

## Chapter 4

# Shadowing Lines of Stardom and Politics: Deconstructing Image of “Rebel Star” Ambareesh

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Rebel star Ambareesh, a popular Kannada film actor and a politician, is considered a cult figure for various reasons including his contentious political career and unquestionable stardom. He was well known for controversial, witty, and sleazy statements in public. Yet he gained considerable attention within the party as he represented dominant Vokkaliga voters in Old Mysore part of the state. A large number of films cast him in scripts comprising a rebellious young man who would take down the entire system single-handedly. In his political career as an MP and state minister, he always shocks his party leaders with his “who cares” attitude like in his films. It is not only the rhetorical, chauvinistic statements alone that gained him popularity. The on-screen jingoism towards a region, roles appealing to feudal set up also welded Ambareesh’s image as a “Proud son of Mandya.” The current chapter is an attempt to deconstruct the unique model of “Rebel Star,” which needs to be evaluated in the historical context of Kannada cinema along with reception among shared ideologies.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It will not be a fair ascription if Indian films referred to films made lonely in the Hindi language, primarily produced through studios based in Mumbai. South Indian films comprise of movies made in four states with evidently demarked regional acceptance and film stars enjoying a dissimilar fandom. Rajinikanth, Chiranjeevi, Mohanlal, Vishnuvardhan, and Ambareesh are (were) the stalwarts of contemporary South Indian films which gained fame in the late 1970s as superstars in their respective film

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spaces (Raghavendra, 2017). Among these, the first four actors consciously turned people's admiration to systematically imagine themselves in cinema's area and to politics occasionally. However, Kannada actor and politician M. H Ambareesh's populism and charisma surpass the glory of his contemporary actors, despite him never tried to do so. He never tried to build a deliberate positive public image for himself. He ironically lived as one of the unruliest personalities in the Southern film fraternity by unabashedly indulging himself in gambling and boozing despite those instances becoming a controversy often. He was ill-reputed for making chauvinistic public statements yet garnered considerable public support, which is difficult to explain.

Despite being an active politician who elected to the Parliament and the state legislature for over seven times in total, he found himself wound up in innumerable controversies. That said, unlike his fellow politicians, the public never viewed him as an imposter or a Tartuffe. Many of the experts interviewed for this research attributed this strange public regard towards Ambareesh to his dialect (precisely Mandya or old Mysore slang), which inadvertently led him to create a distinctly credible identity from the mass, helping him find a strong political base. Despite avidly resorting to inappropriate language, Ambareesh was perceived as a do-gooder and straight shooter, especially when it came to troubleshooting Karnataka film industry-related controversies. Then the question of what accurately creates a fandom arises. Was it the widely perceived on-screen charm or off-screen psyche that accepted Mr Ambareesh as he is? Does his Mandya dialect add fuel to the regional jingoistic and chauvinistic craving of the mass, making him the people's representative? Or was he just a mere construction of cinema that eventually helped him attain political success? Could the success of Ambareesh be owed to his allegiance to a dominant caste base in Southern Karnataka (Raghavendra, 2011)? These questions will investigate the arguments presented further in this chapter.

There is an abundance of television interviews principally on the lines of the whimsical nature of Ambareesh's public statements and a couple of informative books in Kannada, essentially appeasing Ambareesh fans. However, the current researcher could not find a single critical article constructing or deconstructing the image of Ambareesh on his stardom or populist personality. Hence, this chapter follows a partially ethnographic analysis that includes personal conversations with Ambareesh's fan and interviews from the journalist community who have had the opportunity to engage in close encounters with Mr Ambareesh over the last few decades. Also, popular films of Mr Ambareesh's quoted as and when required, which are mostly subjective interpretations of the author.

## **CHANGED ELECTIONEERING IN THE POST-AMBAREESH'S CAMPAIGN**

According to Bergman, the cinema produced for creating a spectator's response (Sandberg, 1997). While anticipating a response, the spectator is the sole focus in the process of cinema creation. The images and words meticulously intended for these unknown yet loosely connected aspirations of the spectator communion. Those who cater to such expectations are praised and accepted along with all the other delusions peddled by that person, who usually considered as a star. Spectators' community in a healthy society expects to be led by the virtues of an 'ideal' person. They are well aware of the shortcomings of their chosen leader and still decided to bestow their hopes by indulging themselves in this beautiful intellectual bargain. Actor turned politician Ambareesh might be one of those accepted, intellectually bargained populists in Southern Karnataka (M.V. Krishna, personal interview, 2019). Ambareesh recognised as a famous star in the early 1980s, and this status was still rooted in the hearts of the people

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