

Chapter 25

South Indian Cinema: A Study of Culture, Production, and Consumption

Krishna Sankar Kusuma

Jamia Millia Islamia, India

ABSTRACT

Cinema scholars often refer to Hindi cinema as Indian cinema. India has diverse languages, cultures, and a long history of Cinema of its own. Regional cinema in numbers, as well as quality, competes with any cinema in the world. The study is an attempt to present the case of five film industries in the southern part of India, which includes Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tulu language films. The southern film industries is theorized as 'South Indian cinema' as they share similar features, yet each one of them is unique. South Indian cinema has often been looked down upon as it is cheap and vulgar. The research also explores the gender dimensions in both the industry as well as on-screen presentation. This chapter aims to provide a theoretical and philosophical interpretation of South Indian cinema.

INTRODUCTION

In India, Cinema has emerged as a symbol of culture. Along with cricket, Cinema has part of the everyday life of the common public. Cinema has been one of the sustained industries which have been striving through rapid changes in the technology, exhibition spaces, distribution and viewership pattern. Cinema became a social institution rather than just an entertainment media (Srinivas, 2006).

Often scholars and media in India and foreign refer films made in India as “Indian cinema”, where it is wholly referring to the movies made in the Hindi language. A. Rajadhyaksha (2003) argues, “As Bollywood is of course identical to the Hindi (if not Indian) cinema” is an indication of the existence of strong regional or non-hindi (Bollywood) cinema. India is linguistically a unified nation with many regional nationalities. Languages spoken in different states not only differ in their accent but also unique to their script and cultural ethos. Major film industries in different styles in India include Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Odia, Bhojpuri, Assamese and Gujarati etc. The southern part of India with five dif-

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ferent unique languages produces films in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu (it is one of the not so prominent film making industry in Karnataka)

All the film industries put together produces the highest number of films in the entire world. For the discussion, the words Cinema and Cinema used interchangeably. Overall, the South Indian film industry produces more than 50 per cent of films every year (KPMG-FICCI, 2016). The overall share of the theatrical earning of regional cinema range from 40-45 per cent of the total movies produced in India, in which 70 per cent received by Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam in 2017 (KPMG-FICCI, 2018). The rise of over the top media (OTT) services brought vast amounts of revenue to the films made in India, with significant contributions from South Indian movies, which includes Netflix acquiring the digital rights of Bahubali 1 & 2 for 255 million rupees (Choudhary, 2017).

WHAT IS SOUTH INDIAN CINEMA?

South Indian Cinema is increasingly used by the academic scholars to examine the history, shared entertainment culture and Cinema. South Indian Cinema is about the cinemas of the South, which speaks five different languages with their unique culture. Cinema studies or Cinema as a historical, political and cultural artefact never taken seriously, so it is difficult to trace the historical evidence from a variety of sources (Baskaran, 2009). South Indian cinema uniqueness shapes its character to establish its identity. Generally there is no such specific occasion to watch a movie in a theatre, it may be a festival, a get together with friends, relatives, if one gets bored, happy, sad, if the film carries a good public talk or even audience go to just see why certain film is not doing well. Over the years, Cinema not only created a culture of its own but also emerged as a part of popular open culture. South Indian Cinema share similar developments in Cinema along with Hindi cinema. The growth of Cinema in India has witnessed contributions from directors, actors, technicians and other creative and technical fields from South India.

The unique features that distinguish them from other regional Cinema include the stardom and star/hero-worship, fans and fans associations, Cine-politics, Folklore and mythological films. Other characteristic features include the holy and religious films, Naxalite or red Cinema, Dubbing and remake, Horror comedy, songs and dances etc.

Stardom and Hero Worship

In South Indian film culture, there is the widespread of idolizing movie stars is part and parcel of the entertainment culture. The star phenomenon dwelled into to a variety of socio-political movements in actual society. Fandom is unique in Southern Cinema where fans go out of their way to catch repeat shows of their favourite stars. Practice in the form of extreme devotion for Gods and Goddesses invoked fans to form of Bhakti or by appealing to some other sentiment in them

Fan activity has grown from a voluntary event to a more organized and traditional function of a star. The two forms of fans and fan clubs exist further based on star sponsored as well as voluntary and grounded on the lines of caste, class and region. The rift between two fan clubs often based on the caste of each star, where the fans act like protectors of the pride or stardom of a star. The fan activity traditionally includes preparing the first day shows in theatres, banners, garlanding etc.

The advent of the Internet and social media enhanced fan activity online. Like, share and subscribe of the tailors, taking care of the trolls by counter writing in favour of the star. With the click of a button,

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