his film while on the other hand the buyer is the last one in the producer-distributor-exhibitor chain to recover his investment and make a profit The buyer is thus a speculator who has no guarantee whatsoever that he will recover his investment. He often made his investment decisions based on the reputation of the producer (for the film had to be completed, before the question of profit arose) and of the stars. The latter soon included not only actors and actresses but also directors and music directors. Additional guarantees of success were the `formula elements' which supposedly provided specific attractions for different sections of the audience:' sentiment' for `ladies', mass-songs' for the masses, etc.

The buyer, it is argued, could only emerge due to the growing popularity of stars. After all the star is one of the major considerations of the buyer, since the star is believed to be a sure way of attracting audience(s). With the growth of fans' associations in the eighties, a star's new film was guaranteed excellent openings' (initial gate collections). However, stars were crucial even in the age of financier-distributors, as were 'formula elements'. Stars did influence buyers' decision to invest money in the film-industry but the star and buyer systems together strengthened the position of the producer who was freed from the clutches of the financier-distributor.

Further the star and the buyer ensured the survival of the loss-incurring film-industry without restructuring it more efficiently along capitalist lines In a good year a new film was released every 2-3 days throughout the eighties. As Narasaiah and Srihari point out, a majority (anywhere between 60-80%) of these films were flops in that they did not recover the cost of production, publicity, distribution and exhibition. In most cases one of the players, often the buyer, incurred a loss. In such a situation the industry could not survive in its existing form unless it drew investments from outside

its boundaries. With the breakdown of the institution of the financier-distributor, the film financier (who was not a distributor) began to provide loans to the producer. These financiers had nothing to do with the industry and charged between 36-48% interest (per annum) on their loans. The buyer enabled the producer to repay this amount regardless of the fate of his film. (It was not unusual for producers to find themselves in deep trouble because buyers did not buy exhibition rights. Sometimes financiers were forced to distribute the film because the producer failed to repay the loan.)

The advantage of the buyer system was, and still is, that it attracted a whole range of speculators by enabling them to enter the distribution network according to their ability. The territory-wise buyer for instance could sell to lesser buyers who might buy the distributor rights for a single district or town or even a single print Some buyers enter the scene only to acquire rights to re-release a film in a small territory. A film which is sold for five crores, for instance, might be sold at the lowest level for as little as two to five lakhs. As Narasaiah pithily remarked, `[t]he buyer system allows the distribution of loss.' He added that there was no dearth of town buyers' who generally sank agricultural surplus into the film industry by turning distributors. At this level, practically every year new buyers enter the market, drawn by the hope of making enormous profits instantly.[7]

Stardom does help sell a film but ultimately it is the producer and the `form of manufacture' which flourish under these economic conditions. Madhava Prasad argues that in the Bombay industry, unlike in Hollywood, film production results from the heterogenous form of manufacture' in which various filmic components (story, song, dance, stars, etc.) remain relatively autonomous, without any underlying unity; and, more importantly, that they are manufactured according to independent traditions (see Prasad 1994:73-87). Instead of transforming the raw material'--the script-into a new product--the narrative--this ensures that the product 'remains parasitical upon theatrical, literary and imported sources (new music styles, dance forms, fragments of Hollywood narrative elements), that

[7] The account of the buyer system,' as it is known in film-industry circles, is based on interviews with Narasaiah and Srihari cited above.

it cannot subsume under its own control' (Prasad 1994: 87). Similarly in the Telugu industry every component can help sell a film (depending on the fame of the manufacturer) and each individual film becomes a unit in itself, manufactured and sold separately. This facilitates the survival of a highly inefficient industry and also of a cartel of producers whose primary responsibility is to assemble `stars' (star-director, actor, music producer, choreographer) so as to siphon into the industry surplus from other sectors like agriculture and trade.[8]

The changes made in entertainment tax structure by the state government in 1983 (which came into force on 1.1.1984 and was subsequently revised in 1984, 1986 and 1991) had the effect of rewarding star assembling in film. Ordinance 31 of 1983 (later A.P. Entertainment Tax Act No.24/84) classified theatres local area-wise (i.e., according to whether they were situated in municipal corporations or cities, selection grade municipalities or large towns, etc.) and according to their amenities (i.e., whether they were air-conditioned, air-cooled or `ordinary'). Tax was imposed on total seating capacity instead of on the number of tickets actually sold An air-conditioned theatre in a city, for instance, was taxed at the rate of 25% of the gross collection capacity' multiplied by 22 (per month) and temporary/touring talkies were taxed at the rate of 13% of the `gross collecton capacity' multiplied by 7 in 1991 (APFCC, *A.P. Film Diary 1995*, Part III: 30). In the earlier system, tax was levied on the number of tickets actually sold at rates varying between 30 and 18 per cent

Known as the slab-system' in industry circles, this system resulted in drastic reduction in the distributor's `share' (of gate collections) as collections decreased Distributors in Vijayawada argued that at the highest slab they were forced to withdraw a film if the gate collection fell to 40 per cent of the gross collection capacity. On the other hand, for a full house the distributor only paid tax at the rate of 11 per cent (instead of 30 per cent in the earlier system).

[8] It has been argued that the buyer system of distribution went into a decline in the mid-nineties, largely because of the repeated failure of the films of almost all major stars. *{Andhra Prabha,* Chitralekha,' 13 July 1997: 1).

One of the techniques adopted by exhibitors to make the best of the situation was to reduce the number of seats in the lowest priced category (front benches'), forcing the masses' to purchase more expensive tickets. Distributors, for their part, went in for saturation releases' (Chiranjeevi's *Hitler* was released in 18 theatres in Hyderabad-Secunderabad) and hoped that the assembled components would attract a large audience in the opening week.

Both the buyer and the slab-system enabled producers of big-budget films to have a field day. The slab-system, by rewarding hits and forcing the early withdrawal of films which drew a moderate response, actually enabled producers to sell their films to speculative buyers on the strength of the fan-following of stars. What these developments do not explain is the phenomenon of stardom itself. While it is possible to explain how stars were deployed to sell films by examining the economics of the industry, the presence of the star, as it has been proved repeatedly, does not ensure the success of a film.

The class-film (re)deployed Chiranjeevi in an attempt to reach out to the 'masses', broadening its viewership base and ensuring that the message' films *sold* like mass-films. It is therefore, important to note that the collaboration between Chiranjeevi and the makers of class-films is one which ensures that this genre-in-opposition does not pose a serious threat to film production and marketing, despite the tendency of the genre to present itself as being distinct and superior to the mass-film. However, what the class-film does to the star is interesting and crucial to its reformist package (see Illustration 7).

The Megastar's Message

Why (in addition to helping to prepetuate the heterogenous form of manufacture' and buyer system of distribution) would immensely popular stars collaborate with makers of class-films and willingly participate in this exercise at redeployment? What does a class-film offer a star? An unlikely source alerts us to the anxieties evoked by a star's popularity and ways in which a class-film addresses

them.

In a twenty page letter to the star, a `concerned film-goer' who insists that he is *not* a fan writes:

> After watching *Subhalekha* (K. Vishwanath, 1982) and *Rudraveena* it was felt that Chiranjeevi acted well; he had talent But today people don't remember you in *Subhalekha* and *Rudraveena*. In fact no one remembers that you have talent.'

The underlying opposition set up by the author is a familar one: talent vs charisma. The non-fan goes on to add that with *Swayamkrushi*, Chiranjeevi `reached heights unimagined [by himself].' But subsequently, he wasted his talent by acting in films like *Gharana Mogudu* and obscene films (' *bootu cinemalu*') like *Alluda Majaka*. The problem with Chiranjeevi, according to his critic, is that he has almost unlimited charisma and can, like a `*yugakarta*', a man of destiny, influence the whole of society.' Indeed, the `Megastar' (used with stinging irony thought the letter) has completely shirked his responsibility towards society and failed to ask himself `what impact [his] roles have on the youth.' He adds, I am not asking you to do social service. The least you can do is to choose roles which don't harm society.' What Chiranjeevi requires is not the 'mass formula', he writes in English to emphasise his point (most of the letter is in Telugu) but a meaningful story: 'A story that can give you ample scope for exhibiting your real talent in acting.'

As the letter progresses it becomes clear that political objections (the failure of the *Yugakarta* to have a positive influence on society) are being staged as aesthetic ones (mass formula). The author suggests that charisma should be fused with `talent', not overshadow it. The assumption is that mass formula roles require no talent, talent itself being defined as the unique ability to influence 'the whole society' positively. For the author, exhibiting real talent in acting' is social service' because the

[9] M. Murali, Hyderabad, 9 August 1995. This letter is a part of the collection of letters made available to the author by Chiranjeevi's office in Hyderabad

aesthetics of the class-film *is* its politics.

Curiously enough, this letter echoes the reasons Chiranjeevi gave for acting in class-films and even producing one (*Rudraveena*, although credited to his brother Nagendra Babu, is according to Chiranjeevi himself, his own film):

> The audience pay attention to whatever I [my films] say. I didnt want to merely entertain. I wanted to give a message because what I say is taken to heart and translated into practice. [So] I had to give a message which was useful to society.... Doing such roles satisfies the soul.[10]

It tums out that the Megastar is himself anxious about his own stardom. Chiranjeevi's statement needs to be seen as a response to the accusation that his films/mass-films have had a negative impact on society. By featuring in class-films he was trying to demonstrate his good intentions. Further, these films are standing examples of his ability to act/perform: I can act, I can prove that I am an actor. Haven't I done [that in] *Aapadbandhavudu* and other such films[7'] For his fans and himself, they arc a sign of his superiority. Unlike other stars he has the ability to act.

As far as the star is concerned, the class-film lends him respectability on many counts It offers him an opportunity to *act,* receive awards, be seen as socially responsible. His excursion into respectable cinema, greeted with much applause by critics, reinforces, paradoxically, the dominant construction of the mass-film and himself as a corrupting influence. His exceptional roles only prove the rule. His well-wisher thus uses these exceptional roles to reprimand him.

The contest into which the star is drawn, I would like to suggest, is a contest over how the star is to be represented in films The message of the class-films under consideration here is written on the body of the star. As we shall see in the next chapter, the founding assumption underlying the attack on the mass-film (or popular cinema in general) and the attempt to delegitimize it is that the masses

' Chiranjeevi, Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

imitate what they see on screen. The class-film is valorized because it offers `positive' role models. While the central problem, for both mass-film and class-film, is the masses, the resolution offered by the former is clearly inadequate (as far as the elite is concerned). Something spills over from the mass-film into the `real' world. This excess is marked by the behaviour of the masses, including fans, and has to be suppressed.

The 'Return' of Caste

The three class-films that starred Chiranjeevi were made in a context in which caste was the central political question. Vivek Dhareshwar (1993) argues that the Indian government's decision to accept the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (which emphasised the need to extend reservations in education and employment to backward castes) had the effect of `de-freezing' caste. Suddenly caste was everywhere and threatened the very foundation of our modernity and the secularism (conceived as a transcendence of caste) of the secular citizen. It is possible to expand Dharesh war's argument, extending the moment when caste emerges at the heart of modernity (in Andhra Pradesh) to include the effects' of the Karamchedu massacre and the subsequent formation of the Dalit Mahasabha (1985).

By the 1980s, Dalits and backward castes became increasingly visible in government institutions at all levers--with a heavy concentration at the lower levels--as well as in elected bodies due to the reservation policy (Rami Reddy 1989). No doubt the representation of Dalits and backward castes remained low in proportion to the population of these groups. The two anti-reservation movements (1986 and 1990) however, demonstrate the resentment of the upper caste against the entry of Dalits and backward castes into institutions and spaces they considered theirs by right.

In 1985, the Dalit Mahasabha was formed in the wake of the massacre of Dalits by the upper

caste Kamma landlords and their supporters in Karamchedu village of Prakasam District. [11] With the formation of the Dalit Mahasabha, the Dalit movement, which has a long history in Andhra Pradesh going back at least to 1930s, entered a new phase. [12] Although the Mahasabha split within a short span, it produced a radical critique of society and drew attention to the persistence of caste hierarchies in supposedly secular democratic institutions (including radical left parties). The exclusion of Dalits and backward castes from civil social institutions as well as institutions of the state, it was pointed out, was not an accident.

Caste antagonism ruptured the social' (to use Laclau and Mouffe's terms once more) and as for the secular citizen was concerned, Dalits were the bearers of this antagonism. This is not, however, to claim that caste was ' discovered' after the formation of the Dalit Mahasabha or after the Mandal agitation. Cinema itself made countless attempts to render this antagonism--whose existence predates these events of the eighties--invisible or to disavow it The dominant tendency has been to avoid direct references to caste or to underplay them: for instance, in the veiled allusions that were relegated to the comedy track, specific occupations usually marked the comedian as lower caste. With the events of the eighties, however, caste antagonism erupted into the public domain, rendering the standard ways of alluding to it, including those witnessed in the mass-film, inadequate. My point is that the films under consideration need to be read in the light of the return' of caste and as part of an attempt to hegemonize a particular, elitist resolution of the caste question.

What is interesting and striking is not the conservative resolution of the problem (class-films are not known for their radical politics) but the way in which the problem itself is defined. What *is* specific to the class-film, or the mass-film for that matter, is not an ideology (for that is not confined

[11] See Balagopal (1988: 169-185) and Subba Rao (1995: 80-87) for a discussion on the Karamchedu massacre.

[12] See Omvedt (1994) for a discussion on the Dalit movement in the pre-independence period.

to cinema) but the means by which ideologies are simultaneously produced and reinforced.

Good Harijans and Bad Dalits

In *Swayamkrushi*, Sambaiah (Chiranjeevi) goes to a bank manager (whose daughter he saves from eve-teasers) for a loan. The manager offers seats to Sambaiah and danga (Vijayashanti) who later becomes his wife. Ganga tries to sit on the seat offered but Sambaiah quickly grabs her by the arm and pulls her to the floor where the two of them finally sit. This gesture of deference to the upper caste manager by a poor cobbler is one of those realistic moments in the film where the characters behave `naturally', as if in real life.

Richard Dyer argues that the understanding and judgement of characters

> depends upon the way a film associates a character with cultural/ideological values and attitudes. Such cultural assumptions are partly to do with stereotypical views of the social group to which a character belongs. This is to say, we judge a character to a certain extent on how s/he fits with our previous assumptions of what members of that group are like (1990: 258-259).

Sambaiah's gesture is an instance of realism because common sense tells us that caste is for real'. But this can simultaneously be read as a *fantasy* sequence because Sambaiah does what upper castes want Dalits to do. Here is a Dalit who is humble, polite, deferential to social superiors and insists on sitting on the floor because he knows his place. And he does this in a bank, a secular institution, while he is trying to get a loan which the state has already made available for Dalits like him and before a man whose daughter he has after all `saved*. Here is a 'Harijan', a figure who invokes the sympathy of upper castes, for whom rights are a gift of generous caste-Hindus. (I use the term to invoke the condescension implicit in Gandhi's coinage; the word `Dalit' coined by Ambedkar means oppressed[1], and implicates the upper castes in caste oppression.) The Harijan is a good (`authentic') Dalit: s/he is what a Dalit should be. This Harijan/good Dalit is a fantasy figure, a product of upper

caste anxiety resulting from caste antagonism.[13]

Sambaiah grows immensely wealthy during the course of the film, rising from a roadside cobbler to the owner of a shoe factory. His remarkable upward mobility is portrayed with the utmost economy. A few shots of Sambaiah and Ganga working hard and late into the night informs the spectator about his struggle. Caste does not come in the way of the progress of a good Dalit--or so the film suggests. Most of the problems Sambaiah faces are created by Govindu, bis brother-in-law.

Govindu is introduced to the spectator trying to commit rape. He is a drunkard, blackmailer, arsonist, womaniser and irresponsible father: in short a villain. His villainy is underscored by the casting of the popular screen villain, Charan Raj, in the role. He is the stereotypical bad Dalit, the Dalit who embodies the worst fears of the upper castes. He destroys society by resorting to the worst sort of crime (including trading his son for Sambaiah's wealth) and refusing to accept the moral order of things and is criminalized/demonized in consequence. In this film, the bad Dalit is put in his place by his other, the good Harijan.

The contest between the bad Dalit and the good Harij an unfolds in the film as the contest over the guardianship of Chinna (Govindu's son and Sambaiah's nephew). Despite the `sacrifices' made by Sambaiah and Ganga (of romantic love and motherhood respectively) Chinna grows up into an atrocious brat He insists on displaying his family's (newly acquired) wealth and ill-treats servants, fellow Dalit children, etc.

When Chinna misbehaves with a servant, Sambaiah insists on making him polish shoes by the roadside to teach him a lesson. Sambaiah has huge framed photographs of himself repairing shoes by the roadside, hanging like trophies on the walls of his palatial house. As a good (albeit foster) father, his endeavour is to ensure that Chinna like himself knows his origins and learns to live with due

[13] Tejaswini Niranjana and I have pointed out elsewhere that the good Dalit was invoked by upper caste students during the anti-Mandal agitation as deserving state support but never getting it because the benefits are cornered by aggressive, upwardly mobile Dalits (See Niranjana and Srinivas 1996: 3132).

humility.

Chinna's little rebellion is precisely against carrying the burden of his caste origins. Returning home after a day as a shoeshine, he flings the photograph of Sambaiah to the floor. He is thus produced as being contemptuous of the profession, referred to by Sambaiah as the mother who feeds', and of his uncle for forcing him to respect it. The film turns on its head Dalits' assertion of the dignity of caste professions by thrusting the profession (and by extension caste) on both the wealthy Sambaiah and his ward.

Govindu teaches his son to smoke and drink in an attempt to win custody over him and blackmail Sambaiah and in the process displays his villainy. He disqualifies himself from parenthood (not in the eyes of the law which grants him custody of his son, but before the spectator) and also underscores the correctness of Sambaiah's guardianship.

The film, however, ends happily because Chinna finally realizes that Sambaiah is his true father. Interestingly, the reunion of Chinna with his (foster) parents, Sambaiah and Ganga, is also a rejection of wealth (by all three) and a return to the caste-profession. The final sequence of the film depicts Chinna and Sambaiah sitting on opposite sides of the road with their tools. Chinna is reformed when he accepts his origins. The curtain falls.

Paradoxically, Sambaiah is presented as transcending his caste by knowing his place. His wealth, social status and the loyalty he commands from his workers are a result of his hard work and, crucially, of his *humility.* Indeed the hardest part of his work is presenting himself as humble. His assertion of his caste (by worshipping his tools, displaying his photographs, punishing Chinna) is not threatening to the upper castes because it is, paradoxically, a deference to caste (as an institution, a hierarchy). This Harijan is a Dalit who has shed his excess, rescued from the Real (used in the Lacanian sense) and integrated into the symbolic order He is quite literally an upper caste man playing the Dalit A good Dalit then is one in whom caste does not produce an antagonism: in a manner of speaking, he is a secular', casteless Dalit. In other words, the ' secular' Dalit, unlike the bad' Dalit,

does not threaten the social with rupture. At the same time, unlike the secular/upper caste citizen, the secular Dalit continues to bear the marks of caste (as is evident from the display of his photographs by Sambaiah).

