Asia Research Institute

Working Paper Series

No. 59

From Virtual to Real Political Power: Film Stars Enter Electoral Politics

Madiraju Madhava Prasad

Asia Research Institute
National University of Singapore

arimmp@nus.edu.sg

March 2006

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

From Virtual to Real Political Power: Film Stars Enter Electoral Politics

Madiraju Madhava Prasad

The political significance of film stars in south India can be tracked at two levels. In the first place, there is a political salience to the star system itself. Secondly, the virtual political orders that are elaborated in the cinema and inhabited by these stars, may inscribe themselves onto the real political processes in different ways. Notably this happens through the entry of stars into electoral politics, but it can take other forms as well, as in the case of Karnataka. This paper will look at this part of the story in some detail.

In the context of the supranational identity of India, there are national identities that are obliged to express themselves indirectly. The virtual political orders serve this specific function. In the moment of the transition from such virtual politics into the real political processes in historical time, the stars and their parties participate in and contribute to the emerging trend across the country towards assertion of regional autonomy against central dominance. We will proceed state by state, starting with Tamil Nadu, and comment upon the similarities between them, as well as the differences. In what concrete ways did the virtual political orders ruled over by these stars intersect with or supplement the electoral method of reproducing the political order? This is the primary question that is pursued in this essay. We will track the interest shown by the stars, if any, in a political career while they were still at the peak of their film careers, the nature of this interest, the actual mode of engagement with political processes when such engagement actually occurs, the immediate political conjuncture in which they plunge into serious political activity, and the differential significance, beyond the similarities, of the specific role played by these stars to the actual political reality obtaining in their respective states.

M.G. Ramachandran and the DMK

The story of Tamil nationalist politics is centered on the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Front; henceforth DMK). The DMK was launched in 1949 by C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, and other intellectual-activists who were previously associated with

the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), a social movement led by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (EVR).[1] The roots of the party, however, lie deeper in the colonial era, in the non-Brahmin movement and its first organized political manifestation, the Justice Party. The emergence of the Justice Party as a force in the Madras presidency in the early decades of the twentieth century is in turn related by historians to the seeds of cultural nationalism sown by the European students of the Dravidian languages who elaborated the idea of Dravidian distinction in a sub-continent dominated by a north Indian "Aryan" culture. The rise of non-Brahmin politics, encouraged by the British rulers of the province in their efforts to curb the power of the Brahmins in administration, was however primarily rooted in the non-Brahmin elite's experience of the discontinuities of modernity, which seems to have been more acute and disturbing than it was for the Brahmins. Barnett diagnoses the situation of the non-Brahmin upper castes in an urban setting like Madras:

> While adjustment for Brahmins in urban areas was relatively easy, and urbanization enhanced their caste status, for many non-Brahmins city life challenged their caste identity and rank. Their position, unlike Brahmins, was dependent upon very specific localized transactional relationships and deference patterns. The lack of generalized ranking (that is, throughout Madras Presidency), and even of general knowledge of the position of various non-Brahmin castes, meant that some castes previously ranked above and apart from other non-Brahmins were now lumped with non-Brahmin masses in cities and towns. (25)

The non-Brahmin elite's position in the traditional social hierarchy was clear and undisputed as long as they remained in a rural setting. Sustained in the villages by daily occupational and other forms of dependence of the lower castes and reinforced by the Brahmin's ritual legitimation, this elite non-Brahmin power became unstable and indeed, invisible in the anonymity of the cities. It is clear from Barnett's account that the urban spaces of colonial India gave rise to a new situation characterized by a scramble for government appointments, in which the Brahmins enjoyed a distinct advantage.[2] The "non-Brahmin", a peculiar self-designation that seems unable to avoid a

---

[1] The political history of Tamil Nadu and the history of cultural nationalism have both been extensively studied. Irshick (1969) and Washbrook (1976) examine the background to the rise of the DMK. The evolution of Tamil Nadu politics through the first organized non-Brahmin mobilization in the Justice Party, the transition to the DK as a largely social movement, and the return to electoral politics in post-Independence India through the DMK can be tracked in these, as well as Barnett (1976), Geetha and Rajadurai (1998). MSS Pandian's essays, and his monograph on MGR's politics have been drawn on extensively in developing this description of the history of DMK politics. Washbrook (1989) provides an overview of Tamil Nadu politics from the "caste, class and dominance" perspective.

