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## PUBLIC RELATIONS IN FILM INDUSTRY A CASE STUDY OF TOLLYWOOD

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### **Introduction**

The importance of Public Relations (PR) in the film industry is bringing awareness to productions in order to create interest in those films by distributors, film festivals, movie goers, and other social influencers. Public Relations agencies are experts in branding and communication, understanding how to make productions newsworthy and relevant to today's audiences. They also offer crisis management planning and response services to help ensure that a production's message does not get lost in translation. Publicists use their established network of contacts and connections as well as seek new marketing opportunities to promote film productions and maximize their coverage through a variety of platforms. The film industry is one of the biggest players in the entertainment field. Every year, close to 600 feature films is released in the US, with India leading the numbers by a massive 1200-odd feature films per year. The figures fluctuate every year, but that does not take away the massive competitiveness of the film industry. Along with the advertising and marketing campaigns handled by the films, Public Relations is slowly becoming a major part of the promotional activities in the film industry.

However, the Public relations as a field has grown immeasurably in numbers and respect over the last three decades and today is clearly a growth industry. It is unfortunate that still in India, people have very less knowledge about public relations; it is hard for professionals to define to their peer groups, and relatives as to what they do for living. Indian business organizations think of hiring a charming lady in her 20's to handle public relations for the organization. Now is the time to change in this era of globalization, organizations need to come out of this sick mentality, and should foresee public relations seriously. There are no universally accepted definitions of public relations. Any book on the subject will list a number and add to them. For the purpose of this chapter, it is enough to say that the movement is way from definitions involving persuasion and towards the idea of two-way communication.



In this connection, Films have been huge revenue drivers in the entertainment industry. However, not all films succeed with high profit margins. Success can be contributed to aspects such as the writing, the production quality, or the acting within a film. These aspects contribute to how audiences, critics and media receive a movie. Unfortunately, these aspects typically overshadow one of the most important functions contributing to a film's success: promotion and public relations. For my capstone, I researched how films are promoted, branded, and distributed through public relations functions. Research largely relied on secondary research, with primary research added for deeper concepts. After basic knowledge was attained, the theories and concepts were applied in an additional creative component included for the capstone. This component attempted to create promotional materials in line with industry requirements, giving readers and the writer a tangible example to see film communications theory.

Tollyhood (as the Telugu film industry is called), which is considered as the second largest film industry in the country next only to Bollywood, is now in a tight spot. Hyderabad houses four film studios Ramanaidu, Annapurna, Sarathi and Padmalaya, besides the Ramoji Film City, the world's largest film studio complex as against one Ramanaidu Studio in Visakhapatnam, which is in Andhra region. The Telugu film industry had incurred a loss of around Rs 7 crore a day from mid-2009 to early 2010 when the Telangana agitation intensified, creating hurdles including cancelling or rescheduling of film shootings. Tollyhood, which churns out close to 190 films with a total budget exceeding Rs 1,000 crore every year, relies mostly on studios in Hyderabad for huge settings, and on the Andhra region for lush-green fields and the large coastline as backdrops for duet songs and 'village' scenes.

Nevertheless, the Tollyhood, as the Telugu film industry is popularly known, is the second largest contributor to the industry's revenue, followed by the other regional language cinema industries in India. Indians love their cinema which is why India is the world's largest producer of films. "Every three months an audience as large as India's entire population flocks to the cinema halls." Fourteen million Indians go to the movies on a daily basis (about 1.4% of the population of 1 billion) and pay the equivalent to the average Indian's day's wages (US \$1-3) to see any of the over 800 films churned out by Bollywood each year. India boasts of about 13,000 theatres enjoying a weekly admission of about 100 million people or 5000+ million per year. Distributors are the last link in the movie chain which takes films to the people. Although the country's filmed entertainment industry is the largest in the world in terms of the number of films it produces (around 900) and its theatrical admissions (around 3



billion), it continues to be small in size in terms of revenue, mainly due to hiccups in low ticket realization and occupancy levels.