The extent to which Dalits traumatize upper caste society' is evident from the complete erasure of caste discrimination in the film. The narrative is set in a casteless society which bears a striking similarity to the ideal Hindu society of the mythical past where caste was mere division of labour. The mythical past is also the Utopian future. This society is an extended Dalit family, without a past (almost everyone is an orphan), without a history of oppression, though threatened from within by the bad Dalit It evacuates the upper castes from the frame of the narrative and locates them at a vantage point which enables them to witness the struggle by the good Dalit on their behalf, and to ratify his actions. I shall presently discuss how the narrative invites the approval of the class-audience.

In *Aapadbandhavudu*, the good Dalit (the term Bahujan would be more appropriate but I retain Dalit' using it in its broader sense for convenience) is a Yadava, eternally grateful to his *Babugaaru* (master). Madhava (Chiranjeevi) sells his cows, sacrificing' his caste occupation (cattle rearing) for the sake of his Master. This action, performed twice, is to be read as raising him beyond his caste. The Master dedicates his books, bis life's work, to the unlettered Madhava when he comes to know of his (first) sacrifice. Madhava is rewarded for his 'castelessness'. After the Master's death be performs the sacrifice again, and this time he is left without a trace of his caste. On the other hand he acquires a cartload (literally) of his Master's books and becomes the guardian of the Brahmin's learning.

Like in *Swayamkrushi*, the state of castelessness is achieved by unqualified respect for the institution of caste. Madhava refuses (till the very end) to marry Hema (the Master's daughter) who is in love with him. Unfortunately her uncle completely misreads his intentions and accuses him of *swamidroham* (betrayal of the master). Throughout the film other people suggest that Madhava marry Hema (or accuse him of trying to do so) but Madhava knows bis place so well that he threatens to end

his life when Hema proposes to him. When he finally agrees, it is due to the threat of suicide by Sripathi (Hema's cousin and betrothed) and the invoking of the dead Master's wish by the very man who accused him of *swamidroham*.

Hema is the reward, the gift of Sripathi and his father, to the now-casteless Madhava: for his transformation into a secular Dalit, for services rendered to the Master's family, and for the preservation of the moral-social order. The entry into the Master's family (through marriage with Hema) is the entry into upper caste society. Madhava can acquire this privilege only by proving his loyalty to that society.

If *Aapadbandhavudu* dramatizes a movement of the protagonist from bearing a Dalit identity to castelessness, then there is a complementary movement in *Rudraveena,* which is a more conventionally modernist film. Suryam (Chiranjeevi) is a Brahmin who loses his caste (and becomes an outcaste for a while). Whereas in the other two films the loss of caste can be read as having occurred in the service of tradition', here it is a mark of modernity. *Rudraveena* explicitly thematizes reform as a means of entry into the modern.

Suryam's love for a Dalit girl Lalita (Sobhana) is a sign of bis modernity, and represented as a part of the hero's larger reformist agenda. His movement away from his caste needs to be seen in the context of his other disagreements with his father regarding social responsibility. His father, represented as a casteist Brahmin (casteism is produced as traditionalism in music, conservatism in social matters, and authoritarianism at home), himself becomes an object of reform. His connivance with the village drunks to foil Suryam's wedding leaves no room for doubt regarding his backwardness Casteism, like alcoholism, is an index of backwardness in the film and is thus seen as an enemy of progress. The Brahmin's casteism prevents him from performing his duty to society: to reach out to the masses and disseminate *culture* (represented by music in the film) and, by extension, to reform them.

Rudraveena also has good Dalits like Varalayya (PL. Narayana), a reformist lawyer and

Lalitha's father. Early in the film, he asks a lower caste/class client to mend his marriage and another to stop smoking, in lieu of his lawyer's fees. He however fails to reform the masses for reasons which I shall examine presently. What is important for the film's message is the alliance between the good Dalit and the good Brahmin, both isolated from their communities-one due to to his education and upward mobility and the other due to his willing downward mobility. These two casteless modernists who undertake reform are pitted against the unholy alliance between the bad Brahmin and the drunks (i.e., bad Dalits, since drinking is a caste marker in the film) who are antimodern and backward because they refuse to give up their caste.

In my discussion of *Swayamkrushi* and *Aapadbandhavudu* I have tried to show that castelessness doubles back on itself to reveal caste at its core. Although *Rudraveena* is highly critical of a certain variety of Brahminism, it locates itself well within the framework of the other two films. The good brahmin, like the good Dalit, is idealized into a Utopian figure. Both occupy positions which have been threatened (if not destroyed) in the wake of Dalit political assertiveness.

Reform and Stardom

What kind of castelessness do Suryam, Varalayya, Sambaiah and Madhava acquire? To generalise this somewhat, how are the star and the question of caste related in the class-film? Suryam in *Rudraveena* sees the propagation of *culture* amongst the masses as his responsibility. The disagreement with his father begins early in the film when he improvises a *raga* to make it more *accessible* to a group of woodcutters. His father, who believes that the duty of the musician is to Saraswati (the goddess of learning and music), chides him for meddling with, diluting, revolutionizing classical music. As the film progresses, the issue is no longer classical music but reform as concrete social change. Suryam does not merely take music to the masses: in the latter part of the film, music is not the point of debate at all. But Suryam loses his caste in his effort to propagate culture, something

Brahmins have and the masses lack, and alcoholism is the signifier of this absence in the latter. Music and alcohol are represented throughout the film as cultural and caste markers.

The difference between Varalayya and Suryam is not musical aptitude, for Varalayya's entire family--servant, dog and parrot included--is musically inclined. (The song *`Randi, randi, randi* demonstrates this clearly.) The difference is constituted, rather, by that which they have both `lost': caste. Only because culture' is caste specific, Suryam succeeds where Varalayya fails.

At another level, Suryam succeeds because he has to. He *is* Chiranjeevi and Chiranjeevi *cannot* fail. What makes Suryam/Chiranjeevi different from and superior to Varalayya/Narayana *is* caste and stardom. Stardom is that excess which persists despite deglamorization, `seriousness' and realism. There is no *outside* of stardom. What the class-film produces and advertises as the beyond of stardom is the reworking of stardom and the redeployment of the star.

The thematisation of caste/reform and the casting of the star as the agent of this reform is the laying down of an agenda for stars and by extension for cinema itself. *What* calls out for reform, what is delegitimized, about the star and cinema is thus crucial to the message. Therefore, although the movement in *Rudraveena* is a reversal (downward social mobility) of what happens in *Swayamkrushi* and *Aapadbandhavudu* (where castelessness accompanies upward mobility), in all these films *both* stardom and caste are excesses which have to disavowed but cannot entirely disappear.

Having borrowed the star from the mass-film and sublimated his excess (to a purpose/reform/responsibility) the class-film presents him (and by extension the castelessness he personifies) to the spectator as worthy of approval. Interestingly, the class-film's address is mediated by authority figures whose approval of the hero anticipates the spectator's reaction. Like the (intra-diegetic) masses in the mass-film who cheer the star's performance, these figures ratify the hero's actions and are crucial to the construction of a spectator position from which the film is to be viewed.

In *Swayamkrushi,* Mastaru (Somayajulu) a village school teacher (and undoubtedly a Brahmin) appears at various points of time to ratify Sambaiah's actions, to bless his efforts and to

certify them as acceptable (to upper caste society). He expresses his approval of Sambaiah's efforts to acquire wealth, his marriage with Ganga and his efforts to educate her by sending her to school. Mastaru is the moral, spiritual centre that Dalit society lacks. Further, he is seen settling the moral-social standards against which the progress of the protagonist/ star is measured

In *Aapadbandhavudu* Madhava's Babugaaru dies before the question of Madhava's marriage with Hema arises. The Master's dramatic death is noteworthy. Upon learning that Madhava raised the money for his eldest daughter's dowry, he decides to dedicate his books to him. During the dedication ceremonoy, which is strikingly similar in one respect to upper caste marriages, he washes Madhava's feet (which the bride's father does to the groom during the wedding ceremony), and dies embracing him. At the most crucial juncture in the film, when the question of who will marry Hema arises, he is absent Would the master have approved? Initially, Sripathi's father authoritatively claims that the Master would have died of shock. Later he himself interprets the gesture of dedication as approval. While ambivalence remains, as it is perhaps meant to, it is important to note that the absent authority and the interpreters of his will are upper caste men

The Indian state is the ratifying authority in *Rudraveena*. In fact, the state is the ratifying authority of *all* class-films as is evident from the inevitable award distribution by the central and state governments to class-films. However, in this fihn, much of the narrative is actually addressed to the state. The long flashback sequence is Suryam's narrative of bis story to Satyanarayana (Satyanarayana) the local MP. By the end of the sequence we learn that the village and dozens of others around it have been reformed But then the father remains adamantly Brahminical. It is only when the state rewards Suryam with an award, that the father makes a long overdue public statement at the award ceremony on the correctness of the path taken by his son. The society which has been reformed and reconstituted around Suryam is a modern one and can only be recognized/protected by the state. It is only by giving his consent to Suryam's marriage with Lalitha that the father becomes a part of this society

Despite the differences between them, in all these films, a ratifying authority is incorporated into the narrative. On the other hand, in the mass-film, the star-protagonist is the supreme (moral) authority and his actions do not require ratification. This state of anarchy' is what is threatening about the mass-film, despite its *internal* prohibitions and strictures against imitation of the star (discussed in the next chapter).

In the Vishwanath films the state is denied its rightful authority as the ultimate seal of approval. The state is indifferent in *Swayamkrushi*. It grants a loan to Sambaiah but fails to reform Govindu who comes out of prison a bigger and more prosperous crook; it takes away Chinna from his foster father Sambaiah. The corrupt politician Rayudu (Satyanarayana) is the only representative of the state in *Aapadbandhavudu*. The interests of the village community, the film suggests, cannot be protected by the representative of the state because, being corrupt, Rayudu is himself is a part of the problem of the degeneration in the public realm This difference in the attitude to the state in the Vishwanath films and *Rudraveena* is coterminous with other significant differences such as in the representation of tradition' and `modernity' in these films. However, I intend to point at the convergence between these films by going back to the star. He enables the narrative to stage crucial manoeuvres in different directions but towards a similar end in *Rudraveena* and the other two films respectively. State or no state, reform is envisioned in all these films as suturing the ruptured social, a rupture caused by the masses.

Cleansing the **Public Domain**

The turning point in *Aapadbandhavudu* is the withdrawal of Madhava from the public domain. In the early part of the film, despite his naivete Madhava is something of a public figure and a local hero. Soon after the beginning of the film, he beats up a gang of train robbers after asking them Isn't it wrong to take things which aren't yours?' His East-Godavari dialect (commonly used in popular

Telugu cinema to connote stupidity and inevitably to comic effect), his speech in bovine language (hilariously mistranslated by bis assistant), his quarrels, etc. add up to produce him as a comic figure. His withdrawal from the public sphere which coincides with the death of his Master, marks the end of the comic effect of his actions and speech, even though he continues to speak in the same dialect.

Earlier in the film, Hema tells him not to pick fights on behalf of the villagers (he makes an enemy of the corrupt local MLA for their sake) and to mind his own business. His public activity, staged as a comic performance, evokes a sense of excess and is therefore shown as ridiculous. On the contrary, his 'business' is to serve bis Master's family (the fight sequences in the latter part of the film are *not* comic). To do this be must withdraw from the public realm, not because his services are not required there, but because he *cannot* clean up the public domain while inhabiting it.

This stands out in stark contrast to the hero's role in the mass-film in which the crisis spills over from the public to the private sphere, and it becomes the hero's responsibility to save both from the enemy. As pointed out earlier, the entry of the masses into the public sphere is perceived as corrupting it. The Dalit in the public sphere is therefore a Dalit out of bis place (in this film he is portrayed as invoking ridicule), In *Aapadbandhavudu* the good Dalit is prohibited from entering this degenerate, politicized sphere--degenerate because it is politicized--and sullying himself by minding `other people's' business (actually that of other Dalits or the masses). So he vacates this irredeemably corrupt sphere and, by implication, he abandons the struggle for *rights* and encloses himself in the family' to fulfil his obligations and duties (as desired by upper caste society).

In *Swayamkrushi*, Sambaiah's struggle is primarily concerned with his family and yet he serves `society' by fighting Govindu who is a public enemy. By making the `family' stand in for upper-caste ' society,' both these films evade the question of rights. Neither Sambaiah nor Madhava recognize the existence of civil and political rights (which can be demanded). The state in *Swayamkrushi* proves itself incompetent by granting the custody of Chinna to his villainous father Govindu. Indeed the state is a part of the problem because it grants rights irrespective of the subject's moral (social) standing. In

the Bank Manager's office, Sambaiah demonstrates his refusal to acknowledge the existence of legally definable rights in general. In *Aapadbandhavudu*, Madhava wins Hema because (according to Snpathi) it is only jusf (*nyayam*) that he does so. This is because he has after all helped her regain her sanity/sexuality (and protected it from assault in the asylum), not because they are in love.

It is noteworthy that the good Dalit's role is defined essentially as that of a family man' who by withdrawing from the public realm dissociates himself from the bad Dalits who are corrupting it. Simultaneously, by defeating the enemy within', he actually cleans up the public sphere and, in the process, clears the way for the upper caste citizen to reclaim lost territory.

The reverse movement of Suryam in *Rudraveena* from the private sphere and the insular Brahminism of Ganapathi Sastry to the public sphere occurs for the same reason: the masses need to be reformed-put in their place. The bad Brahmin is casteist because he obstructs this movement of the good Brahmin from tiying to re-claim the public sphere. Suryam, the good Brahmin sacnfies his home, pleasure, inheritance and caste in the process of re-claiming the public domain. Suryam, after he leaves home, surveys the village and sees huts, his constituency. While a medium shot of Suryam and a panaromic view of the huts are juxtaposed, a poem of the revolutionary poet Sri Sri: *`Nenu Sattam'* is heard on the sound track-the claiming of the public sphere *is* the revolution. "The citizen's duty is to reform the public sphere by entering it and the good Dalit's is to achieve the same end by vacating it.

The political citizen, by definition upper caste, and the apolitical Dalit are protagonists of the same narrative of degeneration. The MP tells Suryam after he hears his story: 'what this country needs is not assemblies and parliaments but a Suryam in every village'. Who could be a more authentic

[14] Sri Sri (Srirangam Srinivasa Rao 1910-1983) was a famous revolutionary poet who also wrote lyrics for about 150 films (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1995). He was the first President of the VIRASAM (Revolutionary Writers Association) and the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC). The invocation of Sri Sri in the film is at once an invocation of the revolution and the golden age of cinema during which major Telugu poets and writers wrote lyrics and scripts for films.

notary of the degeneration of public life and the political establishment than a Member of Parliament? What this country needs, the narrative suggests, is a Suryam in every assembly and parliament. Since that is not possible within the framework of the narrative, Suryam must reestablish the domination of the Brahmin over the village by redefining Brahminism. Notably, even while the class-film recasts the star, it systematically delegitimizes the mass-film. In the class-film cleansing of the public domain is sought to be achieved by the cleansing of cinema: it invokes the redeployment of the star to ensure that he does not corrupt the gullible masses. The class-film articulates its `message' by way of multilayered intertextual references to the mass-film

The Slap

In *Swayamkrushi* Sambaiah disrupts a play performed by students of Sarada's college when the actor slaps Sarada (during the course of the play). Sambaiah climbs up to the stage, beats up the actor and holds forth to the audience on the need for drama to be socially responsible, which here means that it should not depict the denigration of womea The audience applauds his speech. Ignoring the moral of this class-film sequence, Chiranjeevi slapped the heroine in *Donga Mogudu* (1987), *Jagadeka Veerudu Atiloka Sundari* (1990), *Gharana Mogudu* (1992), *Alluda Majaka* (1995) and at least a dozen other mass-films.

Swayamkrushi may not have anticipated these incidents and condemned them in advance but it quite correctly predicted the trajectory of the mass-film. There is an influential critical narrative which asserts that violence and vulgarity are signs of the mass-film's irresponsibility. When the class-film makes a statement on the responsibility of art or cinema it is necessarily with reference to its other which has abdicated this responsibility.

In *Rudraveena*, the music-liquor opposition, as we have seen, is set up as an opposition between high and low, elite and mass cultures. Alcoholism must be rooted out and simultaneously,

classical music, suitably improvised, must be made available to the masses. So the song, a filmic component the film retrieves (like the star) from the mass-film, is transformed into a popularised version of a classical raga

The class-film also makes other significant gestures at propagating `authentic' culture. Madhava excels in playing the role of Shiva on stage. This is presented as authentic popular culture, unlike popular cinema (in general) whose lack of commitment to the propagation of the same is thus emphasised Later in the film Madhava, dressed as a clown, sings and dances in order to make Hema (who has lost her sanity) laugh. In the words of the reformed Ganapathi Sastry, *"Sanghahitame Sangeetam"* (music is what is good for society).

One of the chief attractions of the mass-film (especially the Chiranjeevi starrer) has been its songs. And according to a number of critics they have also been a source of much `vulgarity'. The class-film suggests they should propagate culture, which is defined as having a larger purpose than to merely entertain or provide pleasure unattached to a moral.[15] If songs of the class-film are `classical' (or laced with ' nativityO, fights are reduced in number and are not the kind of spectacles they are in the mass-film. There is a tendency in the mass-film to deploy violence. fights as a means of solving problems. Further, the fight and song of the mass-film produce male machismo as the chief source of stardom.

In the class-film, the fight (violence as a means of solving problems or registering protest) is not an option as far as the hero is concerned. It is not as if there are no fights but *generally* they are not presented as solving any problems. Sambaiah, for instance, fails to reform Govindu despite repeatedly thrashing him. In *Aapadbandhavudu,* the fights are comic,' unnecessary[1] (except for the last two which are in defence of Hema). However, it is in *Rudraveena* that the rejection of the fight

[15] The song began to decline when music became westernised,' says one Bhageeratha This unwelcome development, he adds, is coeval with the decline of the lyricists' status, increase in vulgarity and a general fall in the standard of the lyric. (*Andhra Prabha,* `Chitralekha,' 26 September 1997: 3).

sequence is most unambiguous.

Soon after leaving his father's home, Suryam goes to the local arrack shop and pleads with the drunks to stop drinking. They ridicule him and later beat him up. On the following day he returns saying he can speak in their language too, thrashes them and warns them to stop drinking. This is not only the lone fight sequence in the film but soon afterwards Suryam and Lalitha feel that the poor will not stop drinking just because they have been beaten up. The film suggests that violence is not a solution but it makes this point while showing that the ' fight' is not a legitimate source of pleasure in cinema. It therefore becomes necessary for the narrative to ensure that the spectator disavows his/her enjoyment of the fight sequence.

