



# Regional Cinema and Culture: A Manifestation of Clichés in Andhra Pradesh

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**Abstract:** *Commonwealth nations have, fortunately or unfortunately, accepted English – the colonizers' language – as a prime vehicle of communication. Indeed, it is a matter of concern for most of the regional linguists who try rigorously to safeguard local languages as English replaces them. Every language paves a way for the establishment and the propagation of a specific culture. It is believed that a strong sense of culture can be manifested through the lens of Cinema – an extraordinary work of art- to reach out to the masses. However, it is intriguing to see a drastic difference between western theatre and Indian theatre especially regional cinema. Postmodern era has crafted a form which destabilizes the long-accepted mode of thought and discourses which serve high class society and has stabilized a new pattern of ideology in establishing a variety of culture, class, social perspective...etc. Many doubts have popped up whether Indian theatre is ready to embrace the new wave of thought which is inclusive in nature or not. This pool of thought encourages me to explore the local Cinema and culture of Andhra Pradesh in detail. A detailed study on Andhra Pradesh would demonstrate a plethora of theories such as classicism, racism, casteism...etc. that are underlying would float predominantly. At this juncture, I bring forth the real factors that are blocking the enhancement of cinema and culture and perspectives to better the channels to improve popular culture and empowerment.*

**Key Words:** *Post modernism, Popular culture, cliché, classicism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Commonwealth nations, as Wikipedia says 'The Commonwealth of Nations, normally known as the Commonwealth, is a political association of 53 member states, nearly all of them former territories of the British Empire', would always look back into the past in order to understand their stand on the advent of English specially. It is always the question of acceptance and sustainability of the English in their territories by the natives. The British were quite predominantly entered the territories and established themselves extremely supreme. Their power seemed to be unquestionable and irreplaceable within a short span of time. It swept off other colonizers and delivered a new testimony of power and hegemony on commonwealth nations. It paved a way for the British to introduce their culture, religion, dictums, discourses and Language especially. It is intriguing that a foreigner came and taught his/ her languages at different nations. Though it was unwelcomed and questioned initially, it was embraced and encouraged to spread as early as possible. The nations had unanimously agreed to put their efforts to learn the language. It turned to be a symbol of pride and respect to the natives while speaking in different tongues.

In the rise of fascination towards the colonizer's language, i.e., English, the natives quickly adapted themselves to comprehend the significance of the language. The idea of language stood out to be a main aspect. It was closely monitored by the British local administrators. They were very keen in establishing themselves. Sparks of interchangeability in terms of trade, culture, religion, language...etc. lit the nations and kept ablaze for a long time. In the pursuance of interchangeability of discourses, the British and the Indian administrators worked hand in hand in locating and eradicating a few social evils. It started taking a complete form only after colonialism shifted to imperialism. The colonizers imposed their culture and language on the colonized. The imposition garnered a lot of criticism in both the ways, Negative as well as positive. The positivity side of the coin highlighted the useful things carried out by the British. The advent of English was regarded high when it dealt with the mentioned discourses. During the course of British colonization, the colonizers had a great curiosity on the Drama and Music. They encouraged the local music and art.



## 2. Genesis of theatre:

If we were to understand the genesis of theatre, we have to roll back to ages and centuries to find the source of the idea of theatre. Let me give the instance of how the idea of theatre came into existence from the west. It dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The origins are with the Greek ideology. The story says that *the origins of Greek theatre lie in the revels of the followers of Dionysus, a god of fertility and wine. His female devotees, in particular, dance themselves into a state of frenzy. In the 6th century BC, a priest of Dionysus, by the name of Thespis, introduces a new element which can validly be seen as the birth of theatre.* As per the story mentioned above, the Greek own the credit of introducing the idea of theatre. They could popularize the idea at a rapid speed and could spread it to every corner of the world. In fact, the Greeks have always stood out to be a mark of wisdom.