[2] Washbrook (89) expresses doubts about this claim of Brahmin domination by citing some statistics about their modest presence in the administration and the absence of candidates for reserved posts. The question of Brahmin domination as a whole has not been addressed adequately. Statistical disputes tend to obscure the ideological nature of the assertions made in this regard.

hint of dependency even as it seeks to assert difference, is a symptomatic category that signifies, above all, the absence of a positive political programme behind this new assertion. In the decades to come, many groups would employ the term non-Brahmin and ascribe many meanings to it, but it has to this day not freed itself of this heteronomous status. And the rise of the Dalit movement has only highlighted the limitations of this negative programme. In any case, the situation that prevailed at that time was that the "forward non-Brahmins" were acquiring the educational qualifications required for government employment and other opportunities afforded by the colonial administration, but found that the superior social rank that was theirs in their own localities was non-existent in the cities, where the Brahmin alone, with the backing of sacred texts and European fantasies, enjoyed a feeling of continuity of identity and social superiority.[3] This superiority was a new thing, quite different in its social effects and consequences from the old ritual superiority, but it was not without some continuity with the old order. For the non-Brahmins, the solidarity of Brahmins constituted an obstacle to the expansion of opportunities in education, employment and political representation. "Shudra aspirants to English education and government employment were confronted in the Presidencies by the virtual monopoly of *brahmans* and other *literati* castes over the new sources of prestige and power created in colonial educational, administrative and judicial institutions" (Frankel, 10). The response to this anguish about urban identity took the form of a critique of Brahminism which often extended to derogatory characterization of Brahmins as a whole as "cunning," "selfish" etc (Frankel, 27).

The South Indian Liberal Federation, the non-Brahmin platform, which came to be known as the Justice Party, was launched in 1916. The Justicites concentrated their efforts on acquiring positions in administration and the landed interests within the party prevented the more radical tendencies from making any progress with a more universalist agenda. The other main plank of the party was opposition to the Home Rule movement launched by Annie Besant, which earned it the approval and support of the provincial government. The Home Rule League, founded in 1916 and the Congress party in the Madras presidency "drew support from the same strata of

---

[3] Manor (1989) gives a similar account of the non-Brahmin movement in princely Mysore: "The reason that urban *vokkaligas* felt anger toward *brahmans* and joined the movement against them was that relations between *brahmans* and *vokkaligas* in urban areas were so radically different from those in the village. Urban *brahmans* did not defer to to *vokkaligas* as they tended to do in the villages where the latter were economically dominant and numerically strong….These people joined the non-Brahman movement not because they wanted to *overturn* the social order, but because they wanted to *conserve* it by extending the rules and logic of power relations in the villages to the newly developing urban sector" (341).

society as the Theosophical Society – Western-educated Indians of professional, and to a lesser extent, business and landowning groups" (Barnett, 19), most of them Brahmins. The Justice Party opposed the politics of the Home Rule League and in its "Non-Brahmin Manifesto" published in 1916 sought to "define the attitude of the several important non-Brahmin Indian communities in this Presidency toward what is called 'the Indian Home Rule Movement,' (Irshick, 358: appendix 1; also pp 47-49). Declaring itself "deeply devoted and loyally attached to British rule," the manifesto urged measures for securing a fairer share of jobs in government service as well as representation in "local and other bodies." While the Justice Party was quite successful in its critique of Brahmin domination (forcing the Congress to open up within its ranks a non-Brahmin interest group called the Madras Presidency Association), its political agenda remained narrowly focused upon protecting the interests of the elite non-Brahmins.[4] The party came to power in the 1920 elections to the provincial Legislative Council, under the new diarchic system instituted by the British, which were boycotted by the Congress. The narrow political interests of the majority of Justicites soon led the party into decline, hastened by the sudden loss of interest by the provincial administration in the affairs of the non-Brahmins. (Baker, 237-244)

The Justice Party in decline was briefly headed by EVR, a former Congressman and follower of Gandhi who quit the party when he found its local leadership resistant to reform activity. During the second World War, as Party President, EVR campaigned for a separate Tamil nation and in 1944, founded the Dravida Kazhagam[5], a successor to the Justice Party with a broader and more universalist platform, which functioned as an influential social reform movement rather than a political party until it was eclipsed in Tamil Nadu politics by the DMK.