Finally, a sequence which brings together questions of stardom, cinema and reform and raps the mass-film for its lapses. The public function in which Suryam is presented with the Young Man of the Decade' award by the Prime Minister is held at the village temple. Enormous cut-outs of Suryam adorn the venue. This direct reference to fan culture (in AP and Tamil Nadu) seems to point to the inadequacies of this culture. The cut-outs thereby invoke the 'original' and simultaneously delegitimize it. However, what is being objected to is not stardom itself but the way it is deployed The cut-outs are not in themselves ridiculous; indeed their presence is justified because Suryam/Chiranjeevi is dedicated to reform or progress. By extension, the class-film does not object to stardom *per se* and is not worried about the audience imitating the star. But since the masses presumably imitate, it is imperative that his role does not relay the wrong message. The endeavour thus *is* to harness stardom in the service of `society'. Similarly, fan-culture is fine as long as fans do something productive, useful to society.

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argue that the tendency of the bourgeois or 'constitutive public sphere' *is:*

> to separate the producers of use-values and social experience, in other words the bearers of the collective will, from the tools with which this collective will can be created Its goal is to prevent the political public sphere from existing (Negt and Kluge 1993: 55).

The tools' extend from ' politics right to the structures of the psyche.' Cinema is an institution of the constitutive public sphere (not 'bourgeois' in the conventional sense but certainly controlled by the dominant caste/class) and, as the authors point out, the workers cannot constitute their interests by taking over this public sphere but must create their own, 'proletarian public sphere' (Negt and Kluge 1993: 58).

The working castes in our context do not control cinema. And it is possible that the 'take over' of cinema spaces witnessed in the context of the mass-film will not result in any substantial means of creating and expressing a radical politics. The 'problem' however is that cinema (the mass-film to be specific) is perceived as contributing to the politicization' criminalization of the public sphere because of its influence on the masses. This supposedly results in the takeover/corruption of cinema as it does of other institutions of the public sphere.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, politicization takes place *in spite of* the mass-film, but the class-film misrecognizes the mass-film as contributing to the problem and criminalizes it while subjecting it to reform, in order to prevent the political public sphere from existing' (Negt and Kluge). The class-film succeeds despite commercial failure. The class-film's address to the spectator is mediated by the mass-film.

The spectator of the class-film is the other of the mass-film's fan-spectator in that s/he recognizes the latter as an object of reform. The figure of the fan is crucial to the class-film's production of the mass-film as a corrupting, even criminal, agency as he embodies the antagonism within the cinema hall and relays it to the public sphere of cinema, the 'outside'. The class-film's critique of society, or rather, the politicization of the public sphere, is mediated by the mass-film and articulated as an attack on the latter because of the instability of the star-spectator relationship

established by the mass-film's narrative. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the star in circulation became the centre of a public sphere which expanded the scope of the discourse of rights to cover non-citizens. Consequently, institutions like fans' associations which were not hitherto recognized as 'political' became loci for the articulation of the discourse of lights. In the next chapter I shall discuss at some length how the mass-film is seen by its critics as contributing to the crisis in the social and/or of the public sphere. The narrative of degeneration is thus simultaneously produced across discursive spaces including the class-film, the mainstream press, and, as we shall see, political pamphlets. This narrative hinges on the assumption that the mass-film endorses the politicization of the public sphere of cinema and indeed directly contributes to it.

Finally, the fan occupies a space homologous and coterminous with the rowdy but is an immediate problem for the class-film because he is a disruptive presence within *cinema space*. Reforming the fan, imaged as a lumpen, is thus an important part of the class-film's reformist agenda and the genre therefore endeavours to effect a major transformation of the star. By recasting the star, the class-film attempts to change the star-spectator relationship and fan culture as well, in order that the fan sheds his lumpenness within and outside the cinema hall.

Chapter 4

Fans, Families And Censorship: The *Alluda Majaka* Controversy

For some time now popular Telugu cinema has been the source of considerable anxiety. Political parties, women's groups, the press and people within the film industry have often expressed serious concern about the progressive degeneration of the medium from the `message-bearer' of nationalism and social reform to a dispenser of cheap and dangerous thrills. The focus of this concern, in the eighties and nineties, became the mass-film, packed–as its critics saw it- with violence and obscenity in order to attract the 'masses.' The stars of the eighties, especially Chiranjeevi, the most popular of them by the mid-eighties, were directly implicated in what was seen as the `massifying' of the medium[1].

The *Alluda Majaka* controversy broke out at a time when already current fears about the impact of cinema were compounded by the widespread concern caused by developments related to what may, for the sake of convenience, be called liberalization.'

No other film in the recent past evoked the kind of response which *Alluda Majaka* (E. V. V. Satyanarayana, 1995) did. Newspaper reviews condemned the film, leftist women's organizations held demonstrations outside theatres screening the film, Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha (the women's wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Akhila Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) took out a protest rally, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) raised its objections to the film on the floor of the

[1] Some critics trace the origins of the problem to the mid-sixties and implicate A. Nageswara Rao and N.T. Rama Rao, in addition to Krishna etc. For example, see Kannala (1986).

Legislative Assembly and was joined by members of other parties including the ruling Telugu Desam Party. Women's groups on the left and right as well as legislators, cutting across party lines, demanded that the film be banned

Meanwhile, a major battle broke out in the Censor Board. The Examination Committee of the Board's regional office had supposedly suggested dozens of cuts (some say over 50) but the producer took the matter to the Revising Committee which overruled most of them. When the critics of the film attacked the regional Censor Board for its inability to adequately censor the film, the Examination Committee members complained to the Central Censor Board pointing out that the objectionable portions were precisely those it sought to delete. The Central Board decided to review the matter while the film was running to packed houses.[2]

Even while the opposition to the film gained momentum, Chiranjeevi fans in various parts of the state went on a hunger strike demanding that the film should not be banned. (See Illustration 8.) Two months after the film was released, when it was rumoured that the Censor Board's decision was forthcoming, Chiranjeevi fans held a rally in Hyderabad in support of the film. They threatened to commit suicide if the film was banned The film was not banned However, additional cuts were made after it had run for over three months.

Considered by its detractors to be the most obscene Telugu film ever, *Alluda Majaka* is in many ways a typical Chiranjeevi film (See Illustration 9.) It closely resembles his *Attaku Yamudu Ammayiki Mogudu* (1989) and has shades of *Khaidi No. 786* (1988) and *Gharana Mogudu* (1992).

In the film, Sitaram (Chiranjeevi) is the son of the benevolent patriarch of his village who has been the Panchayat President for the past thirty years. Sitaram, his family and the village community are victimized by Vasundhara (Lakshmi) and Peddaiah (Kota Srinivasa Rao). Peddaiah's Non-

[2] I am grateful to Gudipoodi Srihari, journalist and Ramesh and Swamy Naidu of State Wide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association for alerting me to the controversy with the Censor Board. I must add that I have done injustice to both their versions and made a brutal summary of what is supposed to have happened See also *India Today* (Telugu), 6-20 May 1995.

Resident Indian (NRI) son, Chinna (Chinna) comes to the village to look' at Vasundhara's elder daughter Pappi (Ramya Krishna), but decides instead to marry Sitaram's sister, Malleswari (Ooha), a traditional Telugu girl' (`*Teluginiti ammayi*'). Peddaiah agrees to the marriage after he realizes that the ancestral land which Sitaram's father had distributed to the coolies contains priceless granite deposits. He demands the land as dowry days before the proposed marriage. Sitaram's father refuses to take it back from the coolies. Peddaiah cancels the marriage. Vasundhara is angered by Chinna's choice but dupes the coolies, steals their land and makes a deal with Peddaiah. Chinna's marriage is fixed with Pappi without his knowledge. Meanwhile it becomes public knowledge that Malleswari is pregnant (Chinna, before returning to America, has had sex with her). Sitaram's father commits suicide when he realizes that the coolies have lost their recently acquired land Sitaram and Malleswari move to the city, awaiting Chinna's return.

Upon Chinna's return, Malleswari is falsely arrested for prostitution before bis eyes. Disgusted, Chinna rejects her. Sitaram is framed (by Peddaiah) in the murder of a police officer and subsequently sentenced to death. He escapes from custody and forcibly marries Pappi who is all set to get married to Chinna. With the help of a lawyer, Sivarama Krishna (Giribabu), the estranged husband of Vasundhara, Sitaram comes out of prison on parole. He is then transformed by his father-in-law into Toyota, a rich NRI on the lookout for an Indian bride, to teach Vasundhara a lesson in femininity and to resolve the multiple crises of the film After another arrest and dramatic escape from prison, Sitaram defeats the villains and restores order. Finally, Sivarama Krishna and Vasundhara are reunited, Malleswari marries Chinna and Sitaram finds himself in a bedroom with Pappi and her younger sister Bappi.

The *Alluda Majaka* controversy foregrounds the dilemmas of the left, including leftist women's groups, regarding issues related to popular culture in general and cinema in particular. Not only did the religious right—BJP and BJMM—set the terms of the *Alluda Majaka* debate but it also ensured, with

its superior resources, that its voice was most clearly heard in public. [3] There is a disturbing similarity between the left, right and apolitical' participants despite the difference in their location and stated concerns.

Obscenity, or more specifically, objections to it happens to be among the most readily available means of initiating a public discussion on cinema and of accessing the official public sphere, particularly the mainstream print media. For instance, in the recent past there have been court cases and campaigns against individual 'obscene' films like *Teneteega* (Nandakumar, 1991), *Bandit Queen* (Sckhar Kapur, 19%) and of course, *AJluda Majaka;* campaigns against obscenity in the media (in general) which involved pamphleteering, blackening of publicity posters, occasional raids on cinema halls (exhibiting obscene films), innumerable letters to editors of newspapers and film reviews or other writings on cinema targetting obscenity.

Obscenity was the rallying point for the opponents of *Alluda Majaka*. Their diverse concerns found a meeting point in an anti-obscenity campaign. I wish to argue that individuals with otherwise differing institutional and political affiliations came together to form a *public* and that obscenity functionied as a 'gatekecping concept[1] in their intervention in the debate on popular cinema. Arjun Appadurai who coined the phrase 'gatekeeping concepts' explains that

> a few simple theoretical handles became metonyms or surrogates for the civilization or society as a whole.. [they are examples of concepts] that seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question, and define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region (Appadurai 1986: 357).

Obscenity is one such theoretical handle' which seems capable of setting the terms for a debate on cinema. As we shall see, the public thus fanned (to cleanse cinema) does not merely exclude certain

[3] In almost all the statements made by Chiranjeevi fans during the controversy, they attacked the BJP. BJMM and intellectuals', implying journalists like Qudipoodi Srihari who wrote the first critical review. Chiranjeevi said the controversy was the rcsuhofa'communal political party's attempt to capture public attention' (Interview, Hyderabad, 20 July 1995). It is as if the leftist women's groups did not make an intervention.

sections of the audience but more importantly, the society. It is in fact defined in opposition to them.

I would like to examine what obscenity signifies for the public that opposes it and how these particular significations then work to produce an antagonism between 'women' and `masses'. The construction of women and masses moreover is such that women arc seen as upper caste and middle-class while the masses are seen as lower caste/class rowdies. Interestingly, the film too depicts women and the masses as antagonistic collectives, though in a manner quite different from their production within the obscenity debate. Consequently, both the film and its critics mutually reinforced the notion of a society threatened by the agency of women and the masses. The larger question the *Alluda Majaka* controversy raises is how films arc watched by their audiences. This is of crucial importance to those interested in reading the debates on cinema as also debates on understanding and changing the social/society.

Section I

That obscenity was not a problem only for *film critics* is evident from the fact that from 1969 onwards, readers and interviewers of various newspapers and magazines repeatedly asked the famous revolutionary poet Sri Sri (who wrote lyrics for dozens of films) to account for the increasing obscenity in films (Sri Sri 1990: 35, 39, 93 and passim). A clear indication of the degeneration of cinema, particularly in the eighties and nineties according fc> *its* critics, obscenity is seen as a problem because of its appeal to certain sections of the audience on whom it exerts a powerful negative influence.

Annette Kuhn in her study of the censorship debates in early twentieth century Britain points out, During this period [1909-1925], strategies for regulation of cinema were guided by assumptions about *who* cinema was for' (1988: 119). Although our context is very different from the one Kuhn studies, her work alerts us to the critical role played by `fears about the peculiar vulnerability of certain social groups to cinema in the attempts to regulate it' (Kuhn 1988: 120). In our context, the issue of

obscenity matters for its critics because of what it supposedly does to the audience, who, as we shall see, are represented as the real source of the problem.

In this section I examine the views expressed on obscenity by participants of the obscenity debate. Some of them were major players in the *AlludaMajaka* controversy while others, for one reason or the other did not express their opinions about the film publicly but have interesting observations to make on the issue.

For Marxist-Leninist women's groups, the audience is firstly the *victim* of cinema and other media. In the '90s, according to mis section, the media transmit imperialist propaganda which makes them all the more dangerous. One activist is reported to have said, 'Obscene culture is imperialist culture It distracts people from the struggle to solve their problems. It is a culture which emasculates them [*nirveeryulanichestundi*]'.[4] A pamphlet by the same organisation, occasioned by an acid attack on a woman student by a man who claimed to be her lover, points out, [T]his poisonous imperialist culture, this STAR and film culture, not only ensures that the youth do not have the time to think about society but it also completely misleads them.'[5] Sandhya, President of the Progressive Organization of Women (POW), argues that in the 1990s, women are being commodified in the name of modernization. Obscenity is gaining currency through beauty contests and fashion parades.' The danger is of, urban-elite, imperialist culture making inroads into the lower classes.' As a result the youth are getting spoilt, values are being eroded.'[6]

Owing to the pervasiveness of obscenity and violence in the media, people these days tend to imitate the actions they see in films and television, leading to violent sex crimes against women,'

[4] *Mahila Morgan*, April-June 1996: S3.

[5] Mahila Chetana, *Anuradhapai Dadiki Karanamaina Visha-samskruthini Roopumaapudam* (Pamphlet).

[6] All statements of Sandhya quoted in mis chapter are based on a personal interview by the author at Hyderabad on 5 October 1996.

argues Sandhya. Film posters, which ate everywhere, arc becoming increasingly obscene and in the process, `poisoning the minds of even children.'[7]

R Swamy Naidu, Secretary of the Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association, (who has nothing to do with the women's movement or the anti-obscenity campaign and was one of the organisers of the fan rally in support of the film) argues, some youth think they can imitate what films show', forgetting that cinema is only for relaxation'. He estimates that 5 per cent of the population, all of which comprise the youth, get spoilt (*paadaipotaaru*)because of `crime and exposure in films and end up committing crime'.*

So, children,' youth,' people', are the victims of cinema/media. They are also me aggressors who victimize women The Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya pamphlet (tied above) concludes, `The extent of the impact of cinema, STAR culture [in a patriarchal society] *is* evident from me day-to-day increase in the attacks and crimes against women.' Increasing violence against women is explained, made intelligible, as the influence of cinema (and other media) on potential aggreason who are transformed into actual aggressors.

Vijayalaxmi (President, Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha. Andhra Pradesh) feels that upper class men are not influenced by cinema in any significant way Cinema makes, youth and lower classes ask "should we drink, commit crime, rape"?[9] For Vijayalaxmi cinema is part of a larger problem: the breakdown of traditional values, family and society. Today's cinema teaches both male and female `students', *how to*elope, *lave, have sex* (emphasis added) Society is thus already on the road to ruin. She says helplessly, ` There is a limit to how much we [the BJMM] can do. *Society*

[7] Andhra Pradesh Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya, `*Asleela Sahityanni, Cinimalanu, Vyaparaprakatanalanu Nishedhinchali*' (pamphlet).

[8] Interview, Hyderabad, 13 November 1996.

[9] Vijayalaxmi's statements quoted in this chapter are based on an interview at Hyderabad on 1 December 19%.

should change' (emphasis added) According to her, Ours is a society in which parents no longer care about the way their daughters dress.' In feet, parents are encouraging the spread of vulgar fashions.' However, she adds, it is cinema which popularizes these fashions'. The way heroines dress, for example, is imitated by young girls. Vijayalaxmi argues that girls and their parents are partly responsible for sexual harassment by men because the way girls dress 'can have an impact on men.' She feels, 'this generation is interested in [night] clubs, disco, fast musk... drinking and cinema have a powerful negative impact [on it].'

Obscene cinema, therefore, is at once a symptom of and cause for the crumbling of the institutions of society. These are the signs of our times. Not only the right but the left too is deeply distressed by the breakdown of the 'social order'. At a public meeting held by Mahila Chetana to protest against obscenity, a young woman is reported to have said, 'Owing to the influence of cinema even those who are like brothers [*annayya varasa ayyevalley*] say "I love you".'[10]

Bom Vijayalaxmi and leftist women's groups speak of the impossibility of 'women' watching films, because they are obscene. The pleasure of the family' or 'women' is destroyed by obscenity. Vijayalaxmi argues, 'It is possible that an unfamiliar male [*parayimagavadu*—one who is not the husband or a relative] sits beside me [in the theatre]. When that scene [an obscene sequence from *Alluda Majaka*] appears on the screen, I don't know what his feelings are but *ladies* feel *very uneasy*' (emphases indicate the use of English words in fee original statement) According to the Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya pamphlet (cited above), 'Today's films cannot be watched by all the members of the family... [they] portray women only as sex objects.'

Read by leftist women's groups as a manifestation of patriarchy, obscenity becomes a source of indecency, acutely embarassing to women. This shift is enabled by the imaging of the target audience of the film as primarily lower class/caste. The assumption is mat the obscene film is *meant*

[10] *Mahila Margam*, April-June 1996: 23.

for the masses whose pleasure is at the expense of the embarassment of women/ 'ladies'. Women are so constructed in this debate as normative female subjects whose upper caste, middle-class status is so self-evident as to be invisible. And the victimization of these women begin in the cinema hall: it is as if their embarassment is the source of the enjoyment of the masses.

Vijayalaxmi referring to a scene (which has the heroine `offering' her husband to his former lover) indignantly remarked. What kind of an impact will this have on the audience? ... They cheered and whistled. *They were enjoying it.* Who? Those who sal in the C class [front seats] (emphasis added)'. It is not clear why the sequence referred to by Vijayalaxmi is obscene, since it is not sexually explicit She found the sequence morally offensive and by labelling it as obscene demonstrates that the concept (obscenity) is a signifier of a whole range of anxieties. (I shall return to these anxieties in a while.) Vijayalaxmi's statement also suggests that criminality of the masses lies, at least partly, in their uninhibited celebration of the embarassment of ladies. In other words, an audience which is capable of cheering and whistling at what is shameful and offensive to women must be a criminal audience.

In fact, K Narasaiah, a film journalist and sympathizer of the Communist Party of India, actually argues that obscene cinema's audience, the mass, is not only male and lower class but is also an audience of criminals. He argues that the increase of obscenity in the eighties is a direct consequence of the changed composition of the audience. He feels that in the past, a significant proportion of the audience comprised of middle and lower middle-class fiunilies With the arrival of television and video, they abandoned cinema to, mechanics, artisans, rowdies, crooks etc.'[11] Narasaiah's argument is often inverted in the obscenity debate to make the claim that the middle and lower middle-class families, and therefore, women', abandoned cinema halls *because* of the increased obscenity in films The genre which caters to the lower class, criminal, male audience is of course known as the mass-film'. There is no di: pute that the mass-audience patronizes the mass-film This

[11] Based on a personal interview at Vijayawada on 19 December 1996.

opinion is shared by political activists, the film industry's rcprcscntativcs, film critics and even leaders of fans' associations.