The western countries embraced the idea of theatre and started working on in their own styles to suit the native culture and traditions. On a special note, the Romans were highly influenced by the Greece. Their plays were all set in Athens and followed the style as well. For an instance, the Roman writers, *Plautus and Terence*, got the fame because of their writings at an early stage. The idea of writing was with the notion of pleasure, which was well connected with the Circus Maximus, *is an ancient Roman chariot-racing stadium and mass entertainment venue located in Rome, Italy.* It was the main arena for organizing sporting contests – chariot races and boxing matches. The gladiator fights used to be highly popular. These attracted the crowds in huge numbers. Death was the central theme of the contest. History says *'each gladiator tries to kill his opponent. If he merely wounds him, either the sponsor or the crowd will give thumbs up or down for mercy or death'*. People just embraced this sport as a part of entertainment. In order to entertain the audience further, many permanent amphitheatres were built to give a taste of the spectacle. Of all the amphitheatres, *Coliseum, an oval Amphitheatre in the Centre of the city of Rome, Italy*, was the most spectacular place. It hosted a number of sporting contests on a regular basis. This momentum had shadowed the beauty of theatres. In fact, the theatre was no match to the sporting contests. It continued for a long time.

Finally, theatre was given a proper preference and prominence outside the Roman Empire. The sporting contests got the prominence at a rapid pace. They were the main symbols of entertainment. The significance of theatre was dimmed under the shadow of the colosseum. It was no match for the romans. Theatre was silenced at a time. The artists were left deaf and dumb to the situations. The theatre got a little chance only in the 10<sup>th</sup> century after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It took different forms from 10<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century. It all started with the churches. They took out the liturgy to enact on the streets. The prominent incidents were enacted for the public. It was called the liturgical drama. The other were *Mystery plays, Processional plays and Comedy plays*. The Amphitheatres lost their prominence with the arrival of theaters in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were called London's Theatres. Many prominent personalities, *William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlow, and Ben Jonson*, wrote for the theatres. They developed a plethora of genres such as *Tragedy, comedy, Romantic, Historical, Political, Cruelty...etc.* These prompted the humans to explore themselves and give an everlasting taste of art. People got an increased taste for the theatre. It reflected the life and intrigued many souls to respond to the situations predominantly. Nonetheless, it also created political turmoil which caused the termination of theatres in 1642. It alarmed the citizens because they were cut off from the reality. All the actors pleaded for the revocation of the ban. The lift was revoked in the year 1660. Later on, theatre was given an impeccable importance by the people and the government.

## 3. Indian Theatre:

On the other hand, India which was under the colonial rule had its own art and music as I mentioned above. Indian culture was reflected on the stage. Indian culture was reflected on the stage. The Sanskrit theatre was the initial form of theatre in India. It developed along with the western theatre such as Greek and Rome. Its influence was very predominant with the arrival of Alexander the Great in India. Indians had the interest in the Greek style of plays. It went on a while. The British even gave a nod for the theatres in India though Islamic rulers did not show interest in it. It instilled a lot of aspects to the theatre. The pre independent era theatre was a manifestation of people's will and wish. It was used to motivate the natives to be very resistant to the British rule. However, the idea of theatre got shifted from a mark of resistance to entertainment during post independent era. Theatre started facing a tight fight from the local televisions and cinema. So, it got split into different pieces. They added the flavour of region to the pieces of theatre. I would say the complete dilution started taking place from there. The regional cinema had been existing for a long time. It played a very crucial role in building the region holistically. At this juncture, I would like to explore the regional culture and cinema of Andhra Pradesh.