The breakaway group which launched the DMK claimed to be upset with their leader EVR's moral lapses (Barnett 76).[6] In hindsight, however, they have proven to be a more pragmatically

---

[4] This inevitably gave rise to the separate mobilization of backward non-Brahmins under the banner of the Madras Provincial Backward Classes League to secure separate reservations for "backward Hindus" (Frankel 11).

[5] Annadurai's role as EVR's closest aide, in launching and naming the DK, is emphasized in historians' accounts. See Irshick (347).

[6] The reference is to Periyar's marriage, in his seventies, to a woman less than half his age. Most commentators dismiss the DMK explanation as a cover for their real political motive (i.e., to launch a party with parliamentary goals). But Periyar's action is likely to have played a significant role in making it obvious to these men that the DK, under his leadership, would not be amenable to the kind of programme of "responsible politics" that they wanted to get into.

inclined group who were willing to fight elections under the aegis of the new Indian government, and at the same time diluting the separatist demand slowly into the autonomy platform which is the more universal form taken in state-Centre conflict. One might say that, in coming out of the DK, the DMK was marking a return to the political culture of the Justice Party (in the process inheriting all the unwholesome traditions of the latter) and bidding goodbye to the more tactical and anarchic methods of EVR[7]. Eighteen years later, in 1967, the DMK won a landslide victory in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections and came to power with Annadurai as Chief Minister. In his brief stint at the helm before he died in 1969, Annadurai had to face many situations in which the DMK's commitment to its own professed ideals was tested: among these was the language agitation, which the students continued during DMK rule, this time against not only Hindi, but also the neglect of English, which was important as a means to employment; another was the massacre of untouchable landless labourers in Thanjavur by upper caste landlords, which elicited only a mild response from the government, and was responsible for the growing disillusionment of dalits with the party. Annadurai nevertheless kept the party together by virtue of his charismatic personality and his tremendous popularity among the masses. After his demise, the party's Tamil nationalist platform having been more or less resolved in favour of a compromise with Indian nationalism, the DMK became a party of personalities and the conflict between the top leaders, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, R. Nedunchezhiyan, M.G. Ramachandran and others prevailed over all other issues (Barnett, chapters 8, 9 and 10).[8] The split in 1972, which brought into being the Anna DMK, was thus entirely caused by power struggles between faction leaders which had no ideological basis whatsoever.

---

[7] The primary virtue of EVR's movement was that it reflected its creator's highly individualistic and modern outlook. It is not surprising that Periyarism was not able to develop into a coherent critique of caste society, although it went much further in that direction than any other movement of its kind in south India. The material conditions for such an advance simply did not obtain, and Periyar's career shows all the marks of an intellectual career that had to be lived in extremely inhospitable conditions. He was thus more of an atheist than a materialist, his rationalism taking the form of an idealist focus of mobilization than an attribute of the faculties. It was a rationalism that could only succeed by diverting belief towards itself, rather than dissolving the relation of belief altogether. However, this is not a quality specific to EVR's thought. It could be argued that colonial Indian thought (such as Nehru's) usually related to the formulaic distillations of Western rational thought in this fashion, turning them into objects of a counter-belief. It was a dominant modality of colonial thought, symptomatic of the constrictions within which such thought had to function. It continues to be operative even today: the state sponsored discourse of secularism, for instance, calls upon us to *believe in secularism*, and to help us in this task, presents us with the bhakti and sufi traditions as secular religions that may be believed in without political risk.

[8] Annadurai's popularity among the DMK supporters is the stuff of legend. None of the other leaders of the party, with the exception of MGR, commanded such loyalty and admiration. MGR's rising popularity was also a source of anxiety for Annadurai. (Barnett 137, 165)

The DMK leaders were men of exceptional literary talent, orators, playwrights and poets. It was their idea to employ the cinema as a means of propaganda. The Soviet experience may well have influenced this decision, but these revolutionaries did not envisage a new cinema for the masses so much as a way of using the existing popular film melodrama as a vehicle for communicating party propaganda. Thus most of the films that are recognized as being part of the genre of "DMK film" are fairly standard social and costume dramas. But they often contain scenes of iconoclastic import, dramatizations of the egalitarian principle, and other broadly progressive instruction, as well as more narrowly conceived party propaganda including documentary footage showing party leaders, images or references to the party flag or its colours and the party's election symbol (see Barnuow and Krishnaswamy, Pandian, Hardgrave).