Arent the artisans, crooks etc. accompanied by their 'families'? The point is not the actual presence or absence of women but their visibility. This not only depends on their class status but also the kind of film tbey are supposed to enjoy watching. The opponents and supporters of the mass-film are so sure that `women' are embarassed by obscenity that in their narratives women disappear from the audience. Chiranjeevi fans, for instance while accepting the dominant construction of the audience of obscenity, arrived at a different conclusion about *Alluda Majaka*. *They* repeatedly claimed that the film was being watched by women and was therefore *not* obscene.[13] This line of argument didnt convince the film's opponents who continue to assert that women did not watch flic film.

Gudipoodi Srihari argues that Chiranjeevi lost women viewers due to *Alluda Majaka*. He suggests that the masses are responsible for (the making of) obscene films like *Alluda Majaka* because, `no producer is really interested in playing with sex.'[13] Swamy Naidu who has no love lost for film critics, paradoxically echoes Srihari in his defence of the film, The mass audience needs *masala*.' According to him, however, the film was well within the limits of decency because women watched *it* All the assertions, claims and counterclaims regarding the composition of the audience are not based on any systematic audience survey. While audience surveys may throw light on different aspects of collective film viewing, it is doubtful if they can be deployed to challenge the dominant assumptions about the tastes of different sections of the audience.

For its critics, the problem with *Alluda Majaka* was that it was meant fc> be a mass-film. It was intended for the `front benchers', the C class audience. When the film was being made, Chiranjeevi seemed to agree when he said with profound regret:

[12] *Andhra Jyoti*, 24 April 1995: 12.

[13] Srihari's statements quoted in mis chapter are based on a personal interview at Hyderabad on 24 November 1996.

> When we [stars] try to satisfy our artistic urge by doing performance oriented roles, they [fans/masses] are not satisfied. We survive because of them... [So] I decided that my duty [*dharmam*] was to the mass-audience. They are the ones who love me. They made me popular. So, although I have the desire to do other roles, finally I decided to do what they like.[14]

Chiranjeevi used the term `masses' synonymously with fans' during his interviews with me. For Chiranjeevi, his fans and critics, the `masses' comprise the majority of popular cinema's audience. In the obscenity debates, they are indistinguishable from `lumpens' and 'rowdies' for all practical purposes. These are the people who dont and also cant appreciate serious cinema. So well does Chiranjeevi know his masses that he said, `If I [*Alluda*

[me to play] these [`non-serious,' vulgar] roles.'

Alluda Majaka reinforced a belief which has acquired the status of an uncontestable truth: the masses, obscenity and criminality are inextricably linked. In fact, the mass-film, as a category (of which this film is perhaps the best example in recent times) is a problem for its critics because it addresses the masses, caters to their taste and abets their propensity to crime. The *Alluda Majaka* controversy was firmly grounded on these assumptions. The opponents of the film could claim to be on the side of `society' by trying to prevent the `masses' from watching the film by calling for its ban.

I would now like to examine what is this thing called obscenity and why does it induce such anxiety in its critics?

What is Obscenity?

Srihari says, obscenity is vulgarity of expression'—thinly veiled references to private parts and sexual intercourse in dialogues and lyrics; bodily exposure, physical gestures suggesting sexual

[14] Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

intercourse. Enjoyed by the masses in their ignorance and tastelessness, it deeply disturbs civilized society and makes it feel ashamed,' to borrow a phrase from a pamphlet by a women's group.[15]

According to Srihari, it is not possible to clearly define obscenity. *We* recognize it when we come across it `[A]ny normal, thinking person, with average intelligence, cannot enjoy it [obscenity] and reacts negatively.' On the other hand, `some in the audience do not find anything obscene.' They are, of course, the masses.

Why are *we* 'naturally' outraged and offended by obscenity? Because, Srihari suggests, the primary source of obscenity is the entry of the sex-act' into the public (as opposed to the private) domain via cinema. This is one of the reasons why the masses and obscenity go together. Unlike `us,' the educated, middle-class section,

> [c]oolies, uneducated people, have a different [notion of the] sex-act. They live under trees, in shacks and don't have privacy. They have sex under trees, we in the bed-room. Their sex-act is reflected in films and they enjoy it

For respectable middle-class people, then, obscenity is anything which violates the sexual mores of civilized society. Deviations then, such as sex in the wrong places (screen), sexual desire expressed by the wrong person (heroine chasing the hero'), for the wrong character (mother-in-law) and unsublimated love (Vijayalaxmi laments mat in obscene cinema love becomes sex), etc. become instances of the obscene.

Srihari's statement also points to the grounding of the anti-obscenity campaign in the elite's paranoia of the masses' social-sexual practices corrupting `society' (which is of course conceived as upper caste, middle-class society) The anxiety that obscene cinema violates and threatens the sexual mores of society' manifests itself in the objection raised to *Alluda Majaka*'s mother-in-law sequences' (for want of a better phrase). Local customs and traditions were invoked to condemn these sequences.

[15] Chaitanya Manila Samakhya, op. at

Sandhya, referring to the infamous song sequence, *Atto, attamma kooturo* (which features the hero in a dance sequence with his mother-in-law, wife and sister-in-law), argues that the film dealt a blow to nativity' (implying local custom):

> [O]ur culture equates the mother-in-law with mother... Although sons-in-law expect and receive dowry, harass their wives and even kill them, they never misbehave with their mothers-in-law. After viewing this film, they will start doing so.

The left and the right have no disagreement on this issue.[16] The point is not whether the custom in question is `universal' to all caste/class groups of Andhra society but the left's acceptance of the dubious claim that 'nativity' is worthy of unqualified support

Everyday forms of women's oppression, precisely because they are everyday occurrences, are seen as more tolerable than the attack on `nativity'. Exploitation and objectification of women as invoked by the leftist women's groups in the obscenity debate are infused with the fear of the 'erosion of tradition'. This, in fact, is a position often associated with the right. The left draws on the dominant construction of tradition as it does on the construction of 'women' and 'masses', categories that the leftist project has itself problematized.[17] Moreover, the `nativity' argument is marshalled to reinforce the caste/class endogamy of upper caste, middle-class society, as is evident from the condemnation of the `vulgar heroine(s)' in *Alluda Majaka* and other contemporary films

Srihari argues, `[T]oday's heroine is worse than the vamp of yester years.' Implying that the vamp' or `cabaret' dances are not in themselves obscene any longer. (This jutdgement too is made

[16] It is worth noting that at least one participant, in the workshop where a draft of this chapter was presented, mistook Sandhya's comments on the mother-in-law sequences for Vijayalaxmi's. The confusion was caused because I did not mention Sandhya's name before the statement

[17] Strangely enough, the onus of questioning the wholesale appropriation of tradition by the BJP in the course of the controversy fell on the film's supporters. The film's script-writer, Posani Krishna Murali, cited Telugu folk songs which transgress the incest taboo in an attempt to take the sting out of the BJP attack. See *Superhit*, 12 May 1995: 10.

when speaking retrospectively.) On the other hand, both Sandhya and Vijayalaxmi felt that the vamps were obscene alright, but that the cinema of the late sixties and seventies, in which cabaret reqwenree were a regular feature, was well 'within limits'. In the films in which the vampish role was carefully distinguished from the heroine's part, there was no way the audience could miss the vamp (often played by specialists who were stars in their own right) when she appeared in the narrative. So long as the sexually available woman was branded and stigmatized as the vamp, obscenity was justifiable after all, she could be titillating without producing too much guilt because she got her just desserts in the end. Further, modes of representing the vamp often made her class/caste origins evident (let us not forget that the representation of vamps often invoked the traditions of the courtesan or *devadasi*).

The heroine, particularly in films like *Alluda Majaka* which feature a lower class hero, represents the upper caste, middle-class woman. When she indulges in 'over exposure', it becomes a moral problem of enormous magnitude for the middle-class because, to use Vijayalaxmi's phrase, *'they* are enjoying if. *They*, the masses, are getting the wrong idea: that `our' women are sexually available. And thus the masses get the impression that the class/caste endogamy of the elite can be tampered with.[18] Like the mother-in-law sequences, the vulgar heroine can and is indeed read as a threat to `nativity'. Srihari, for instance, insists: `In our society women do not run after men [i.e., make passes at them]'. Whether this threat to nativity posed by obscenity is perceived as emerging from an imperialist culture (as Sandhya argues) or from the current crop of film makers and stars, the issue at hand is definitely not of women's oppression alone.

`Obscenity', even when it is mobilized by the left in its intervention, has less to do with sexism and the exploitation of women than with the indignation of upper caste, middle-class citizens. In the *Alluda Majaka* controversy, the left not only failed to redefine obscenity as sexism but reinforced the

[18] See Prasad (1994: 300-301) for a discussion on the preservation of class/caste endogamy in Hindi cinema. In fact, as far as *Alluda Majaka* is concerned, it is possible to argue that `social order' or the endogamy of the elite *is* not threatened. See Section II below.

rightist anxiety to protect the normative female subject from the male gaze of the lower class masses.

Further, *A lluda Majaka* would continue to be a sexist film even if all the fifty odd instances of obscenity (identified by the Censor Borard) were to be deleted Sexism and patriarchal values in popular cinema do not reinforce themselves only through obscene sequences. To cite an example from Chiranjeevi's own career, *Hitler* (Mutyala Subbaiah, 1997), a `clean film' which was incidentally celebrated in print by Gudipoodi Srihari, an ally of the left in the *A lluda Majaka* controversy. In this film, the hero indulges in as many as five acts of violence against the heroine and his sisters and all of them are justified by the narrative. But, not surprisingly, *no one* protested publicly against the film—it wasn't obscene after all.

My unease with the deployment of the argument against obscenity by the left is firstly due to its tendency to avoid public discussions on cinema except with reference to obscenity (and violence to a lesser extent, but that is another story altogether). Secondly, the composition of the anti-obscenity alliance as also the anxieties articulated by it, are deeply disconcerting to anyone who is sympathetic to the left and is interested in a broadly leftist intervention in the debates on popular culture It is for this reason that 1 have been critical of the leftist contribution to the obscenity debate As we have seen above, concern about sexism, which is a concern of leftist women's groups and not the BJMM or the upright film critic, is expressed in terms of the anxiety about nativity', embarassment of women', breakdown of the family and its pleasures, lustful masses, etc.

The appeal of obscenity as a critical tool lies in its ability to evoke a whole range of anxieties and therefore find a captive audience in a public which *defines itself* in opposition to the 'youth', people', lower classes' etc. The actual composition of the public of the anti-obscenity campaign *is* not necessarily upper caste and middle-class. (For instance some of the statements cited from *Mahila Margam* were not made by upper caste middle-class women.) Nevertheless, the anxieties invoked and reinforced by the debate, as I have tried to show, mark this public as essentially upper caste and middle-class. It is precisely this kind of public which *is* formed by the means of the now familiar

manoeuvre of dissociating itself from obscene cinema. There is actually a popular term, often used in Telugu film magazines, to conceptualize the standardized middle-class audience of cinema which supposedly *does not* watch/enjoy obscene films-class-audience'. The participating public of the anti-obscenity campaign produces itself as an extension of the class-audience—its projection—into the public sphere. Ironically, by wielding obscenity as a critical category, the left enters the debate on cinema as a constituent of the elite public articulating upper caste, middle-class anxieties. The obscenity argument cannot be reformulated to make a feminist critique of sexism in the cinema. The fundamental anxiety invoked by obscenity is one which results from the encounter, on-screen and off-screen, between me upper caste, middle-class female and her lower caste/class male aggressor. This norming of the female victim and her male aggressor was brought into sharp focus in the immediate aftermath of the Chunduru massacre (as pointed out in Chapter 2). Recent writing by feminist scholars has drawn attention to the implications it has for feminist practice. In their discussion of the problem, Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana (19%) observe:

> The category of `woman', and therefore in a very important sense the field of feminism as well as the female subject, emerge in this context by obscuring the Dalit woman and marking the lower caste as the predatory male who becomes the target of `feminist' rage (243).[19]

The obscenity debate—particularly the way in which it frames issues related to gender, caste and class—raises important questions for the left in general.

In my examination of the fan intervention in the controversy and the film *Alluda Majaka* in Section II, I would like to discuss some of these questions and argue mat understanding the politics of spectatorship is crucial for a critical engagement with cinema which is sensitive to the socio-political implications of the issues thrown up by the current debates on the medium Because we watch films

[19] See Section titled 'Mandal and Chunduru' is Tharu and Niranjana (19%: 237-243) for the discussion on the construction of the upper caste, middle-class woman as the victim of the lower caste male.

as collectives *vaAform* collectives in the course of watching films, what goes on the process of watching or talking about films merits close attention.

Section II

In the obscenity debate we witnessed me formation of an audience collective around an issue (obscenity) or a particular kind of cinema (mass-film or obscene cinema). This collective approximates closely to the class-audience and an elite public of cinema. There is another articulate collective which is also formed around cinema which I have only mentioned in passing, i.e., fans, particularly those organized under the banner of fans' associations. In this section I discuss briefly some responses by Chiranjeevi's fans to the dominant construction of the supposed audience of obscene cinema. Fans, it would seem, are quite obviously fond of obscene films-they are a part of the mass-audience and actually defended *Alluda Majaka*. However an examination of the terms on which fans defended the film alerts us to how the opponents of the film presented themselves to the former (and possibly other sections of the mass-audience).

Almost all public statements by fans during the controversy accuse intellectuals', 'politicians' and 'leaders' of making an issue of the film to gain publicity. One of them states, 'given this is a Chiranjeevi film, no mater what they [the critics of the film] say, they can become " popular" and see their names in the newspapers.'[20] Films and television channels associated with the urban middle-class were attacked.

> Don't these elders [*pedda manushulu*] who want to ban *Alluda Majaka* know how terrible programmes are on Zee and STAR TV?...

[20] Text of press-note released by Akhilandhra Chiranjeevi Yuvatha on 24 April 1995 when a rally was organized in Hyderabad by fans in defence of the film.

> If these people were really concerned about obscenity, they would have prevented English films like *Basic Instinct* from being screened...[21]

They went on name half-a-dozen 'obscene' films produced by Ramoji Rao and D. Rama Naidu both producers (especially the former) associated with clean' (read middle-class) cinema, suggesting that the elites were conveniently blind to the obscenity in their own favourite films/TV channels. *Alluda Majaka* on the other hand, was *not* obscene but was being targetted for dubious reasons. They offered to prove that the film was clean:

> For almost sixty days, 250 theatres across the state have screened *Alluda Majaka* which has received phenomenal support from the people... Even if one woman bangs her head in shame after watching the film, we, Chiranjeevi fans, will hang ourselves there and then.[22]

What was the opponents' *real* reason for raking up the controversy, apart from gaining publicity? Public statements by fans' associations frequently referred to a plot to defame Chiranjeevi Although they did not elaborate it in public, they made it clear that certain 'big people' wanted to destroy him. The fact that such attempts are being made, and that this controversy was only the latest in a series of such unsuccessful attempts; is something of an open secret, according to members of the fans' associations.

The fens' analysis goes something like this the Kammas, who controlled the film-industry for decades, were afraid of the popularity of Chiranjeevi This self-made non-Kamma worked his way up from the bottom without the backing of big-shots. The industry was organizing itself around Chiranjecvi and thus the fiefdom of the Kammas was slipping out of their control Powerful Kammas like Ramoji Rao, owner of the *Eenadu* group of publications and a film producer, D. Rama Naidu,

[21] Akhilandhra Chiranjecvi Yuvatha, cited above.

[22] Akhilandhra Chiranjecvi Yuvatha, cited above.

owner of a film studio in Hyderabad and father of Venkatesh one of Chiranjeevi's rivals,' Mohan Babu, film star and producer, Ch. Vidyasagar Rao, floor leader of the BJP in the Assembly, etc., came together to destroy Chiranjeevi and reestablish the hold of Kammas over the industry.[23] Further, Chiranjecvi's unchecked popularity would tempt him to enter politics and end the domination of Kammas (and Reddys) in politics. It is telling that the first nasty review of *Alluda Majaka* appeared in the film magazine *Sitara* (written by Gudipoodi Srihari), published by Ramoji Rao. Immediately afterwards BJP took up the issue and ignorant political activists and others played into their hands to see their names in the newspapers.[24]

Notably, the fan intervention focussed more on attacking what they perceived to be the elite opposition to the film, and of course the star, than on defending the film. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the activities of fans in support of the star enabled fans to enter public spaces to negotiate their subalternity. But we have already seen in the previous section that there is a considerable overlap in the position of the film's critics and its supporters (like Swamy Naidu and of course Chiranjeevi) on the alleged preference of the masses for obscene films. Since the imagined audience of obscene films is so central to the debate and so much is held in common by members of different publics in this regard, I will begin by asking what is clearly not a simple question: who enjoys obscenity? Obscenity (or violence for that matter) is supposed to be dangerous because *some* people, often the same people who enjoy it, are prone to mistaking the film for reality and imitating what they see on screen.

Christian Mctz, discussing Octave Mannoni's work, points out that the audience *knows* that film is a fiction but `everything [in cinema] happens as if there was nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really would "believe in it"' (Mctz 1982:72). Who is tins person? According to Metz,

[23] Vidyasagar Rao is not a Kamma but that did not in any way challenge the conspiracy theory.

[24] My two informants wish to remain anonymous.

> [T]he credulous person is, of course, another pan of ourselves, he is still seated beneath the incredulous one, or in his heart, it is he who continues to believe, who disavows what he knows (he for whom all human beings are still endowed with a penis). But by a symmetrical and simultaneous movement, the incredulous person disavows the credulous one; no one will admit that he is duped by the 'plot'. That is why the instance of credulousness is often projected into the outer world and constituted as a separate person, a person completely abused by the diegesis... (Mete 1982: 72).

The *Alluda Majaka* controversy not only posited the 'masses' as a credulous audience but also labelled mem as the addressee of obscenity. Despite the success of this 'obscene' film, no one was guilty of enjoying the obscene sequences in *Alluda Majaka*. The response of Chiranjeevi fans to the film is indeed illuminating As far as the middle-class is concerned, there is no doubt fans are a part of the masses. In fact the class/caste origins of fans places them well within the category of the masses. However, those fans who thought the film was obscene claimed they did not enjoy the film or felt that the objectionable sequences ought to have been deleted On the other hand, those who did say they enjoyed the film claimed that there was nothing obscene about it. The minority which felt that the film was obscene argued that the obscene sequences were there for the masses.[25] Thanks to the condemnation accompanying the label, *everyone* disavowed their enjoyment of the obscene' sequences. Therefore, the addressee of obscenity, he who enjoys it, is always the other, eternally regressing, impossible to apprehend.