## 4. Andhra Pradesh Cinema and Clichés:

Andhra Pradesh has been the most inclusive state in terms of culture and religion. In fact, it has an impeccable feature of hospitality. I can say that it is the place for serenity and humanity. People are good at heart and will. So, it is



so inspirational to many states when it comes to unity. However, there is a twist in the story. When it comes art and theatre, it seems to have taken a sudden turn in accommodating every section of the society. In a way, it is partial at this juncture. There was a hope of transformation in the fields of Andhra Pradesh culture and cinema with the arrival of post modernistic approach. The well-established discourses got trembling in the postmodern era. The era had destabilized the long-accepted mode of thought and discourses and crafted a new ideology that accepted every section and class of society and social perspective. It outstretched the hopes of regional culture and cinema of Andhra Pradesh that it might follow the western thought of postmodernism. However, the regional culture and theatre of AP failed to incorporate the western thought in its style. It resulted in a great misery for the regional culture and cinema as it encouraged a plethora of clichés to creep very evidently. The concept has multiple layers to be explored.

#### 4.1 Racism:

It is highly shocking to know that the Andhra Pradesh cinema has the racist approach. It is done on the skin tone of the person. It is projected time and again as well as spread to the grassroots of the society. It is pathetic that a person with fair tone is made a protagonist and a person with Brown tone is projected an antagonist. Let me quote a derogatory dialogue from a movie, *Sarainodu*. The hero says “Don’t think of me as stylish and soft, looking at my Fair tone of the skin. I am mass in nature”. This dialogue has taken me by surprise. The writers have intended to say that everyone who has the fair tone as soft and stylish and on the other hand, people with brown tone are harsh and rash in nature. How derogatory and racist it is! The same cine ideology is reflected in Andhra culture. I have witnessed a few instances at shopping malls, Entertainment spots, Temples, Churches, Restaurants...etc. I see that the attitude of the shopkeeper changes according to the Skin tones of the customers, which is indeed a mark of Racism. Another instance could be found in any friend circle where the person with Fair tone is regarded a hero and brown tone a villain given to any nature of theirs. How racist it is! One of my colleagues, who is a Muslim, told me that we do not allow our kids to play with brown toned skin kids. How racist it is! Finally, most of the movies have the goons of brown skin tone. It is reflected in everyday life. Children are told to be careful of brown skin tone people. Indeed, children do get frightened by that. How racist it is! The list goes on and on.

#### 4.2 Casteism:

There are many clichés added to Andhra Pradesh culture and cinema. They are *Classism, Casteism, Woman subjugation, Racism...etc.* First and foremost, let us explore the concept of *Casteism*. It has been very lethal for a long time in cinema field. Everything is done on the basis of caste. It has been the ultimate platform for the high sections of the society. Indeed, the good old economic report says “Rich become richer and Poor become poorer”, it would rightly fit into the situation of cinema. There is no exaggeration in saying that the complete regional cinema is in the hands of a few creamy layer section of the society. Of course, they all come from upper castes, such as *Kamma, Kaapu, Vysya (very seldom) Reddy and Raju*. We do not find anyone from lower section enjoying popularity though they are talented enough. Mr. Rajesh. K, who comes from Theater and Art background, is one my good friends. He is interested in Direction department. I asked him about the possibilities of growing in the cine industry as he comes from a Dalit family. He sounded a little hopeful but highly hopeless regarding the future. In fact, this is the scenario that is prevailing in Andhra Pradesh.

I am reminded of a heart throbbing incident. The censor Board of Andhra has banned a movie, ‘*Saranam Gacchami*’, which indeed talks about the need of reservation system in India. It has taken Mr. Bommaku Murali, the producer, by surprise. He says ‘*I am surprised and feel depressed by this act. I could not understand the reasons for my movie getting banned*’. Later, he fought and got the movie released. Most of us are not aware of the movie’s arrival and departure. Indeed, it shows how a few sections are not ready to be questioned. Finally, Mr. Murali says that he would not stop making such movies that speaks of social justice.