The most celebrated DMK film is arguably *Parasakthi* which, interestingly enough, starred Sivaji Ganesan a founder-member of the DMK (Pandian 1991; and Hardgrave 1979) and MGR's rival for the top position in Tamil cinema throughout his career. Famous for its depiction of lustful priests, and the denunciation of a temple deity as a mute stone (this part of the dialogue was erased from the soundtrack but the actor's lip movements were retained), *Parasakthi* was a successful DMK film but it is hard to tell exactly how it promoted either the party's manifesto or its immediate political aims. Pandian, in his excellent piece that revisits the moment of *Parasakthi* in DMK history, points to the very ambivalent character of the film's progressivism. In any case, after this, it is MG Ramachandran who becomes the darling of the DMK writers. Sivaji Ganesan, who had until 1955 been the "star symbol" of the new type of social criticism promoted by Annadurai and Karunanidhi, "drifted away" and in 1961 eventually ending up in the Congress, after which he tried to live down his DMK past, "to forge himself as the idol of the religious and the more cultivated section of the population" by acting in mythologicals (Sivathamby, 34).

Sivathamby (1981) divides the history of DMK film into two phases. The first, ten-year phase beginning in 1948 is dominated by Annadurai, Karunanidhi and other writers. It is the phase of social criticism where the writers brought their own perspective to bear on film narrative. In this phase the social criticism requires minimal identification with the protagonist and there is no emphasis on star personality. In the second phase, from 1957 to 1977, MGR dominates the film

entirely. He is the sole spokesman for the party on screen and everything is focused around his leadership. "The entire argument was woven around the protagonist himself" (Sivathamby, 44). As far as the leadership was concerned, the disturbing trend was not the popularity of MGR's films, from which they stood to gain, but the fact that his presence was becoming a big draw even outside the theatres, at public rallies. Annadurai seems to have been the only one who acknowledged without any sign of apprehension, this importance of MGR to the party, although by the time he became chief minister he too might have been getting anxious about the latter's popularity (see Price). "His face alone will bring 30,000 people, and when he appears in person, he will draw 50,000," Anna is reported to have said (Sivathamby). The party also marked the success of MGR films with lavish celebrations where he was taken out in procession much like the gods in Tamil Nadu temples. Whatever the reason, as long as Annadurai was alive, MGR enjoyed increasing importance in the party and "MGR manrams"[9] were even allowed within the party ranks, apart from the "rasikar manrams" or fan clubs that were independent of the party. Karunanidhi succeeded Annadurai as Chief Minister, with the backing of the MGR faction. After the resounding success of the party in the 1971 elections, Karunanidhi quickly moved to consolidate his position "through large-scale fund-raising and membership drives" which also reflected "growing concern over the popularity and strength of M.G. Ramachandran and his MGR manrams" (Barnett, 294). By this time MGR's popularity had long ceased to be the result of his association with the DMK, if it ever had been that. On the contrary, it was becoming clear that the DMK was itself dependent on his screen charisma to an extent that, party leaders worried, might affect their political respectability and credibility.

Karunanidhi's strategy for raising funds included a proposal to lift prohibition which had been in force for over three decades, a move strongly opposed by Congress and MGR. To combat MGR's growing influence directly, Karunanidhi also launched his son Muthu on a film career and tried to "prevent MGR from getting film contracts" (Barnett, 294-295). This clearly shows that Karunanidhi's strategies were not based upon principled objections to the growth of charismatic power within the party but on the perceived threat to his own (and his family's) political fortunes. There was also a clear lack of understanding of the sources of MGR's charisma, which led to the idea that by replicating the trappings of MGR's stardom, another star

---

[9] MGR "fan clubs" –Editor's note

could be created out of nothing. Karunanidhi thus shared the political sociologist's understanding of the MGR phenomenon as a product of the power of modern propaganda machinery combined with the credulity of the masses.

MGR reacted to this attempt to marginalize him by charging the government with corruption, and demanding that the ministers declare their assets in public. Suspended from the party for anti-party activities, MGR surprised the party leaders by rejecting their conditions for re-admission and started his own party, a new DMK named after Annadurai. The strong public reaction following his suspension had demonstrated his popular support adequately. The MGR manrams within the party and the fan clubs outside together became the cadre of the new party. From the top ranks of the DMK, however, very few followed behind MGR.