This imagined addressee is crucial to the audience (as in actual viewers like Vijayalaxmi, Srihari, Swamy Naidu and myself), essential for engaging with obscenity. Our pleasure, the pleasure of the disavowing audience, is made possible by the other--the credulous, obscene spectator, *the* addressee of the film Vijalayaxmi's engagement epitomizes, in significant ways, the obsession of the

[25]Based on interviews with Chiranjeevi fans in Hyderabad. I found the interviews with Ch Venkateswara Rao, who conceded that the film was obscene and Vulisetty Anjaneyulu, who did not know what obscenity (*asleelata* in Telugu) was and listed *Alluda Majaka* among his three favourite Chiranjeevi films, particularly useful in understanding the response of fans to this film

decent' person with obscenity. Being an uppercaste, middle-class woman, she is certainly the other of the obscene audience (obscene because it consumes obscenity) but watches all obscene films at least twice and remembers each film, dialogue by dialogue' She recalled a raid conducted by the BJMM on the infamous Lighthouse theatre in Hyderabad (which specialises in exhibiting soft-porn films). The slogan shouting women drove the audience out of the theatre and some of those fleeing even broke their legs when they jumped from the first floor. In Foucault's words, the raid offered Vijayalaxmi `[t]he pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light [deviance]...' (Foucault 1984b: 45).

This mode of engagement with the obscene is legitimized by `politics' (membership in political organizations), unlike that of the masses which is supposedly a gratification of lust The fan (1 use fen' as a short hand for the `mass' because the fan, almost always rowdy is the most visible member of the criminal mass) actually enables the middle-class, upper caste audience, to enjoy (in a different way certainly but enjoy all the same) the mass-film. In the process however, the fan's political agency and the politics of the film/sequence is suppressed, by the label of obscenity.

What docs the anti-obscenity campaign *seek* to prohibit? The lust of the masses and the source of embarassment (of the citizen-spectator), though not necessarily in that order. These are not problems which originate in or arc confined to cinema but are burdens obscene cinema has to bear because it addresses the masses. The threat masses pose is that of transgressing the social order: their look objectifies the respectable' woman, violating her body. Obscenity is sexism of a certain kind; an unusually excessive kind because it involves the transgression of class/caste norms. One of Shashi Tharoor's characters in his novel *Show Business* verbalizes this objection in all its actuality:

> After all, the dramatic rise in what the papers call eve-teasing, which is nothing less than sexual harassment of women in the street, isn't entirely unconnected with Hindi films. Where else could all these lower-class Romeos have picked up the idea that the kind of well-dressed woman they once wouldn't have dared to look at is suddenly accessible to them? (1991:248)

What is read into film is the encounter between the lustful Romeo/fan/rowdy and the well-dressed (read upper caste, middle-class) woman which is actually staged in public places, no longer inaccessible to the former. This encounter cannot be prohibited because both the 'masses' and `women' have a *right* to be where they are. Yet the anti-obscenity campaign attempts precisely to prevent this encounter through a re-staging of this encounter within the cinema hall by (a) making 'women' disappear from the audience and (h) seeking a ban on the obscene film.

What in the film (named as obscenity) triggered this response? In other words, what does 'obscenity', both the label and the thing that it refers to, mask?

The *Alluda Majaka* controversy cautions us against assuming that there is a stable (filmic) text which is capable of answering our questions, if only it is read correctly. The contest over the film was a contest over ways of interpreting it To rephrase the famous Lacanian formulation about language, the film signifies for someone before signifying something. The film's opponents produce the filmic text as an obscene one because they imagine or believe that the addressee is the `mass' or `fan' and *not* the 'family*. The response of the critics, who as pointed out earlier, produced themselves as an extension of the `class-audience', was overdetermined by the identification of the addressee. Sections of the audience refused to be constituted as the addressee of the film because they felt that this position was already occupied by the 'masses.'

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the mass-film constructs its spectator or addressee as a fan who is always/already a member of an adulatory collective. This spectator is capable of taking the cue from the narrative to construct a coherent text which has the star as its central organizing principle. I would like to briefly summerize some the my arguments made in Chapter 2 now and go on to propose that the discerning viewer is aware of the structure of the narrative. I shall then attempt to relate the issues thrown up by the obscenity debate to my discussion of the mass-film in Chapter 2.

The Star's Biography and other Pre-requisites of Film-Watching

The film presupposes that the spectator is endowed with knowledge about the star and the genre (`mass-film'). This knowledge, culled from the stars' earner films, `biographies', film magazines, other films featuring `rivals' etc. is crucial to the intelligibility of the film The spectator therefore `knows' what the film *is* about, not merely because popular film magazines thrive on feeding their readers with tit-bits of information about forthcoming films but because films draw on earlier films even as they (necessarily) differ from them.

The addressee of *Alluda Majaka* is aware that the film like other mass-films, contains two antagonistic sets of elements. The task of the filmic narrative is to neutralize antagonisms and resolve contradictions between these elements The hero/Chiranjeevi belongs to one set, the positive set, which is a matrix of family and community. However, he has the ability to migrate and inhabit the negative set, whose elements threaten/*negate* the positive set This in turn is the matrix of the anti-family, the false modern (or even feudalism' in earlier films like *Khaidi*), often including the state which threaten the hero and the institutions/constituencies he represents.

In *Alluda Majaka*, the hero's endeavour is to protect the family (his own kin group as well as the family as an institution) and the community. He also retrieves some inhabitants/elements of the negative set such as the women (Vasundhara and the two heroines), Chinna and the stale and reclaims them for the positive set In the film all these elements are, figuratively speaking, captives of the villains of the filmic narrative.

The opening sequence re-establishes (since the spectator already knows) Sitaram/Chiranjeevi as a victim of the state and the hero of the village community. He is in chains, accompanied by a vanload of policemen and the entire village mourns his impending death. He is modern (his clothes and hairstyle signify his modernity) and also highly religious: the first time we see bis face is when he applies *kumkum* on his forehead at the temple.

The film opens at a moment when the crises besieging Sitaram and the village community are at most intense. The long flash-back' sequence (narrated by Sitaram to his father-in-law) explains his marriage by force but more importantly it shows the crises unfolding. The film's' real time' or present deals with Sitaram's attempt to find solutions (his marriage is one such attempt, as it later tarns out) to problems which belong to the past. The flash-back establishes a causality which justifies his marriage with Pappi and his future actions. As with *Khaidi*, here too the flash-back unfolds in two parts The first is quite literally a quick sequence of images which trigger a violent reaction in the hero (in bom films the violence is aimed at the police who are on the side of the enemy). The second part is elaborate and recruits the diegetic listener and the spectator as allies. This narrative within the narrative contains the history of the hero's victimization and his link with the community—a feature that the opening sequence too underscores. The spectator is thus *reassured about* the justness of Sitaram's actions The community and Sitaram are portrayed in the flash-back as deeply religious. In addition, the village is a democratic space. The devotional group song early in the sequence describes me village as Gandhi's `*RamaRajyam*', an ideal democracy. Sitaram's father, acting upon Sitaram[1]* suggestion distributes temple land (the family's ancestral property) to the coolies, paving the way for the entry of socialism' in the village.

This Utopia is a thing of the past. It is seen in the film as irretrievably lost and exists only as a nostalgic memory. With the death of the President/father, the village and Sitaram lose the benevolent feudal patriarch (who is presented as an ideal democrat). As in other mass-films, the hero takes the place of the missing source of authority and the community reorganises itself around him. However, the elements of the negative set, Vasundhara and the villains who orphan Sitaram, also threaten to orphan the community by falsely implicating Sitaram in the murder of a police officer.

When the film opens, the village community mourns the transition (from the Utopian past to a crisis ridden present) which can only be described in terms of loss: of the patriarch, the land given to the coolies, Sitaram's liberty and the impending loss of his life as well. The flash-back establishes

the need for the establishment of a new patriarchal order in place of the absent benevolent patriarchy. This is exactly what Sitaram goes on to supply. Sitaram of the opening sequence is as much modern consumer as be is orthodoxically religious He thus represents the 'traditional' and the `modern' simultaneously. If his religiousness links him with the community, his `modernity'/ consumerism makes him different from others in his community.

The filmic narrative produces the community as authentic because the villagers serve as the bulwark against consumerism On the other hand, Vasundhara and her daughters arc presented as a problem because while the onus of upholding the tradition lies as much on 'women' as it does on the village community, the former fail in their duty. In the film, these women constitute a threat to society because they, in contrast with 'traditional' women like Malleswari, have shed the protective veil of tradition.[26] The heroines' ultra-modern body is literally the exposed body, a source of obscenity (in the film and for its critics). Vasundhara too, like her daughters becomes sexually 'available'. The film produces her sexuality as excessive because she too has abandoned tradition In her case, the movement away from the 'home' into the world, made possible by her rejection of her husband's authority is signfied as a transgression. The crises of the film result from this particular transgressive act, quite literally when the two heroines and Vasundhara enter the village, unaccompanied by a male These women sin against the hero Sitaram and the community. In the film, an offence to Sitaram is an offence to the community and vice versa. The flash-back, Sitaram's narrative about *his* past, defines the problem(s) and lays the foundation for his future course of action. Ho *is* the ultimate victim and also the supreme agent of just vengeance. All history is his story.

[26] See Lata Mani (1989) for a discussion on the constitution of women as the bearers of tradition. Partha Chatterjee (1993: 116-134) argues that the emergence of the dualisms home/world and spiritual/material was a significant moment in the history of Indian nationalism Women were assigned the major role in the home which was seen a domain over which the state had no jurisdiction.

Women as a problem

The hero's battle against the (upper class, upper caste, ultra modem) women and the villains is a contest over the representation of tradition: about who should speak for it but also who ought to bear its signs. Vasundhara and her daughters offend the community and Sitaram as they move into the public domain without the sanction of male authority. This movement is construed as a degeneration of the public domain. These women characters constitute a threat to the community and the public domain because they are not in their rightful place, i.e., the home. They thus become sexual objects and the focus of the lower class/caste male gaze. Their presence in the public domain, equated with the field of the subaltern male's gaze, is in itself a threat to the family and community. Notably in the film, the family is upper caste/class and the community comprises of lower class/caste men. Vasundhara is a breaker of families (her own and Sitaram's). Her independence which results from the separation from her husband is a product of her negative agency and causes further destruction.

The film makes a crucial ideological manoeuvre by producing the perceived threat to the upper caste/class family as a problem of the community. The spectator is recruited as an ally in this battle to drive the upper caste women back into the home. This is achieved by presenting the transgression of upper caste patriarchal norms as crimes against the community. This is what makes the fihn highly problematic and retrogressive.

Every offence against the community is shown in the film as committed from a position of class privilege. The infamous bathing sequence, condemned as obscene, is one such action. Bappi and Pappi, wearing swimsuits, bathe in the drinking-water tank of the village. They refuse to apologize when Sitaram and other villagers object. Sitaram then strips them (underwater) and asks, his servant and sidekick, Abbulu to empty the tank. To save themselves the shame of standing naked before the villagers, they apologize.

What has been dubbed by the anti obscenity campaign as obscenity is produced in the film as

the revenge of the community. The label of obscenity masks the dialectic of offence and revenge which produces an antagonism between upper class women and the community, imaged as lower class. Both the offence and revenge revolve around the sexuality of the upper caste/class women and the gaze of the community, mediated by the hero's masculinity which is at once distinct from, as well as representative of the community. Vasundhara's crime too illustrates the linkage between Sitaram and the community. She dupes the coolies and steals their land. She then goes on to offer the land to Peddiah and in the process fixes Chinna's marriage with Pappi. This is at once an offence against the village community as well as Sitaram's family.

The migration of these women from the private to the public domain, made possible by the absence of patriarchal authority at home, is presented as being the source of the problem. Vasundhara is responsible for the `obscenity' of all three women because she made herself independent of male authority and thus `naturally' failed to teach her daughters to be decent. The independence of the three women is depicted as excessive and a manifestation of their (excessive) sexuality The exercise of their class privilege in public is presented as a display of sexuality (as obscene') and the retaliation of the lower classes, presented by the film as being equally obscene, targets their sexuality. The hegemonizing manoeuvre of the narrative that equates upper caste/class interests with the interests of the community disavows caste/class conflict, producing the latter as a spectacle staged to gratify the spectator's lust.

Since the problem originates at Vasundhara's home which is marked by the absence of male authority, Sitaram invades it and solves the problem with the backing of her estranged husband. What Sitaram does is to target her sexuality, to demonstrate to her and the spectator how transgressive *she* (her sexuality) is. Therefore the `obscene' mother-in-law sequences

It was with *Attaku Yamudu Ammayiki Mogudu* (A. Kodandarami Reddy, 1989) that the mother-in-law in Telugu cinema first became a focus of the hero's sexual advances In this successful Chiranjeevi starrer, the domineering middle-aged woman, Chamundeswari Devi (Vanisree), is `tamed'

by Kalyan (Chiranjeevi), her own son-in-law from a lower-class background Chamundeswari Devi, like Vasundhara, is separated from her husband and is misled by her relatives, who arc also the villains. As the fifan progresses, Chamundeswari Devi's sons and daughter abandon her, unable to tolerate her oppressive ways. The film, however, ends with Kalyan defeating the villains who hold Chamundeswari Devi hostage demanding her property, and reunites the family including the father-in-law Here, as in any other mother-in-law film', the sexuality of the older woman is foregrounded Interestingly, the actresses Vanisree and Laxmi who were cast as the heroines of many South Indian films in the 70s have, in the films of the 90s often played the role of the mother-in-law Perhaps their earlier film roles as heroines allow for the frequent references to their lingering sex-appeal which is now depicted as excessive because it is not reined by any patriarchal authority. The independent woman is thus seen as oppressive, arrogant and sexually `available'. In all these films, class privileges are shown as oppressive precisely because they are exercised by a woman. The retaliation of the lower classes here is not aimed at ending class privileges but their exercise by women.

In the post flash-back part of *Alluda Majaka*, Sitaram begins to solve the problems which result from his mother-in-law's transgressions, *with his father-in-law's permission and active collaboration.* During one of his many encounters with Vasundhara Sitaram tells her menacingly, *'Aadadaanivikanaka batikipoyavu'* (I have let you live because you are a woman). Clearly Sitanm *cannot* thrash her like he thrashes the villains and he cannot slap good sense into her as he does with Pappi, bis wife. She has to be tackled differently because she is his mother-in-law

Sitaram as *1* oyota makes advances towards Vasundhara (which she rejects), claiming that she is more beautiful than her daughters. His advances necessitate the intervention of Vasundhara's husband, Sivarama Krishna who re-enters her house as Toyota's acquaintance. He `saves' Vasundhara by pointing out to Toyota that she is already married to him. Sitaram, disguised as a bumpkin, descends soon after, demanding that his marriage with Pappi be consummated In what has been denounced as the most 'obscene' sequence of the film, he is in a bedroom with Vasundhara and her

two daughters. There is a blackout Sitaram later claims he has had sexual intercourse with someone but doesn't know who it was. The possiblity of his partner being the mother-in-law is implied at some length. These sequences and the infamous song sequence (*`atto, attamma kooturo'*)suggest and were indeed read as transgressing the incest taboo. While they titillate the spectator by suggesting such a possibility, s/he *knows* that the taboo will not be transgressed. The conviction comes from the fact that this is a Chiranjeevi film and therefore *nothing* immoral can be done by the hero, and that anyway the mother-in-law film is a familiar sub-genre of the mass-film *Alluda Majaka* in fact can be read as underscoring the incest taboo, rather than transgressing it The moral' of the controversial mother-in-law sequences is that the son-in-law's advances take place because of the mother-in-law's surplus sexuality. If the cardinal rule of a patriarchal society, subservience to the husband, is broken, then all rules may be broken. The son-in-law's transgression is made possible by the woman's prior transgression. The mother-in-law thus performs the crucial function of establishing the link between the family and the public realm by threatening both with her actions. The resolution of the crises resulting from her actions hinges on the splitting of the hero into Sitaram and Toyata. I would argue that the splitting of the hero into Sitaram and Toyota offers valuable insights into how the film constitutes its addressee

The Masquerade

Both Toyota and Sitaram, the latter presented in these sequences as a yokel, are ridiculous versions of the Sitaram of the past (shown in flash-back). They are both caricatures, of the real Sitaram. Toyota's garish clothes, dyed hair, blue eyes, helicopter, sidekick Mandela and sister' Dakota (Abbulu in disguise); Sitaram's dhoti, headcloth, cheap trunk, cheroot and bullock cart are signifies of their supposed origins but they also serve to produce the two figures as comic. Moreover, both the characters behave in an `obscene' manner and are both required to teach Vasundhara a lesson.

The ease with which Sitaram transforms himself into his caricatures foregrounds his ability to inhabit two antithetical worlds His metamorphoses highlight the dichotomy between the ultra-modern and backward' worlds but in the process also irons out the tensions between their two worlds There is a hilarious sequence in which Sitaram and Toyota supposedly fighl each other. While Vasundhara and others wait outside the room for the victor to emerge, by a quick change of costume, make-up and accent (which only the spectator can see) they are made to believe that every few seconds one or the other is thrown out of the room The point here is not that there are two heroes (three if we count the 'real' Sitaram) but two *subject positions* and correspondingly two socio-economic and cultural locations. The hero/star can occupy these positions simultaneously or glide between them. In the process, the antagonisms corresponding to these subject positions are sutured over, resulting in the production of a single authentic subject, the *real* Sitaram, who can at once be both elite and subaltern (super rich NR1 and common villager) Unlike the NRI Toyota and the yokel Sitaram who represent inauthentic subject positions, the real Sitaram is *neither* as well as *both*—the`modern' villager, a hero within the community, *who is therefore superior to all the other villagers.* (See the discussion on production of the authentic subaltern in Chapter 2.)

Between the two caricatures, the unreal (I use the term deliberately) Sitaram is the lower class figure. Specific markers of origin/difference(cheroot, tintrunk, pumpkin etc.) are deployed to produce him as a subaltern type. As a result, regardless of the fact that the real Sitaram is a rich farmer's son and the markers of subalternity cannot be associated with him, he becomes a part of the people' the seamless mass which is perpetually marked by victimization. Everything that Sitaram does, feeds quite naturally into the larger narrative of the community's revenge. Sitaram's actions are rendered intelligible because the spectator sees through the masquerade. The unreal Sitaram, who is a subaltern figure twice over (due to his rural origins and relatively lower class status), transfers his subalternity to the real Sitaram, making him a more authentic representative of the people because he is not a bumpkin to be ridiculed

Similarly Toyota, transfers his 'modernity' to Sitaram, making him a representative of the authentic modern. The hero is thus presented neither as a representative of consumerism/ modernity nor of tradition, but as the touchstone by which the authenticity of other characters' modernity is measured. The answer to the question 'how much modernity' (or 'tradition') is provided in the opening sequence of the film when the jean-clad Sitaram is introduced to the spectator applying *kumkum*.

Interestingly, Toyota too becomes a subaltern carrying out the revenge of the oppressed because he is the actor Chiranjeevi whom the spectator 'recognizes' not only from the opening shot onwards but because the actor has a history of representing the wronged subaltern. Further, the spectator is privy to the exchange between Sivarama Krishna and Sitaram and therefore not only knows that Toyota is Sitaram but also that, being Chiranjeevi he can do no wrong.