#### 4.3 Women subjugation:

Women subjugation is witnessed on the silver screen of the Andhra Cinema. They are portrayed as the subjects for pleasure. It has been projected that women characters are always completely dependent on male characters. They are house makers and cannot decide on their own. They are always behind curtain. If any woman character that has a voice to raise then she will be tagged villainous. Women oriented movies or characters are not accepted completely. In a way, it looks like, the heroine characters are there for ‘stress relieving’ with their appearance. Other than that, heroine has no role to play. She is there as a point of glamour, which is unreal as much as the character itself, and for the six glamorous songs.



#### 4.4 Classism:

It is even a point to be noted. It is evident that the low-class people cannot be taken into a respectable position. The posh culture dominates the humanity. In fact, it looks like that the industry seems be only of a few classes. Let me give you an instance which resembles the classism in the field. Mr. Shiva Nagulu, a folk singer, got an opportunity to sing for a movie. He did sing for a song and it was there in audio. Finally, when the movie got released, his voice was not found. His song was removed and replaced without any intimation. I am sure it would not have happened if anyone comes from the mentioned classes. The movie unit would have been very cautious about the situation. Whereas it did not happen with the singer who went heartbroken because he comes from a humble background.

#### 4.5 Religion:

Even the popular religions are under the hammer as most of the religions are not preferred to be of high quality. For instance, I have not seen any hero comes from religions, such as Christianity, Islamic, Parsee, Jain...etc. except Hinduism. They prefer particularly a religion repeatedly which, in fact, defames other religions. Based on these projections, the locals have less regard for others as they place themselves with their favourite actors and actresses. Culture is an ideology that guides everyone. It mirrors the past, the present and future generations. It is the best teacher for the human beings for long time. Great danger comes to the humanity when the culture fails. It means that culture starts taking sides and being partial. I believe there is no meaning to the culture when it does not recognize the human as it is. There is a collapse of culture in Andhra Pradesh especially as it is owned by a few sections and dictated by a few sections. And of course, it needs an immediate attention otherwise we will not have a culture to speak of and to pass on to the future generations.

#### 5. CONCLUSION:

The mentioned clichés are not less than the current culture of the state. It was never recovered from the clichés that are portrayed evidently at every point of life. People who raised their voices against these are tagged selfish and fake personalities. The sections who are enjoying the power deny all the charges and declare themselves just and correct. The current situation is far from getting a solution forever and ever because we live in a world of imagination which looks like a Utopian society. The present generation has to take the responsibility and ignite the world full of just and righteousness. Sadly, it will not happen as we live outside the reality. I discuss these aspects with many experienced personalities. They just strike off everything with a statement '*This is the society. Just go on with the flow*' I get perplexed whenever someone says that because my conscious would not agree with the statement time and again. I wish it has to be changed and it has to be inclusive in every aspect of life.

Finally, I have a few thoughts running in my mind; when can I see that there is an equilibrium is maintained on the screen irrespective of caste, creed, sex, region...etc. After having scripted all my thoughts, I have closed my eyes and want to foresee future of Andhra culture and cinema. I say I have a dream that a hero from low caste section is preferred as the protagonist. He is of brown skin tone and of religion which is not regular. I have a dream that woman is given equal importance on the screen. As I dream and dream and dream, finally I see that the people consider it abnormal and get up to leave the theatre. It woke me up from the dream. In fact, I am not surprised by the people's reaction. It will go on as long as the clichés do exist in the minds. In fact, I do not know a solution for these disparities that are existent in society. Many thinkers and writers still work on continuously to find a way out to establish a culture that incorporates everyone irrespective of caste, creed, region, complexion, language...etc. The regional cinema of any state should lift up the talents that are unseen and unheard. There is a plenty of talent from the lower sections as well. It has to be recognized and provided a better platform to shine. Firstly, we have to break the clichés and establish a hope for a better and a glorious tomorrow. Undoubtedly, it is a matter of concern and all the stalwarts and thinkers of Andhra should come together to analyse the situation and find a way for repairing the damage done to the glorious culture and cinema of Andhra Pradesh.

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