Around this time, a minister Dr. Sathiyavani Muthu was also removed for protesting openly against the party's dominance by caste Hindus, a move which led to a significant exodus of Dalit leaders together with her. This development, which was independent of the other one, also revealed the erosion of the party's progressive credentials and its increasing domination by personalities (Barnett, 299). Signs of the growing popularity of ADMK provoked the DMK to desperate acts, including calling MGR a foreigner and referring to his political ambitions as an attempt to turn Tamil Nadu into another Kerala (Barnett 303).[10] None of this seems to have had any impact upon the population which voted the ADMK to power with a huge majority in 1977. Thus began a reign of 11 years, ending with his death in 1987, which has been described as "undoubtedly one of the darkest periods in the contemporary history of the state" (Pandian, 12).

What was the political significance of the DMK split? The DMK is a regional party that came into being as a platform for representing specific class/caste interests in Tamil Nadu. The party's background in radical social reform, the rhetorical invocations of socialism, and the use of the cinema as a tool of propaganda had been successful in mobilizing the masses beyond expectations. There was thus a wide gap between the actual interests that were effectively dominant in the party and the huge mass following which was a constituency without any representable interest. The party was in no mood to face the consequences of mobilization -- it

---

[10] This raises an important question about the cultural nationalist platform of the DMK: while the party attracted youth from a vast array of lower castes who were galvanized by the promise of equality and self-respect, the theme of cultural nationalism, which has been emphasized in historical writings, seems not to have affected the growing popularity of MGR (or later, Rajnikanth). We will come back to this question later.

was interested in a governable polity (and a community that could sustain the glory of Tamil), not a subject of revolution. MGR had served the party, in its early days of enthusiasm and daring, as the embodiment of the putative revolutionary subject. They had believed he would serve the party as a simple vote-catcher, but the masses had their own ideas. Having mobilized the masses in this way, the DMK was unable to absorb the released energy into its project of parliamentary politics and Tamil nation-building. The split in the party thus occurred along this natural faultline that divided the class/caste interests dominant in the party from the simulacrum of revolution on which it had depended for its success. Karunanidhi rallied the interest groups (hardly any top leaders of the party went with MGR), while the film star walked away with the dreamers. MGR thus became the entirely imaginary representative of the utopian dimension of Dravidian politics. He became a king of democracy, monarch of the dispossessed. Karunanidhi won over the support of many of the dominant sections of Tamil Nadu society by his brand of conciliatory politics. MGR, an isolated figure supported by only the vast illiterate, semiliterate and powerless masses (and representing no identifiable interests), on the other hand, resorted to repression and populism (see Pandian) to ensure his own survival.

Tamil Nadu has thus ended up as the only state in the Union in which there exists a party which represents no interests, only aspirations. Under MGR's successor Jayalalitha, the party has continued to provide a simulacral government, driven by the arbitrary passions of its revolutionary leader. In retrospect one can only conclude that the DMK was more daring in its political gambles than it could afford to be, given its constituency. Or perhaps we could say that the bourgeoisie lacked the courage (or the space, given the press of the Union) to impress its will upon the destiny of the Tamil masses, who were primed up for such an absorption. In any case, the net result is a lasting political stalemate from which there seems to be no possibility of any early relief.

The unexpected rise of NTR

In March 1982, N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), still a popular actor in the Telugu cinema, launched a party called Telugu Desam (Telugu Nation). In January of the following year, the party defeated the (hitherto unchallenged) Congress and NTR became the second film star chief minister of an Indian state. Unlike MGR, whose rise to power was gradual and who was from an early stage in