The complicity of the spectator, resulting from his/her foreknowledge (not limited to the developments within the narrative) is essential to the masquerade. The masquerade ensures that Sitaram retains his superiority even as he represents the subalterns and it is only made possible by the spectator's knowledge/complicity. The spectator sees through the disguises but it is imperative that s/he does not ask, 'what is Sitaram/Chiranjeevi, who is obviously not a common man or subaltern, doing as the representative of the people?' To ask this question is to unmask Sitaram and the masquerade of stardom itself This question would make it impossible for the spectator to constitute an intelligible, coherent text from the film

The institution of stardom as it manifests itself in the film or outside films and the film itself prevent the surfacing of such destabilizing questions. The spectator position is so constructed as to elide over the fundamental incommensurability of the subject positions occupied by the star. The spectator is thus at a location from which the suturing of these subject positions is invisible.[27]

[27] At this point I would like to emphasise that my notion of the masquerade is quite different from the way Sumita Chakravarty (1993) deploys it in her study of popular Hindi cinema. According to Chakravarty,

I have argued in Chapter 2 that the mass-film's star protagonist is represented in a manner that ensures the spectator's simultaneous awareness of his stardom and subalternity. This awareness is a result of the biographical/inter-textual references and the direct address to the spectator. The mobilization of the real as a discursive category is crucial to the resolution offered by individual films of this genre to what is produced by them as the crisis in the social. Further, in the mass-film, the hero's struggle against marginal izati on often translates as the `taming' of the anogant upper caste/class heroine or mother-in-law. In *AlluduMajaka*, far more than in other mass-films, the transformation of transgressive women is a major part of the solution' to the breakdown of the social. As suggested earlier, the star-spectator relationship is established in a manner that facilitates the narrative's resolution of the crises. I therefore wish to return to a question which I have already tried to address in the previous chapters. Why is the spectator never allowed to forget that the character (Sitaram/Toyota, for example) is *Chiranjeevi* in disguise?

M. Madhava Prasad's notion of the `despotic spectacle' is useful in understanding the spectator of the mass-film. Prasad (1994) argues that popular Hindi films of the fifties and sixties are staged as 'despotic public spectacles' and do not generally allow a voyeuristic relation from being established between stars and spectators. Before I discuss this argument 1 wish to point out that it is difficult to conceive of the pleasures of spectatorship of the mass-film as voyeuristic (as suggested by much film theory that has Hollywood cinema as its object of analysis) for two reasons. Firstly, the mass-film

> [t]he Bombay film's use of the masquerade is motivated ... by ideas of fragmentation and disintegration of the social/national body and its recuperation and regeneration. It serves as a crossover phenomenon: between the individual and the social, between one's current state and a future state, between the private citizen and the public official, between dis-ease and well-being. As utopian moments interspersed in filmic texts, the masquerade signifies the triumph of social ideals within the context of the modem nation-state (311-312).

In my understanding, the masquerade, is a key device for suturing antagonistic subject positions by the deployment of the star.

posits a spectator who is always/already a member of a collective. Secondly, the star often addresses the spectator directly, making the latter acutely aware that s/he is watching a performance and thus making it difficult, if not impossible, for the spectator to derive voyeuristic pleasure from the viewing of the film As is evident in most song sequences of the mass-film, the image is *given-to-be-seen.* To cite just one example, in *Jagadeka Veerudu Atiloka Sundari* (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1990), early in the film's most popular song *{abba nee teeyani debba)* the hero/Chiranjeevi and heroine/Sridevi move towards each other to embrace. However, they stop suddenly as if aware of the spectator's gaze, look at the camera (the heroine every coyly covers her face with her hands), smile and more back from the (static) camera but remaining in full view of the spectator, begin dancing. Although the spectator is caught looking, so to speak, s/he is not embarassed because the object of the gaze is presented (to the former) to be looked at (See discussion on the songs of the mass-film in Chapter 2.)

1, therefore, suggest that the mass-film needs to be conceived of as a 'despotic spectacle' which, according to Prasad, 'creates its own field of perception into which the subject must enter to *see and be seen*—the spectator's gaze here is deprived of any sense of power' (1994: 160-161, emphasis added) Prasad adds that the despotic spectacle calls for a direct perception of the spectacle rather than a perception mediated by identificatory relation' (158-159). Insofar as the mass-film is concerned, the biographical reference underscores the presence of the star while the direct address by the star to the spectator qualifies and indeed *authorizes the spectator to look,* endowing him/her with what Prasad calk the *darsanic* gaze.' Unlike in the voyeuristic relation,

> in a darsanic relation the object gives itself to be seen and in doing so, confers a privilege upon the spectator The object of the *darsanic* gaze is a superior, a divine figure or a king who presents himself as a spectacle of dazzling splendour to his subjects, the praja' or the people (156, original emphasis).

Although Prasad's formulation was made with reference to the Hindi cinema of the fifties and sixties (the genre he calls feudal family romance), it furthers our understanding of the mass-film

because here too we are dealing with a variety of cinema that presents itself as a spectacle Further, by constantly invoking the 'real' star (i.e., star as an extra-filmic entity), the genre effective *prohibits* the spectator from identifying with the star.

Finally, returning to the anti-obscenity campaign, na a manner quite different from fan activity (discussed in Chapter 1), it alerts us to the same problem. What happens when actual viewers or publics of cinema came into contact with the spectator or the inscribed viewer of the film? We have seen that the *Alluda Mcgaka* controversy resulted in the formation/reinforcement of not one but two publics. The larger question thrown up by the controversy is how can students of cinema, who are more often than not concerned with the *spectator,* understand and theorize *audience* response which is generally the object of sociological analysis? In the next chapter I address this question with reference to the anti-obscenity debate and recent developments in Telugu cinema.

Conclusion

Decline of the Mass-film

In the previous chapter I have argued that audiences do not necessarily watch a film from the spectator position constructed by that film The gap between audiences and the spectator raises an important question. What is the relationship between audience groups and the spectator, and by extension, what role, if any, does the spectator play in the formation of and interaction between the publics of cinema. Let me begin by asking a question which is crucial not only for this dissertation but also for studies of other forms of industrially produced (or 'mass*) culture. If, in their circulation, the meanings of cinema arc not those which arc those made available to the spectator, why should studies of cinema concern themselves with the spectator at all?

I wish to recall three instances which I have already mentioned to illustrate problems arising from the tendency to misrecognize the actual viewer as the spectator. Adorno's condemnation of `mass' culture (1991), the anti-obscenity campaigners' anxiety about the masses and Fiske's defense of the popular (1989).' The assumption underlying Adorno's critique of mass culture is that the audience, when confronted with their counterparts (spectators) inscribed into the mass-media as consumers, fully identify with the construction (the spectator-as-consumer). The members of the audience therefore appear in Adorno's thesis as passive consumers. In the anti-obscenity campaign too, the mass-audience are believed to have always/already occupied the spectator position of obscene' cinema Fiske's assertion of the radical potential of the popular as founded, paradoxically, on a similar

[1] Adorno and Fiske are discussed in the Introduction and the obscenity debate in Chapter 4.

assumption. He starts with the premise that the actual viewer/ listener/consumer always resists the hegemonic ideology by acts of interpretation. But the resistance, a function of *reading,* is projected on to the cultural *object* in Fiske's analysis.

The reason for my drawing attention to fte spectator position constructed by films (in Chapters 2, 3 and 4) is not to assert the primacy of the filmic object or textual analysis over other modes of engaging with cinema. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the spectator is an abstraction which is available to actual viewers through the critical engagement with a film genre Most viewers are trained to recognize the spectator of a film whether or not they see themselves occupying this position. My intention in this dissertation has been two fold: (a) to examine how films *work* toresolve social crises and the crucial importance of the spectator for the resolution offered by films, and (b) to look at how films circulate, or in other words, examine how actual audiences work to produce meaning I have suggested that in the process of producing meaning audiences also form themselves into collectives, publics The production of meaning is a contested political activity because what is at stake is the question of how to understand or imagine society as well as the location of the viewer in the social. What happens in the cinema hall, during the course of film viewing, when real viewers encounter each other and the spectator, offers significant insights into some aspects of the circulation of cinema. Positing the spectator, while recognizing mat it is an abstraction, has been necessary for my study whose primary concern is not the analysis of the filmic object, but the publics of cinema..

Ashish Rajadhyaksha's (1996) formulation of the ' fourth look' as the look which constitutes viewers as a collective, helps us understand what happens in the cinema halls. However, this look does not result in one single collective but multiple collectives, simultaneously. The look of the screen at the audience initiates an exchange of looks among audiences and between the audience and the spectator. Let me explain this by briefly returning to the discussion on *Alluda Majaka* (Chapter 4).

An individual viewer's affinity or antagonism with the spectator lays the foundation for the former's sense of belonging to a collective. In the case of *Alluda Majaka,* the actual viewer

(Vijayalaxmi, Swamy Naidu) misrecognizes a section of the audience (the `front benchers') at the spectators of the film. This is because everybody (from film-makers to stars, fans and critics) *knows* that the masses are the intended audience of the film and the masses are physically present in the theatre. The projection of the spectator on to the masses is founded on and reinforces the construction of concrete individuals among the audiences as a collective--the mass— the traits and attributes of which are all too well known. Notice that the mass is marked by its exteriority to the actual viewer. The masses supposedly enjoy obscenity while no actual viewer does; they arc negatively affected (spoilt') by cinema because they are credulous, etc. Therefore, the `look' of the viewer which results in the discovery of the spectator also produces a collective that is empirically verifiable (for there are frontbenchers).

The masses thus imagined (they are a collective only insofar as a viewer thinks they are) enable actual viewers to understand--why there is obscenity in the film, why it shouldn't be there-- and engage with the film Further, the projection of the spectator into the theatre enables actual viewers to form into collectives by either complete dissociation from it (as in the case of the film's critics) or by insisting on a degree of difference while acknowledging broad similarities (recall Vcnkateswara Rao's claim that he liked the film but was embarrassed by the obscenity).[2] Another instance of the ' fourth looking' among viewers, real and inscribed, is at work when the spectator, already projected into the theatre, `looks' at the real viewer. Vijayalaxmi's acute sense of embarrassment at being *seen* by the unfamiliar male in the audience during the obscene sequence is a case in point This look is sought to be prevented by *banning* the film or deleting portions of it because the spectator is a product of the narrative. However s/he is also a real' being, actually present in the hall So the look can also

[2] It is worm pointing out mat the star's attempts at caderizing fans coincides with the tendency to foreground the difference between the fan and the masses. When asked what the socio-economic background of fans was, Swamy Naidu insisted mat though a majority were poor or lower middle-class, highly educated and well settled people were also fans of Chiranjeevi. He went on to name some. The attempt at dissociation from the mass is also evident from individual fans' avowed love for Chiranjeevi's class-films

be abolished by making sure that the film circulates *outside* the cinema hall. I have in mind the enormous popularity of the mass-films, particularly Chiranjeevi's, on the cable television artworks which have a large middle-class viewership. (Practically every public holiday is marked by the screening of a film by Chiranjeevi, Balakrishna etc.) When the mass-film is watched in the middle class home, away from the masses, the embarrassment seems to disappear.[3]

Figuratively speaking, the spectator stands (or sits) between or among actual viewers when they look at each other, especially when the viewers perceive themselves as belonging to antagonistic collectives. indeed constituting them as opposites (`families' and fane' for instance). The look of the viewer at the screen too is refracted by the spectator insofar as this presence is a subject position which can be disavowed. The spectator is a phantom viewer, a manifestation of the anxieties about the social, and I argue that it is impossible to actually watch a film without these anxieties being projected into the theatre

The exchange of looks among actual and phantom viewers takes us back to a fundamental problem for the cinema as an institution and its viewing as a social activity in the Indian context As pointed out in Chapter 1, the cinema made it possible for the physical convergence, under one roof, of widely disparate and therefore potentially antagonistic social groups. What the on-screen spectacle has had to ensure is that mis off-screen spectacle— of the various classes and castes coming together within the theatre—did not become unmanageable. It is the *responsibility* of the narrative to suture over antagonisms between social groups within the cinema hall 'tent. In other words, to ensure that the presences among the viewers—by embodying antagonisms—do not threaten any section, particularly

[3] Paul Willemen (1994) argues that the cinematic institution *conspires* to minimise the effects of the fourth look. He suggests that

> [i]t is perhaps this fourth look which prompted theatre managers to locate the most expensive seats at the bock: there one feels better protected against the danger of being over-looked in one's voyeuristic pleasure, a protection people appear to be willing to pay for (108).

the upper caste, middle-class section, of the audience to the extent that the latter abandons the cinema hall. Ideally, the spectator position should be one with which everyone fully identifies. Why then is the figure of the fan a crucial referent in both mass-film and class-film?

Within and around tbe cinema hall, the fan stands in for the defiant subaltern whose very agency is a crime according to the upper caste, middle-class. The visibility of the fan marks the theatre as a contested space, pointing to the failure of the social contract, a contract which translates into the theatre as a maintenance of the strict class-caste hierarchy within the auditorium. The films discussed in the previous chapters were made and circulated in a historical and social context when the central problem of popular Telugu cinema was the subaltern who threatened to rupture the social beyond repair. Just as the cinema's address to the audience is the (only) means of addressing `society', targeting the ran as an object of the reformist initiative (by the star, genre, industry) is a way of addressing the larger and related problem of the crisis in the social Not surprisingly, despite insisting on the difference between fans, masses and the class-audience, in the course of his interviews with me Chiranjeevi frequently used fans, masses and even `people' as synonyms.[4]

The rowdy-hero of the mass-film, like the fan, is a representative of (i.e., a stand in for) the defiant subaltern who has to be re-presented in order to be controlled. While producing the subaltern as a vigilante who breaks the law to strengthen it, and challenges the state to legitimate it, the mass-film also attempted to construct the fan as a devotee. The fan-as-devotee is a Utopian figure in that the relationship between him and the star-as-idol holds the promise of unlimited control of the masses. Such a fan invokes for the elite a nostalgia for the feudal in all its authoritarian glory. A key transformation aimed at by the mass-film, and the star is his off-screen interventions, is of the fan-as-lumpen into the fan-as-devotee. If there is `a formula' for the mass-film, it is the narrativization of the

[4] This was particularly striking during Chiranjeevi's interview in Madras (22 January 1995) when he responded to questions about his fans at some length. At one point he said, `people don't want me to play serious roles... My fans want to see me as a "gang leader" or *mutha mestri.*'

`rowdy's' shedding of excess, an excess named as rights which sits uneasily on the non-citizen.

The fan-spectator is not a figure the upper caste middle-class viewer can directly identify with. But as I pointed out earlier, disavowal of the spectator position too is a form of engagement Although the genre was seen as addressing the lumpen and justifying his excesses rather than reforming him, the middle-class audience could and did patronize the mass-film precisely because the cheap thrills' of the genre were meant for the other. I argue that for the non-subaltern public, the disavowal of these thrills is accompanied by the voyeuristic viewing of the relationship between the rowdy-star and the lumpen-fan, a relationship which is strikingly similar to that in the classic master-slave narrative We', the class-audience', know exactly when the fan will whistle and cheer and how the fan will respond to the narrative's cues. Consequently, although the cues are also meant for us, our pleasure lies in our ability to identify the inscription of the fan into the narratrve and predict his responses These are what Prasad calls 'the pleasures of disdainful engagement[1.5]. However, it is important to note that these pleasures are accompanied and enhanced by a considerable anxiety which the class-film can be seen addressing.

Is this a misplaced anxiety? Perhaps not Not because fens/ masses imitate what the hero does on screen In fan activity the star-icon acquires a valency which is at variance with the screen equivalent As pointed out in Chapter 1, the star could be deployed by fans to justify acts of defiance of the kind that are strictly prohibited by the narrative. These activities of the fan, misrecognized as the spectator, result in the upper caste, middle-class audience reading the mass-film against the flow of the narrative, ignoring the resolution offered by it

For fans, the appeal of the genre might lie in a similar `misreading' which results in perceiving the mass-film as celebrating the agency of the subaltern. However, the ultimate burden of occupying the spectator position is passed on to the masses'. The difference between the fan response and the

[5] See Prasad for how English-language film magazines in India thrive on the disdainful engagement of middle-class viewers with popular Hindi cinema (1994: 316 n7).

hostile critic's response to the spectator is that the former docs not perceive himself to be in an antagonistic relationship to the masses. Further, the mass-film is seen responding to their expectations, which are no doubt constructed by the industry and the popular press to a considerable extent. What makes a mass-film amenable to repeated viewings is precisely the sense of control it gives to fane and regular film goers (including the upper caste, middle-class viewers) in general. There are no major surprises in the mass-film. The success of the mass-film as a genre, despite the failure of individual films at the box-office, lay in its ability to construct a spectator position which enabled different sections of the audience to engage with the genre although no actual viewer may have fully identified him/herself with it (the spectator). This will become clearer when I discuss the decline of the genre presently.

The class-film's critique of its other, like that made by the elite public of cinema, is founded on the assumption that the masses imitate what they see on the screen. While this anxiety is shared by the industry in general, including the star, the class-film addresses it by re-shaping the star of the mass-film By re-casting the star, the class-film attempts to reform the fan, make him shed his lumpenness. The class-film does offer some opportunities for the fan to partake of the thrills of cinema, such as fights or dances, but by denigrating these thrills in the narrative it tutors the fan in the `true' pleasures of cinema ('pure acting', no vulgarity, etc.). Paradoxically, while the mass-film prohibits identification with the star *(he* gets away with murder because he is a star, the viewer is reminded) the class-film offers the star as a role model for imitation. The production of his subalternity (which hinges on the deglamorization of the star), the strenuous attempt at verisimilitude, the absence of the biographical reference and direct address are efforts at constructing a positive role model. And who should imitate the star? I have suggested that the spectator of the class-film is a non-fan, i.e., the class-film addresses him/her as if s/he were already a member of the class-audience The fan is thus the other of the spectator and this being, exterior to the spectator, is supposed to imitate the star. The spectator doesn't need to because s/he is in any case not a ran in need of reform.

The spectator position of the class-film confers cultural distinctiveness and social responsibility on viewers As a result it is difficult for a viewer to actively reject the spectator position The tension between being a fan (i.e., belonging to a subaltern public) and the spectator of a class-film is resolved by individual fans by imaging themselves as good or ideal fans. The assertion of having liked class-films delumpcmzcs them, allowing them to make claims to respectability and citizenship. The fan who watches and enjoys the class-film is an ideal fan because he appreciates the star's attempt to serve society (by playing responsible roles) and responds to the appeals of the star himself to patronize his experiments. (Consequently class-films figure prominently in the lists of fans' favourite films) On the other hand, the fan who makes demands on the class-film is seen as a 'lumpen': uncultured, irresponsible member of the mass, or in other words, a false fan. Such a fan refuses to appreciate the nobility of the star's attempt to reform society. Rejecting the spectator position offered by the class-film is thus a sign of cultural backwardness and a sign of a fan's lack of commitment *

The class-film renders class-caste differences onscreen non-antagonistic and by doing so ensures that the masses within the theatre are no longer threatening to the class-audience because they are seen learning from the narrative.