While most are well aware of the importance of marketing while promoting a film, not many are aware of the importance of Public Relations (PR) PR and Marketing go hand in hand when a promotional event for a film is planned, the role of PR is maximizing the reach and coverage of the event across various platforms. A great PR agency ensures that the event gains maximum eyeballs and is covered across news channels. The role of PR is to inform the various journalists about the event, ensure and track the coverage of the event. If a certain film plans to promote itself in various cities like many films plan their city promotions in various cities then the role of PR is to tap the local media in those cities and ensure the event gets covered in the local press in that city. Unlike marketing, PR of a film begins the moment a film is announced. If a film is announced and is all set to go on floors for shoot, the role of a PR company is to get exclusive news and stills from the shoot and constantly be in news till the trailer and songs from the film are out. That's why a PR job is actually a lot longer and more challenging job than marketing.

### **Indian Film Industry**

Anyway, the Tollyhood, as the Telugu film industry is popularly known, is the second largest contributor to the industry's revenue, followed by the other regional language cinema industries in India. Indians love their cinema which is why India is the world's largest producer of films. "Every three months an audience as large as India's entire population flocks to the cinema halls." Fourteen million Indians go to the movies on a daily basis (about 1.4% of the population of 1 billion) and pay the equivalent to the average Indian's day's wages (US \$1-3) to see any of the over 800 films churned out by Bollywood each year. India boasts of about 13,000 theatres enjoying a weekly admission of about 100 million people or 5000+ million per year. Distributors are the last link in the movie chain which take films to the people. Although the country's filmed entertainment industry is the largest in the world in terms of the number of films it produces (around 900) and its theatrical admissions (around 3 billion), it continues to be small in size in terms of revenue, mainly due to hiccups in low ticket realization and occupancy levels.

In the number of movies released every year, focus on niche movies, advent of digital cinema and growth of multiplexes, implementations of innovative campaigns regarding a particular film and collaboration with international studios, and to a certain extent the rise of a new class of consumers who are ready to shed that extra penny for a good film, and to the young generation directors who also are ready to walk that





extra mile to do an experimental film with a bold theme; all these gave the required impetus to the producers . The Successful cinema is built upon several elements: content, technology, marketing strategy and human resource. The PR factor is where expertise in distribution and marketing comes in. The central business function includes product definition, designing and refinement, packaging, promotion, and communication through message making and distribution.

### **History of Tollyhood:**

Importantly, the Telugu cinema is the segment of Indian cinema dedicated to the production of motion pictures in the Telugu language, widely spoken in the states of Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.<sup>1</sup> Telugu cinema is based in Film Nagar, a neighborhood of Hyderabad, India. Since 1909, filmmaker RaghupathiVenkaiah Naidu was involved in producing short films and travelling to different regions in Asia to promote film work. In 1921, he produced the silent film, Bhishma Pratigna. He is cited as the father of Telugu cinema.<sup>2</sup> In 1933, East India Film Company has produced its first Indian film, Savitri in Telugu. The film was based on a popular stage play by Mylavaram Bala Bharathi Samajam, directed by father of the "Telugu theatre Movement" Chittajallu Pullaiah and cast stage actors Vemuri Gaggaiah and Dasari Ramathilakam as "Yama" and "Savithri" respectively.<sup>3</sup> The film was shot with a budget of estimated 1 million (US\$14,000) in Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> It received an honorary diploma at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Venice International Film Festival.<sup>5</sup> PatalaBhairavi (1951) was the only South Indian film screened at the first India International Film Festival.<sup>6</sup>

However, the works such as B. Narsing Rao's ethnographic film MaaOoru won the 1992 Hungarian Visual Arts "Main Prize-Media Wave Award.K. N. T. Sastry's Thilaadanam received "New Currents Award" at the 7th Busan International Film Festival. K. Viswanath's Swati Mutyam was India's official entry to the 59th Academy Awards. Rajnesh Domalpalli's Vanaja was nominated for the Best First Feature and Best

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<sup>1</sup> .The Hindu: Friday Review Hyderabad: Nijamcheppamantara, abaddhamcheppamantara, hindu.com.

<sup>2</sup> . Telugu Cinema Celebrity Raghupati Venkaiah Naidu". idlebrain.com.

<sup>3</sup> . Narasimham, M. L. (7 November 2010). "SATI SAVITHRI (1933)". The Hindu. Chennai, India. Retrieved 8 July 2011.

<sup>4</sup> . Narasimham, M. L. (7 November 2010). "SATI SAVITHRI (1933)". The Hindu. Retrieved 8 July 2011. b

<sup>5</sup> . Bhagwan Das Garg (1996). So many cinemas: the motion picture in India. Eminence Designs. p. 86. ISBN 81-900602-1-X.