his career associated with a rising political movement, NTR was not suspected of such ambitions by many. During the run-up to the 1983 elections, NTR did make a series of films which announced his intentions (*Justice Choudhury*, *Bobbili Puli*, and *Nadesam*). And the archival record shows that he occasionally made statements about his inclination towards socialism, and that like MGR, he too had developed an early reputation for leadership, although in the beginning it was limited to his leadership of film industry campaigns to raise funds for relief works. In 1969, he led a "bhiksha yatra" to collect for the Andhra Cyclone Fund covering three states. The newly appointed Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Karunanidhi and MGR received and supported his rally. "I am you, you are me", NTR declared to the massive crowds (*Vijayachitra* September 1969). He has already, by the early 1970s, earned the title of "people's actor" a term which is always applied to the mass heroes like MGR (who was known as Makkal Thilakam or People's Hero, as against Sivaji Ganesan who was Nadigar Thilakam, Supreme Actor) and Rajkumar. In 1976, at the inauguration of his venture Ramakrishna Studio, the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh praised him for his dedication to the Telugu people (*Vijayachitra* July 1976). Regarding the decline of the Telugu mythological, NTR had definite views. He felt that with women no longer going to the movies as before, the audience was mainly male and wanted thrills. The average spectator wanted to see his hero doing on screen what he himself was unable to do. Once such hero worship developed, the actor had no choice but to do whatever gives the audience satisfaction. Asked if it was goodbye to mythologicals, he replied, "Yes. The people are saying don't drag the gods out of the temples. What can we do?" (*Vijayachitra* August 1980). Even before he announced his political ambitions, his star status was such that he was asked for his opinion about political issues. In 1975, to such a question, he replied, "The government should bring a genuine socialism into force....Even if it is like the Russian system I would have no objection" (*Vijayachitra* March 1975).

In other words, NTR did not lack a public persona stemming from but exceeding the parameters of stardom. But it remained invisible due to the absence of a real-political habitation. Thus the meteoric rise of NTR in a short span of time was a puzzle that political commentary could only explain by reference to pre-political factors. Since he lacked MGR's political background, the experts quickly latched onto his mythological films as the basis of his popularity. As an explanation it has the merit of fitting neatly into the existing picture of the Indian masses built up over time by the South Asian disciplines. "The picture that his name conjures up in the minds of

ordinary voters is that of a god, killing demons and evil-doers," opined the *National Herald* (21.12.82). "NTR has managed to combine the enduring charisma as Telugu screen's Krishna (popular even with Kannadigas and Tamils) with pouranic associations of Kodanda Rama," said the *Sunday Observer* (9.1.83), and rounded off its portrait of a people and their divine hero by invoking "rickshaw pullers and construction workers" as NTR's main following.[11] Admittedly, among NTR's most popular films were the mythologicals, based on narratives from the two epics and the puranas, in which as the leading actor of his generation, he always played the most important roles, "especially Krishna and Rama" (Dickey). But it is not usually mentioned that he also played Duryodhana, Bhima, Ravana, and, in the memorable *Nartanasala*, Arjuna living incognito disguised as Brihannala, the transgender dance master. As discussed earlier, the stage actors, and especially those who acted in mythologicals, were admired for their ability to play many roles. In the cinema they could do so in the same film, showing, alternately their ability to communicate *roudra* (fierceness) in the role of Bhima and divine grace in the role of Krishna. Not only did he play a variety of roles in the mythologicals, but more importantly the social genre dominated as far as his total output of films was concerned, with mythologicals falling way behind by comparison. We have already noted that the genius of the Telugu mythologicals and the reason for their continued popularity lay in the adaptation of mythological content to the narrative form of the social. The mythological film was not only structured as a family melodrama, it also incorporated the standard features of the social, including the comedy track and the climactic fight scenes. Notwithstanding the variety of roles he played, the commentators had no doubt that NTR's roles as Krishna and Rama would have had the most impact and that a devout population had turned him into a god.[12] That the commonsense about Indians' religious inclinations is at the back of such certainties is demonstrated by the fact that Hardgrave,

---

[11] There is no evidence to suggest that any of these assumptions made without reflection by journalists and scholars alike have any truth in them. The idea that a steady fan following might come from among construction workers is based upon a complete ignorance of the nature of construction labour in the country, as well as the economics of film watching. These arguments are based on the repetition of middle class common sense and serve an immediate function of calming the unease generated by such events.