Telugu Cinema after the Mass-film

GharanaMogudu (1992), the high point of Chiranjeevi's career and the mass-film as a genre, was foll^wfrf almost immediately by the near total collapse of the mass-film *Mutha Mestri* (released in January 1993), though not as successful as *Gharana Mogudu,* is by no account a commercial failure. After *Mutha Mestri,* with the exception of *Alluda Majaka,* there has not been a single significant mass-film featuring either Chiranjeevi or other major stars like Nagarjuna, Balakrishna and

* Elite critique of the class-film as pointed in Chapter 3 has often revolved around its inability to be genuinely' artistic or culturally distinctive enough. The pollution of the class-film by * mass-formula' elements has been decried for this reason. What has rarely been in question is its reformist intention or the *need* for the genre.

Venkatesh. The naxalite-film seems to have completely replaced the mass-films proper by taking over the representation of the rebellious subaltern's struggle for rights.[7]

Among reasons cited for this development are alienation of family audiences and repetitiveness of the filmic narrative [8] Both these causes have existed almost throughout the eighties. If 'families' are in fact boycotting films, they have been doing so from the previous decade Repetitiveness, moreover, is an accusation that can be made at random against most popular films at any given point of time, whether or not the genre in question is on the ascent or decline. I would like to offer a different explanation for the decline of the mass-film focussing on how this development is related to the perceived problems with the genre in general and the spectator position constructed by it in particular.

I wish to draw attention to three related and coeval developments which had significant bearing on the mass-film. Firstly, the distance between the fan and the masses, partly a result of the 'real' star's interventions in fan activity (see Chapter 1) and his validation of the critique of the genre by acting in class-films created the conditions for the construction of a spectator who is clearly distinguishable from the mass-audience. It became increasingly difficult for fans to promote films which were seen as addressing only the 'masses'. It is entirely possible that sections of tbe `mass-audience', particularly those from backgrounds similar to fans, after following the raging debates on obscenity of cinema and the backwardness of the masses in the popular press, refused to be addressed as the masses. Chiranjeevi's statements on the masses preventing him from experimenting with other kinds of films could only have reinforced tbe criticism of the genre.

Simultaneously, the emergence of a hybrid genre which combined the mass-film and class-film, posited a sophisticated spectator who was quite distinct from the mass-film's 1 have in mind films

[7] Interestingly, despite the phenomenal success of *Osey Ramulamma* in the recent past, film buffs have already forecast the death of the naxalite-film. In fact, all the naxalite-films which followed this film have not been successful.

[8] These are the reasons cited by Gudipoodi Srihari for the poor performance of Chiranjeevi's films in the mid nineties (*Eenadu*, Eenadu Cinema,' 5 February 1997: 12).

like *Roja* (Mani Ratnam, 1992), *Gentleman* (Shankar, 1993), *Premikudu* (Shankar, 1994) and *Bharateeyudu* (Shankar, 1996), which were dubbed from Tamil into Telugu, but also *Kshana Kshanam* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1991), *Gayam* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1994) and other films made by Varma and his assistants who had turned to direction (e.g., Siva Nageswara Rao and Krishna Vamsy) While these films were more successful with urban than rural audiences, films made by the Telugu film industry for the latter too had to take into account the attraction of the sophisticated spectator for the supposedly unsophisticated masses. *Ammoru* (Kodi Ramakrishna 1995) for instance, is a devotional film, whose traditional constituency is believed to be women, specifically rural women, had some of the most spectacular special effects ever to be seen in a Telugu film Of particular relevance for my argument are the films by Shankar which bear a remarkable similarity to the mass-film in their thematic concerns. The bandit-hero of *Gentleman* is a brahminised tower-caste youth who launches a one man struggle against corruption and also Bets up an educational institution for poor (read upper-caste) students because the corrupt government has failed to provide education to those with `merit*. *Premikudu's* lower class/caste hero falls in love with the daughter of the state's governor and wins her heart by learning *Bharatanatyam*. He also saves the state from the governor who is actually a terrorist master-minding the collapse of the government In *Bharateeyudu,* the seventy-five year old hero, a former freedom fighter, takes it upon himself to cleanse the government of corruption and even kills his corrupt son for being responsible for the death of forty school children.[9]

The mass-film failed to address the challenge posed by these films on two counts. Firstly in terms of the spectator posited by them, there was a distinct shift away from the imaging of the spectator as a member of the unsophisticated, uncultured mass-audience. Secondly, as is evident from some of the major successes of the Telug film industry like *Peda Rayudu* (Ravi Raja Pinisetty, 1994),

[9] See Dhareshwar and Niranjana (1996) and Niranjana and Srinivas (1996) for analyses *of Premikudu* and *Bharateeyudu* respectively.

Ammoru and *Pelli Sandadi* (K.Raghavendra Rao, 1996), the ability of popular cinema to respond to the liberalization of the Indian economy from 1991 onwards was a crucial factor in the success of individual films. With the exception of *Alluda Majaka*, the mass-film almost completely ignored economic liberalization. Liberalization was imaged variously as resulting in a spurt in consumerism, the threat of the welfare state being dismantled and erosion of native culture in popular cinema. What is common to almost all the films mentioned above (dubbed into Telugu or made in Telugu) is the attempt to either come to terms with the anxieties invoked by and/or exploring the possibilities opened up by the very process of liberalization. Positing the sophisticated spectator is rtsclfa means of coming to terms with the rapid expansion of satellite/cable television on the one hand and dubbed versions of Hollywood films.

The technical sophistication of *Premikudu* and *Bharateeyudu* elicit comparison with Hollywood productions rather than other Indian films, and the spectator is presumed to be aware of both Hollywood cinema and international satellite channels (like Channel V and MTV). Simultaneously, their avowedly `serious' themes (particularly of *Gentleman* and *Bharateeyudu)* are reminiscent of the class-film. The Telugu film industry's response to the liberalized present was mediated by the competition they faced from these films which not only defied existing generic categories but were seen as being able to attract the mass- as well as class-audience. In other words these `new' films (which were also being made in Telugu by Varma and his former assistants) were a part of the problem which for the Telugu film industry translated as the loss of viewership for the mass-film.

Even a brief examination of the major hits produced by the Telugu film industry clearly demonstrates mat there has been a shift away from the mass-film's tendency to image the spectator as a member of the mass. Special effects apart, *Ammoru* (Kodi Ramakrishna, 1995) is typical of the Telugu film industry's response to both liberalization and the threat posed by the slick `new' films. It successfully packaged nativity (here imaged as folk religion and cultural practices that have as their

centre the cult of the mother goddess) for the 'modern' sophisticated spectator. *Peda Rayudu's* spectator is not sophisticated (in that s/he is not invited to make comparisons between the film and Hollywood or internatinal satellite TV productions) but s/he is marked by a taste for nativity (notice mat this is a 'clean' film i.e., it is not obscene and therefore does not cater to the 'mean taste' of front benchers). The film presents a benign feudal lord presiding over a village freeing it of injustice by adhering to time-honoured traditions of the village Such a feudal lord, the film suggests, is a necessary condition for the survival of 'authentic' Telugu culture. Nostalgia for the feudal is thus inseparably linked with the yearning for nativity The feudal itself is presented here as a system where the social is not torn apart by class/caste antagonisms. Further, everyone in the village is seen as being 'equal' (despite class/caste inequalities) because all belong to a unified *cultural* community. (Spectacular group dances involving hundreds of dances are watched by everyone from the feudal lord to the commoner and even the wife of the fonner participates in one of the dances.) The feudal lord dies at the end of the film when he realizes that he has passed a faulty judgement at the village panchayat The conflict between the benevolent patriarch and his more modern younger brother (both roles played by Mohan Babu) thus results in a vacuum with the passing of the feudal. The death of the patriarch is presented as doubly tragic because the younger hero is incapable of filling the vacuum and thus the village community and its culture are threatened by the absence of the protector.

The invocation of the feudal is at once a critique of the state, which has completely failed to replace the feudal structures of authority and justice, and the liberalized present, which threatens the already disappearing nativity. Thus a critique of the present, characterized by the corrupt, inefficient state and consumerism, necessitates the reliving of the past by imaginatively reconstructing it

In *Pelli Sandadi* (1996) the extended urban middle-class, upper caste family becomes the foundation for the celebration of consumerism Evidently an adaptation of the Hindi super hit *Hum Aap Ke Ham Kaun!* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), a major portion of the narrative is devoted to the representation of various rituals associated with what is seen as the traditional' Telugu marriage.

(Some of these rituals' are quite clearly borrowed from the Hindi film.) The urban extended family enters the village and relays the glory of native Telugu culture to the spectator, culture symbolized in the film by the marriage ceremony. The urban family's return to its 'roots' is in fact the means by which the film recasts consumerism as a celebration of its cultural heritage. Further, the presentation of the extended family, seen as a democratic institution with kind and understanding patriarchs who allow their children to lead the lives of their own choice, becomes the condition for partaking of the pleasures of consumerism (which are pleasures of the collective, albeit an upper-caste, middle-class one). So fundamentally does this film reconstitute the spectator (vis-a-vis the mass-film) that the masses are completely ejected from the frame (except when they appear as loyal servants) and all signs of class/caste conflict are absent.

The spectator is provided clean'/ wholesome' entertainment but also doses of (presumably) local or Telugu culture. S/he is expected to realize that the preservation of native culture is possible only by ensuring the class-caste endogamy of the elite. Indeed the film suggests mat the kind of marriage ceremony that is a repository of our' culture is only made possible by the alliance between the rural and urban elites.

Chiranjeevi's *Hitler*'s (Mutyala Subbaiah, 1997) was released at a time when there was a discernable shift away from the mass-film, in terms of themes as well as the way in which the spectator was configured. However, unlike the films discussed above, *Hitler*'s departure from the mass-film does not lie in its technical sophistication/special effects, celebration of consumerism or a return to the feudal. As in a mass-film, in *Hitler* too the fractured extended family is central to the narrative. Unlike the mass-film however, *Hitler* rejects the figure of the rowdy-hero as the instrument of reform in the public and private spheres and as the centre of the extended family. Instead, the hero, Madhava Rao (Chiranjeevi), is a wealthy, respectable and responsible member of the town's elite.

Hitler's narrative revolves around Madhava Rao's attempt to protect his five college-going sisters from the advances of young men or their attempts to molest the women. Interesting!}, the hero

does not distinguish between the 'lumpen', who sexually assaults his sisters, and their lovers who make advances to the college going girls. The film opens with a fight which results from a lumpen molesting them (by rubbing his shoulder forcibly against all the sisters) as they alight from a bus. Only minutes later the hero literally chases away a youth, Kanta Rao, who is in love with one of the sisters. His ruthlessness in clearing the streets of lovers and lumpens earns him the nickname 'Hitler'. 'Hitler' prevents the lovers and lumpens from taking over public spaces because these youth threaten the well-being of the family (represented by the sisters who are not confined to the 'home'). Of particular interest in this regard is the song sequence '*Prema Johar*, *Down Down Hitler*' ('Long Live Love, Down with Hitler') in which two young men in love with two of Madhava Rao's sisters lead a procession of lovelorn youth, holding placards denouncing 'Hitler' as an enemy of love. When they enter his compound and gather before the doorway of the house, 'Hitler' flings open the doors. The very sight of Madhava Rao drives away the youth. Throughout the film the camera lingers on the doors of the house—firmly shut—or Madhava Rao sitting on a chair right in front of the open doors, virtually guarding it.[10] On one occasion, his second sister's lover (who is also the son of their maternal uncle) sneaks into the house during Madhava Rao's absence with disastrous consequences. Rao returns, chases him to his father's house, thrashes him and also slaps his father (Rao's uncle) who comes in the way, suspecting the cousin of hiding in his house to peep at his sisters while they change their clothes This incident leads to the severing of relations between the two families and Madhava Rao decrees that his sister will not marry the cousin and he himself will not marry the uncle's daughter (Rambha) who is in love with him. He will have nothing to do with a family of 'loafers', he says.

Even as he deals ruthlessly with the external threat (in the form of sisters' suitors), Madhava Rao simultaneously tries to strictly monitor and control his sisters' agency/sexuality. The film suggests

[10] Interestingly, the film's publicity material depicts the hero's house as a fort, complete with stone walls etc. The fort was also used as a stage backdrop for the 100th day celebration of the film in Ongole on 1 May 1997 (See Illustration 10).

that this is necessary since an impure woman attracts the attention of men and is targeted by them. Early in the film, Madhava Rao blames one of his sisters for a love letter written by Kanta Rao (Sudhakar), suggesting that she tacitly encouraged him (by not actively rejecting his advances). The hero's responsibility of protecting their honour (read chastity) is seen as all the more onerous given the absence of the parents. The mother is dead and the father is a truck driver who not only married another woman while the mother was alive but is also held responsible for the subsequent death of the mother. (It turns out that he is not responsible for her death after all but the misunderstanding between the father and son is cleared only seconds before the former's death.) In the early part of the film the hero's control of his sisters and his sternness with their lovers is presented as excessive. However the narrative retroactively justifies mis excess when his eldest sister, drugged and chased by the villains' henchmen, runs into a family friend[1] s house only to be seduced by the latter (a widower, who marries her later). The hero views the loss of his sister's honour as a failure of his guardianship and says that it (the seduction) would not have happened if their *mother had been alive,* in other words, if the sister had been initiated properly into the social-sexual mores of their class/caste.

The film thus establishes an antagonism between the degenerate public sphere, virtually crawling with lumpens, lovers and seducers—all potential threats to the honour of women—and the `family' (presented as young women who need to be passed on by the father figure to the husband with their honour unsullied) The hero tries to seal the family from the outside world and accompanies his sisters to college, on the way teaching the lovers and lumpens a lesson or two in family values. Despite his best efforts, he fails repeatedly to discipline his sisters. After the seduction of the first sister, the second elopes with her cousin and lover. The other three sisters leave him when he brings borne their two half-sisters after his father's death Later, Madhava Rao stands completely isolated when he is blamed by bis uncle, aunt and four of his sisters for trying to kill the second sister's husband. (At this point the villains come to his rescue. It is proved mat they are responsible for the murder attempt on bis brother-in-law and the hero is vindicated. His sisters apologise.)

The narrative justifies Madhava Rao's actions, including physically beating up his sisters, and suggests that no amount of sternness is excessive when the family's honour (i.e., sister's unauthorized sexual agency) is at stake. Unlike the mass-film, however, *Hitler* does not underscore this point by producing a rowdy-hero who deploys `obscenity' to control the upper class/caste woman's sexuality. Indeed, the departure from the mass-film is evident in the sequence of events leading to the seduction of the eldest sister. The spectator is aware that the villains' henchmen have given her drug-laced sweets. Neither the girl nor the hero know this. In other words, the hero does not share the spectator's knowledge. Similarly he has no awareness whatsoever of the happenings in the villains' den. Nevertheless the spectator's knowledge only helps reinforce his/her conviction of the justness of the hero's anti-lumpen actions. Given the villains' plot to defame the hero by targetting his sisters' honour, no precaution is excessive. Therefore, even when the hero chases away roadside rowdies as well as well-meaning lovers, the spectator sees the hero's effort as necessary because the villains' henchmen are lurking in public spaces waiting to pounce on the sisters What makes the hero's task impossibly difficult is that he cannot prove mat the sisters are in any real danger because, paradoxically, he himself does not know that the danger exists in the form of the villains. And this is what endears him to the spectator who *knows.*

Indeed the spectator already knows that mis is not a mass-film, and not only because of the massive publicity campaign, launched months before the film's release and drawing attention to Chiranjeevi's `new image'. The *absence* of `obscenity' is meant to be read as evidence of *Hitler's* departure from the convention of the mass-film. In contrast to *Attaku Yamudu Ammayiki, Mogudu, Gharana Mogudu, Alluda Majaka* and even *Rickshawvodu,* where the hero as the representative of the masses, storms the homes of the upper class-caste elite, in *Hitler* the hero prevents the `pollution' of the (upper-caste, middle-class) home by the lover/lumpen. In the process, the film, which re-casts the star as a respectable citizen, demonstrates the conditions under which popular Telugu cinema justifies or celebrates (even if only to delegitimize) the subaltern's struggle for rights. In *Hitler,* with

the hero vacating the position of the subaltern (whether imaged as the lover, worker, or rowdy in the mass-film) everything that the lover/lumpen does is illegitimate and *all* encounters between women' (upper caste, middle-class) and the inhabitants of the public sphere, regardless of class and caste are seen as worthy of prohibition.

Notice that the changed image' (i.e., role) of the star--from rowdy to citizen-is produced in the publicity material generated by the film's producers and the response of film critics, as being crucial for the transformation of the spectator. As a matter of fact, the film is said to have attracted the ` family' audience." Consequently, the change in the on-screen image is seen as being responsible for the disappearance of the lumpen from the theatre and rendering antagonisms among audience groups non-existent.

Who then is the spectator of this film which has merely two duets, only one major fight sequence, and no obscene sequences, and casts the star as a citizen? One Hyderabad based newspaper suggested that *Hitler* was aimed at launching Chiranjeevi as a politician. The front-page article declares that this film is part of the star's attempt to endear himself to the female audiences (via the family melodrama) in order to create a vote bank of women.[12] Does the film then construct the spectator as a female and a non-fan?

[11] Much has been written, even in the mainstream press, on the changed `image' of Chiranjeevi (as reflected in *Hitler)* which presumably changed his constituency. Even while *Hitler* was being made, *India Today* (Telugu) carried out a five page article on Chiranjeevi. Quoting Chiranjeevi, it argued that the long break of eight months--unprecedented in the careers of his contemporaries--was spent by the star in introspection and reassessment of his career. At the end of the break, the star decided to shed his `image' (about which he has reportedly been unhappy since the early nineties, as we saw in Chapter 1) and acquire a brand new one. The result was *Hitler* which, incidentally, the article correctly predicted would be a major hit *(India Today* [Telugu], 21 September--5 October 1997: 48-52). In less than a week after *Hitter's* release, most newspaper reviews of the film not only drew attention to its appeal to the female audiences but also declared that the film was a hit (see for instance, *Deccan Chronicle,* 7 January 1997: 17). Gudipoodi Srihari went one step further and evacuated fans from the theatres in bis celebration of *Hitler* by declaring that they were disappointed with the film *(Eenadu,'* Eenadu Cinema,' 5 February 1997: 12).

[12] *Andhra Pradesh Times,* 5 January 1997: 1.

I would like to argue that *Hitler* needs to be read in the light of other attempts by the star-institution at disciplining the fan, namely, the star's intervention through *Megastar Chiranjeevi*, the establishment of the Statewide Chiranjeevi Youth Welfare Association and the discourse of the ideal or true fan The industry's shift away from the mass-film follows the delegitimization of theatre-based activities by fans and systematic attempts at encouraging fans to perform social service rather than indulge in 'disruptive' activities. Unlike the class-film which tends almost completely to denigrate the star's 'mainstream' films and the circulation of the star-image among fans, *Hitler* offers a new image, meant for circulation among re-formed fans' associations The hype surrounding Chiranjeevi's attempt to change his 'image' (rather than merely experimenting with *the* 'image' and its `other' in the mass-film and class-film respectively) needs to be understood as an endavour by the film industry and star-institution to adopt a new method to transform the fan-spectator and by extension the mass-audience. The change was necessitated by the failure of the mass-film to minimize antagonisms between groups of actual viewers within the cinema hall. This change became imperative with the commercial failure of the mass-film, although the conditions for it (i.e., perceived antagonism, articulated by fihn critics, political activists etc.) were present for years before *Hitler* was made. On the other hand, efforts to discipline fans were underway even during the heyday of the mass-film. As we have seen, the mass-film itself is a means to regulate the agency of the masses. *Hitler* is thus a part of the larger endeavour by the industry and the star to create a new generic entity which while addressing the concerns of the mass-film avoids its pitfalls--the unmanageable fan and displaced family' audience.