<sup>6</sup> "4th National Film Awards" (PDF). Directorate of Film Festivals. Retrieved 2 September 2011

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Cinematography awards at the "23rd American Independent Spirit Awards."<sup>7</sup> The Baahubali (franchise) produced by Tollywood studio Arka Media Works is the highest grossing Indian film of all time globally. The second installment, The Conclusion is the only Indian film to receive the "Best International Film" at the "44<sup>th</sup> American Saturn Awards."<sup>8</sup>

Promotional poster of Bhakta Prahlada the first full length Telugu talkie produced and directed by H. M. Reddy to have a theatrical release.<sup>9</sup>

The Telugu film industry was originated with silent films in 1912; with the production and release of Anusha Adusumalli in 1923.<sup>10</sup> The film was directed by Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu and his son R. S. Prakash.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Yaragudipati Varada Rao and, R. S. Prakash Rao have established a long-lasting precedent of focusing exclusively on religious themes; Nandanar, Gajendra Moksham, and Matsyavatar, three of their most noted productions, centred on religious figures, parables, and morals.<sup>12</sup> The first film studio in South India, Durga Cinetone, was built in 1936 by Nidamarthi Surayya in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. In 1935, Andhra Cine Tone was built in Visakhapatnam by Gottumukkala Jagannadha Raju. He introduced digital theater sound with the 1935 film Jagadamba.<sup>13</sup>

The first Telugu film with audible dialogue, Bhakta Prahlada, was produced by H.M. Reddy, who directed the first South Indian talkie Kalidas (1931). Bhakta Prahlada was completed on 15 September 1931,<sup>14</sup> which henceforth became known as "Telugu Film Day" to commemorate its completion.<sup>15</sup> Popularly known as talkies, films with sound quickly grew in number and popularity. In 1934, the industry saw its first major commercial success with Lavakusa. Directed by C. Pullaiah and starring Parupalli Subbarao and Sriranjani in lead roles, the film attracted unprecedented

<sup>7</sup> . Narsing Rao's films regale Delhi" (Press release). Webindia123.com. 21 December 2008. Retrieved 25 August 2012.

<sup>8</sup> .Dave McNary (27 June 2018). "Black Panther' Leads Saturn Awards; 'Better Call Saul,' 'Twin Peaks' Top TV Trophies – Variety". Variety.com. Retrieved 9 January 2019.

<sup>9</sup> . Narasimham, M. L. (10 September 2011). "Eighty glorious years of Telugu talkie". The Hindu. Chennai, India.

<sup>10</sup> .Encyclopaedia of early cinema, by Richard Abel, pp. 677, BhismaPratigya, 1921 film

<sup>11</sup> . Telugu Cinema Biography". Kiwibox.com. 3 May 1913. Retrieved 28 November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> . CineGoer.com – Articles – History Of Birth And Growth Of Telugu Cinema". Cinegoer.com. Archived from the original on 10 April 2007.

<sup>13</sup> . Picture perfect!". The Hindu. Chennai, India. 22 July 2012.

<sup>14</sup> . BhakthaPrahladha': First Telugu talkie completes 81 years". CNN-IBN. 7 February 2013. Retrieved 26 March 2014.

<sup>15</sup> .Narasimham, M.L. (9 September 2012). "Wake up, industry". The Hindu. Chennai, India. Retrieved 26 March 2014.



numbers of viewers to theatres and thrust the young industry into mainstream culture. By 1936, the mass appeal of film allowed directors to move away from religious and mythological themes. That year, under the direction of Krithiventi Nageswara Rao, *Prema Vijayam*, a film focusing on social issues, was released. Its success prompted the production of dozens of other immensely successful 'social films', notably 1939's *Vandemataram*, touching on societal problems like the practice of giving dowry, Telugu films increasingly focused on contemporary living: 29 of the 96 films released between 1937 and 1947 had social themes.<sup>16</sup>