Hitler thus constructs its spectator as a fan--for the film not only revolves around the star-hero but indeed offers the star's new image as its primary attraction--but a fan who is not a member of the mass-audience. The film's intended audience include both fans and families, seemingly opposed categories.[13] The antagonisms between these groups (within theatres) presumably disappears when

[13]One of the advertisements of the fihn announced: `Our Chiru is not only for fans but also for families' *{Andhra Pradesh Times,* 26 January 1997: 10).

Hitler is screened because there is nothing in the narrative which drives the masses to crime, violence, etc. Consequently, the spectator's look at the ' family' is not malevolent Regardless of whether or not women who supposedly abandoned Chiranjeevi after *Alluda Majaka* returned to watch *Hitler,* the attempt to tame the ran and to create the conditions for the reappearance of the family audience within the theatre are part of the same manoeuvre. They are founded on the belief that women disappeared (from cinema halls), threatened by the lumpen on-screen and off-screen (among the audience). The family *cannot* inhabit the same space as the lumpen (because the latter is seen as corrupting this space), unless the narrative teaches or civilizes the off-screen lumpen by delumpcnizing the star.

The celebration of the post-mass-film Telugu cinema--which is often a celebration of the decline of the mass-film--is coveal with the increasing currency of the construct of the responsible fan.[14] That construction of the fan as well as the celebration draw attention to the elite public's expectations from the cinema and its (the public's) perception of the function of the cinematic institution. These expectations, I suggest, crystallize around the notion of the 'good film' According to Chiranjeevi, a good film *is* watched and enjoyed by *everyone.*[13] In other words, its appeal supposedly cuts across class, caste, gender and all other social distinctions. Such a film prevents the disaggregation' of me audience (Prasad 1994: 218) by bringing all sections of the audience into the cinema hall, and increasing the profits of the industry. But the notion of the good film is not a construct of the film industry, and its value does not rest merely on its ability to prevent the disaggregation of the audience. It is also a film whose narrative sutures antagonisms and thus prevents the disaggregation of the social into antagonistic groups. And because such a film reconstitutes the

[14] One article claims that in the recent past stars have begun to ensure that then* fans focus primarily on social service. (See Chapter 1 for a discussion on social service by fans.) Interestingly, Chiranjeevi is one of the stars credited by this article with transforming degenerate FAs into socially responsible organizations.

[13] Interview, Madras, 22 January 1995.

social, rendering it free of all antagonism, that the mass and class-audiences, fans as well as families can occupy the same space without the former threatening the latter. Indeed a good film is a proof of cinema's 'democratic' intentions because, ironically, everyone remains in his/her respective place--within and outside the cinema hall.

As for fans'associations in the age of the good film and tbe reformed fan, it remains to be seen how they retain their publicness--and therefore importance--as institutions of the non-elite public sphere of cinema. The history of fans' involvement with the cinema in the past one-and-a-half decades suggests that the `reformed' fans' promotion of good films--instead of mass-films--might become a starting point for fans' engagement with new sets of agendas, their own as well as those of the official public sphere.

Appendix I

Illustration 1. Official Stationery of the All India Chiranjeevi Friends Unit. (Courtesy: M. Suresh Babu.)

M. Suresh Babu
President

61191

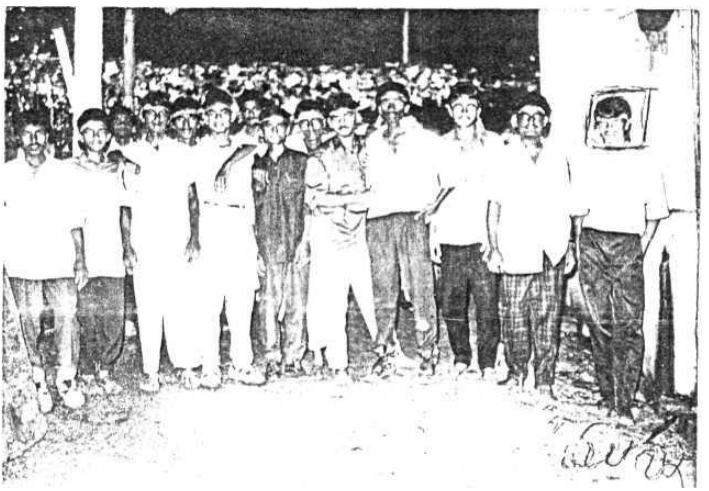
All India Chiranjeevi Friends Unit

Urvasi Centre
Gandhi Nagar
Vijayawada

Illustration 2. Promoting the Star': theatre-based activity.

2a and 2b. Fans celebrate 50 days of *Alluda Majaka* (Photo courtesy: Chiranjeevi's office, Hyderabad.)

a



b.

Illustration 2c. Garlanded cut-out of Chiranjeevi in *Rickshawvodu*. (Photo Courtesy: Chirangeevi's office, Hyderabad.)

Illustration 3. Fans welcome Chiranjccvi to Ongolc on the occasion of the celebration marking 100 days of *Hitler* (*Vartha*, Prakasam edition, 1 May 1997: p.3.)

Illustration 4. Social Service by fans.

4a. Fans visit blind school in Hindupur. Vice-President of the FA in the top left corner.
4b. **Distribution** of bread and fruit to patients in **Merakanapalli**. (Photo courtesy: Chiranjeevi's office, **Hyderabad.)**

a.

b.

Illustration 5. Dalit fans of Chiranjeevi celebrate Ambedkar's birth anniversary in Kamarcddy, Nizamabad District. (Photo Courtesy: Chiranjeevi's office, Hyderabad.)

Illustration 6. One of the three booklets of *Megastar Chiranjeevi* (August 1992)

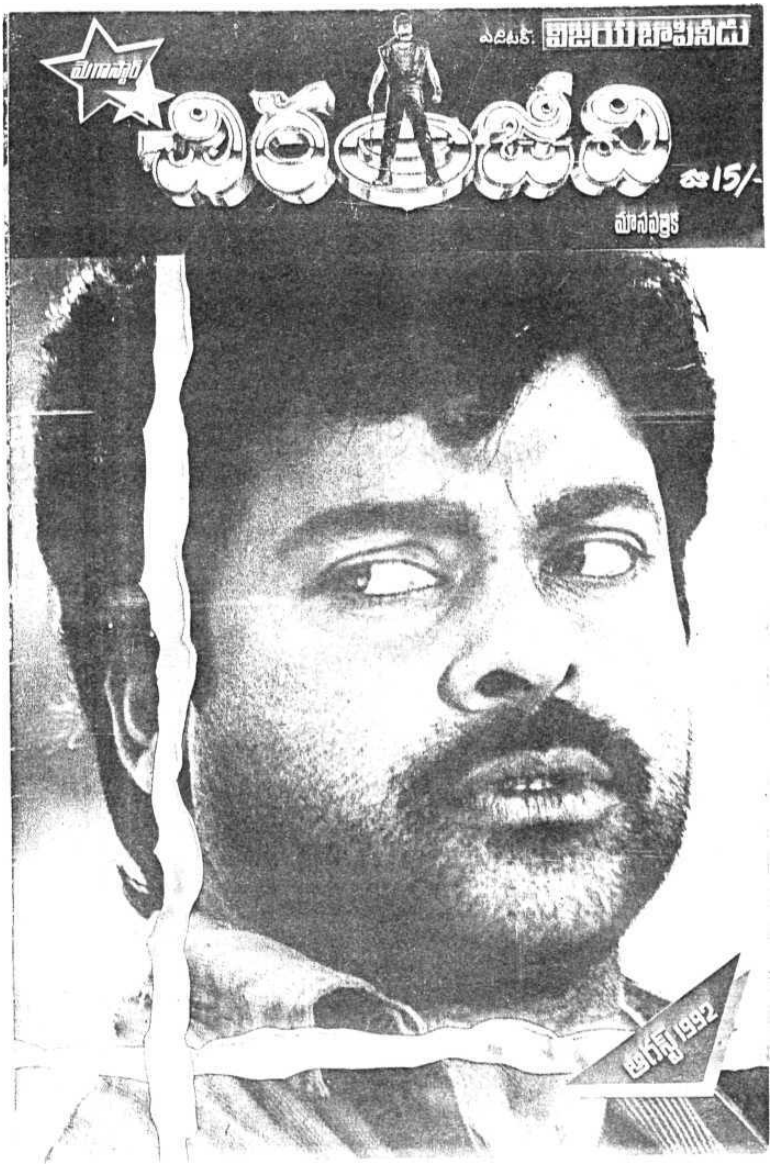


Illustration 7. **Recasting Chiranjeevi.**'

7a. **Chiranjeevi** and Mccna in *Mutha Mestri.*

7b. Chiranjeevi and Meenakshi Seshadri in *Aapadbandhavudu*. (Both pictures from *Megastar Chiranjeevi*, August 1992.)

Illustration 8. One J. Ilemachandra Rao (third from right) of Nellore ends his Tour day old hunger strike in support of the film *Alluda Majaka* in the presence of the town's Deputy Superintendent of Police (second from right). (Photo Courtesy: Chiranjeevi's office, Hyderabad.)

Illustration 9. A poster of *Alluda Majaka.*

Illustration 10. Hitler's forl serves as a backdrop for the 100th day celebration in Ongole on 1 May 1997.

APPENDIX II

FILMOGRAPHY OF CHIRANJEEVI (TELUGU AND HINDI)

S.No.	Title	Director	Year of Release
1.	*Praanam Khareedu*	K. Vasu	1978
2.	*Manavuri Pandavalu*	Bapu	1978
3.	*Tayaramma Bangarayya*	Kommineni	1979
4.	*Kukkakatuku Cheppudebba*	Eeranki Sanna	1979
5.	*Kottalludu*	P. Sambasiva Rao	1979
6.	*I Love You*	Vayunandana Rao	1979
7.	*Punadi Rallu*	Rajkumar Gudapati	1979
8.	*Idi Kadhakadu*	K Balachander	1979
9.	*Sriramabantu*	I.S.Murthy	1979
10.	*Kotalarayudu*	KVasu	1979
11.	*Agnisamskaram*	G.V.Prabhakar	1980
12.	*Kothapeta Rowdy*	P Sambasiva Rao	1980
13.	*Chandipriya*	V.Madhusudhana Rao	1980
14.	*Aarani Mantalu*	K.Vasu	1980
15.	*Jatara*	Dhavala Satyam	1980
16.	*Mosagadu*	K.Raghavendra Rao	1980
17.	*Punnami Nagu*	Rajasekhar	1980
18.	*Nakili Manishi*	S.D.Lal	1980
19.	*Kali*	LV.Sasi	1980
20.	*Tatayya Premaleelalu*	B.V.Prasad	1980
21.	*Love in Singapore*	O.S.R.Anjaneyulu	1980
22.	*Prematarangalu*	S.P.Chittibabu	1980

23.	*Mogudukavali*	Katta Subba Rao	1980
24.	*Ratkabandham*	**Aaluri** Ravi	1980
25.	*Aadavallu Meeku Joharlu*	K **Balachander**	1981
26.	*Parvati Parameshwarulu*	**M.S.Kota Reddy**	1981
27.	*Todudongalu*	**K.Vasu**	1981
28.	*Tiruguleni Manishi*	**K** Raghavendra Rao	1981
29.	*Premanatakam*	Katta Subba Rao	1981
30.	*Nyayamkavali*	**A** Kodandarami **Reddy**	1981
31.	*Oorikichinamata*	**M.Balaiah**	1981
32.	*Ranikasula Rangamma*	**T.L.V.Prasad**	1981
33.	*47 Rojulu*	**K.Balachander**	1981
34.	*Srirastu Subhamastu*	Katta Subba Rao	1981
35.	*Priya*	**S.P Chittibabu**	1981
36.	*Chattaniki Kallu Levu*	S A **Chandrasekhar**	1981
37.	*Kirayi Rowdilu*	**A.Kodandarami Reddy**	1981
38.	*Intlo Ramayya Veedhilo Krishnyya*	**Kodi Ramakrishna**	1982
39.	*Bandipotu Simham*	S **P.Muthu** Raman	1982
40.	*Subhalekha*	**K.Vishwanath**	1982
41.	*Idi Pellantara?*	Vijaya Bhaskar	1982
42.	*Sitadevi*	**Eeranki** Sanna	1982
43.	*Radha My Darling*	**B.Bhaskar**	1982
44.	*Tingurangadu*	**Tatineni Prasad**	1982
45.	*Patnamvachina Pativratalu*	**Mauli**	1982
46.	*Billa Ranga*	**K.S.R.Das**	1982
47.	*Yamakinkarudu*	**Raj Bharath**	1982
48.	*Mondighatam*	Raja Chandra	1982
49.	*Manchupallaki*	**Vamsi**	1982
50.	*Bandhalu Anubandhalu*	Bhargava	1982
51.	*Premapichollu*	A Kodandarami Reddy	1983
52.	*Palleturi Monagadu*	S A **Chandrasekhar**	1983
53.	*Abhilasha*	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1983

54.	*Aalaya Sikharam*	Kodi **Ramakrishna**	1983
55.	*Srvudu Srvudu Srvudu*	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1983
56.	***Puli Bebbuli***	**K.S.R.Das**	1983
57.	*Goodachari No. 1*	Kodi Ramaknshna	1983
58.	*Magamaharaju*	Vijay Bapineedu	1983
59.	***Roshagadu***	**K.S.R.Das**	1983
60.	***Maayinti Premayanam***	**Aaluri Ravi**	1983
61.	***Simhapuri Simham***	Kodi Ramaknshna	1983
62.	***Khaidi***	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1983
63.	***Mantrigari Viyyankudu***	Bapu	1983
64	*Sangharshana*	K Murali Mohan Rao	1983
65.	***Allulosthunnaru***	KVasu	1984
66.	*Goonda*	A Kodandarami Reddy	1984
67.	*Hero*	Vijay Bapineedu	1984
68.	*Devanthakudu*	S A Chandrasekhar	1984
69.	***Mahanagaramlo*** *Mayagadu*	Vijay Bapineedu	1984
70.	*Challenge*	A.Kodandarami Reddy	1984
71.	***Intiguttu***	**K.Bapaiah**	1984
72.	*Nagu*	**Tatineni** Prasad	1984
73.	***Agnigundam***	**Kranti** Kumar	1984
74.	***Rustum***	**A** Kodandarami Reddy	1984
75.	***Chattamto Pooratam***	KBapaiah	1985
76.	*Donga*	A.Kodandarami **Reddy**	1985
77.	***Chiranjeevi***	C.V.Rajcndran	1985
78.	***Jwala***	Ravi Raja Pinisetty	1985
79.	***Puli***	Raj **Bharath**	1985
80.	***Rakta Sindhuram***	A Kodandarami Reddy	1985
81.	***Adavi*** *Donga*	**K.Raghavendra** Rao	1985
82	*Vijeeta*	A Kodandarami Reddy	1985
83.	*Ktralakudu*	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1986
84.	***Kondaveeti*** *Raja*	K.Raghavendra Rao	1986

85.	*Maghadheerudu*	Vijay **Bapineedu**	1986
86	*Veto*	A.Kodandarami Reddy	1986
87.	*Chantabbai*	Jandhyala	1986
88.	*Rakshasudu*	A.Kodandarami **Reddy**	1986
89	*Dhairyavanthudu*	**P.Lakshmi** Deepak	1986
90.	*Chanakya Sapadham*	K.Raghavendra Rao	1986
91.	*Donga* ***Mogudu***	A Kodandarami Reddy	1987
92.	*Aaradhana*	**Bharathi** Raja	1987
93.	***Chakravarthy***	Ravi Raja **Pinisetty**	1987
94.	*Pasivadi Pranam*	A.Kodandarami **Reddy**	1987
95.	***Swayamkrushi***	K **Vishwanath**	1987
96	***Jebudonga***	A.Kodandarami Reddy	1987
97.	***Manchidonga***	K.Raghavendra Rao	1988
98.	***Rudraveena***	K **Balachander**	1988
99.	*Yamudiki Mogudu*	Ravi Raja **Pinisetty**	1988
100.	***Khaidi No.786***	Vijay **Bapineedu**	1988
101.	***Maranamrudangam***	A.Kodandarami Reddy	1988
102.	***Trinetrudu***	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1988
103.	*Yudhabhoomi*	K Raghavendra Rao	1988
104.	***Attaku Yamudu*** *Ammayiki Mogudu*	A.Kodandarami **Reddy**	1989
105.	*State Rowdy*	B.Gopal	1989
106.	***Rudranetra***	K. Raghavendra Rao	1989
107.	***Lankeshwarudu***	**Dasari** Narayana Rao	1989
108.	***Kondaveeti*** *Donga*	**A.Kodandarami Reddy**	1990
109.	*Jagadeka Veerudu* ***Atiloka*** *Sundari*	K Raghavendra Rao	1990
no.	***Kodama Simham***	**K.Murali** Mohan Rao	1990
111.	*Pratibandh* (Hindi)	**Ravi** Raj	1990
112.	*Raja Vikramarka*	Ravi Raja **Pinisetty**	1990
113.	***Stuartpuram*** *Police Station*	Yendamuri Vcerandranath	1991
114.	***Gangleader***	Vijay Bapinecdu	1991
115.	*Rowdy Alludu*	K.Raghavendra Rao	1991

116.	*Gharana* ***Mogudu***	KRaghavendra Rao	1992
117.	***Aaj Ka Goondaraj*** **(Hindi)**	**Ravi** Raj	1992
118.	*Aapadbandhavudu*	**K. Vishwanath**	1992
119.	*MuthaMestri*	**A.Kodandarami** Reddy	1993
120.	*Mechanic Alludu*	**B.Gopal**	1993
121.	*Mugguru Monagallu*	**K.Raghavendra** Rao	1994
122.	***S.P.Parasuram***	Ravi Raja Pinisetty	1994
123.	*The Gentleman* (Hindi)	MahcshBhatt	1994
124.	***Alluda Majaka***	E.V.V.Sathyanarayana	1995
125.	***Big*** *Boss*	**Vijay** Bapineedu	1995
126.	***Rickshawvodu***	Kodi **Ramakrishna**	1995
127.	*Hitler*	**Mutyala** Subbaiah	1997
128.	*Master*	Surcsh Krishna	1997

Source: ***Superhit***, 30 August 1996.

Interviews

Interviews with the following persons were cited or paraphrased in the thesis. All interviews were carried by the author in Telugu.

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