In 1938, Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, has co-produced and directed the social problem film, *Mala Pilla* which dealt with the crusade against untouchability, prevailing in pre-independent India. In 1939, he directed *Raithu Bidda*, starring thespian Bellary Raghava. The film was banned by the British administration in the region, for depicting the uprising of the peasantry among the Zamindar's during the British raj. 1940 film, *Viswa Mohini*, is the first Indian film, depicting the Indian movie world. The film was directed by Y. V. Rao and scripted by Balijepalli Lakshmikanta Kavi, starring Chittor V. Nagaiah in the lead role.<sup>17</sup>

The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent resource scarcity caused the British Raj to impose a limit on the use of filmstrip in 1943 to 11,000 feet, a sharp reduction from the 20,000 feet that had been common till then. As a result, the number of films produced during the war was substantially lower than in previous years. Nonetheless, before the ban, an important shift occurred in the industry: Independent studios formed, actors and actresses were signed to contracts limiting whom they could work for, and films moved from social themes to folklore legends. Ghantasala Balaramayya, has directed the mythological *Seetarama Jananam* under his home production, Prathiba Picture, marking veteran ANR's Telugu film acting debut in 1944.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> . Articles – History of Birth And Growth of Telugu Cinema". CineGoer.com. Archived from the original on 18 February 2012. Retrieved 19 February 2012.

<sup>17</sup> . A revolutionary filmmaker". The Hindu. Chennai, India. 22 August 2003.

<sup>18</sup>. Ghantasala Balaramaiah: The Legend who created Legends". 26lettersto24frames.wordpress.com. 26lettersto24frames.

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Malliswari is the first Telugu film which had a public release with thirteen prints along with Chinese subtitles at Beijing on 14, March 1953, and a 16 mm film print was also screened in the United States.<sup>19</sup> The film was directed by Bommireddy Narasimha Reddy, a recipient of the Dada SahebPhalke Award, and the Doctor of Letters honour. Vasiraju Prakasam and K. N. T. Sastry are one of the noted Indian film critics from the state. The industry is one of the largest producers

of folklore, fantasy, mythological and melodrama films. Filmmakers like KadiriVenkata Reddy, B. Vittalacharya and Kodi Ramakrishna have pioneered this genre. 1956 film Tenali Ramakrishna has garnered the All India Certificate of Merit for Best Feature Film. In 2013, IBN Live's poll cited Mayabazar as the Greatest Indian film of all time.<sup>20</sup>

Relangi, and Ramana Reddy were a comedy double act during this era.Nartanasala won the best art direction award at the Afro Asian film festival in Jakarta. Donga Ramudu directed by K. V. Reddy was archived in the curriculum of the Film and Television Institute of India.Nammina Bantu received critical reception at the San Sebastián International Film Festival. 1967 film UmmadiKutumbam was selected by Film Federation of India as one of its entries to the Moscow Film Festival.<sup>21</sup> The 1968 cult classic Sudigundalu was screened at the Tashkent and Moscow Film Festivals.<sup>22</sup>Moola Narayana Swamy and B. N. Reddy founded VijayaVauhini Studios in 1948 in the city of Chennai.Indian film doyen L. V. Prasad, who started his film career with Bhakta Prahlada, founded Prasad Studios in 1956 based in Chennai. However, through the efforts of D. V. S. Raju, the Telugu film industry completely shifted its base from Chennai to Hyderabad in the early 1990s, during N. T. Rama Rao's political reign.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, the innovative Public Relations (PR) campaign, Tollywood has provided interesting case studies for the marketing strategists, which can be seen in the promotions of the films in near future in two Telugu States (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana). Tollywood has learnt the lessons on marketing strategy fast so as to garner profits in this highly competitive market. This study is unique and first kind of research work

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<sup>19</sup> . Eenadu Daily, Eenadu Sunday – 28 April 2013, 100 years of Indian Cinema, Early Tollywood, Page.9

<sup>20</sup> . IBNLive.comUpdated:May 12, 2013, 4:30 PM IST (12 May 2013). "'Mayabazar' is India's greatest film ever: IBNLive poll". News18. Retrieved 28 August 2019.

<sup>21</sup> . Profile of Gummadi — Telugu film actor"

<sup>22</sup> ..Collections. Update Video Publication. 1991. p. 387.

<sup>23</sup> . Film producer D.V.S. Raju passes away". The Hindu. Chennai, India. 14 November 2010.

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focusing on this particular research area. The Tollyhood is the one of first growing film industry in India as well as at the global platform.

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