[12] Here is an excerpt from an admiring review of NTR's own production, his first foray into direction, the 1961 film *Sitaramakalyanam*: "When NTR announced his intention to play Ravanasura in 'Seetharama Kalyanam' [he had already played Ravana in *Bhukailas*] his brother was against it, since, NTR, by that time had impressed the audience in the role of Krishna. He wanted NTR to play Rama. But the story demanded that Rama should be very young and Ravana, mature. So he proved right in taking up the role of Ravana. He wanted a fresh face for the role of Rama. In those days, Harnath, a charming young man, was a new comer to the field. Fortunately he met NTR and the latter booked him in his new film. Thus the new and good-looking face of Harnath appeared to the audience in the character of Rama….Audience applauded both Harnath and NTR for their grand performance." From http://www.cinegoer.com/srk.htm

commenting on the Tamil Nadu situation, titles his essay "When stars displace the gods" even though MGR did not star in a full-scale mythological ever and Tamil cinema was not dominated by mythologicals to the same extent. In any case, as far as NTR is concerned, there is almost universal agreement that his appearances in the roles of Krishna and Rama played a key role in the trust and confidence that the people showed in him when they voted his party into power. Critics also point to several NTR films which have the name Ramudu in the title as further confirmation of this pouranic connection.[13]

The case of NTR demonstrates most clearly the problems posed for disciplinary knowledge by such liminal phenomena. Thus there are two kinds of scholarly writings on NTR. We have already mentioned what can be termed the anthropological approach, which is well-illustrated in Dasgupta, Dickey, Sivathamby, Hardgrave and others. This approach is primarily concerned with explaining *why people vote for film stars*. And the answer usually has to do with the religious or traditional proclivities of the masses. Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., describes the phenomenon as "the folk culture of cinema" (Hardgrave 1979). He concludes his lively account of the situation in the late 1970s in Tamil Nadu politics dominated by film stars thus:

> Star worship represents a cathartic identification. The world of the film star becomes a repository of displaced frustration. Aspiration is funnelled into an edited version of life in a "second-hand" reality and is dissipated in the darkness of the cinema house. The fan lives a vicarious life through the star with whom he is able to identity. He may even begin to assume the characteristic walk of Shivaji or wear the hair-style of M.G.R. The star provides the avenue for escape from the tedium of everyday life, from the desperation of poverty. The structural conflicts of poverty are dissolved in romantic love: villainy is overcome in a triumph of goodness. And everybody lives happily ever after. The burden of the fan may seem easier to bear. Perhaps he too may someday fall in love with a landlord's daughter.

---

[13] What appears to be universal agreement may on the other hand simply be the result of unthinking repetition of a readymade opinion. And each repetition carries the prejudice a little closer to the status of unquestioned truth. Thus Sivathamby, who analyses the Tamil scene with some care, offers a casual comparison of MGR with NTR, "who by choosing to act only in particular roles (in the roles of gods in mythological themes) has been considered a 'divine' personality by the vast majority of Telugu film fans" (Sivathamby 41-42). Clearly based on hearsay, this statement asserts confidently that NTR acted *only in mythologicals*, and that the "vast majority" of film fans believed in his divinity. While we are on the subject of people's beliefs about their heroes, it may be worth mentioning that John Harriss, in his sociological study of North Arcot peasantry, reports that "the strongest reason …people gave for their support to MGR was that he stood for 'equality'" (Harriss 254). Harriss also mentions that when corruption was discussed, his respondents believed MGR to be incorruptible "because he is wealthy", not because he was a superman or god.

The success of film stars has also been chalked up to the preference for personalities among Indian voters. Both MGR and NTR were "extremely successful at manipulating [their] roles and image" and "always played the hero, never the villain, and demanded to rewrite his lines if they were unsuitable to his role as defender of the downtrodden" (Dickey, 349-351). Another pre-existing predilection of the culture is reflected in the "cultural importance of heroes", which can take extreme forms such as devotion towards them. "Heroes also tend to be ascribed divine attributes" (Dickey, 352), which is again a Hindu trait.[14] There is nothing untrue about these observations; at least, that is not where the problem lies. But before coming to the problem, let us look at the other approach.

In contrast to the anthropological approach, the second school is much more interested in explaining why certain political events take place. This is a political economy approach, which is well illustrated by G. Ram Reddy's essay on "Caste, Class and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh" and Krishna Reddy's on the media in AP. Let us take the former essay. Ram Reddy provides a detailed analysis of a variety of factors, including the political history of the unification of Andhra; the role of historical factors in determining the subsequent developments in the state; caste and agrarian relations and industrial development, etc. It is an argument about the rise of a regional bourgeoisie from among the rural rich, belonging to the dominant Reddy and Kamma castes. The existing political structure, dominated by Congress and increasingly controlled from the Centre, not only appears as an affront to the pride of this new class but also acts as a hindrance to their aspirations. Reddy traces the conjunctural factors that combine to hasten the emergence of the Telugu Desam as a response to this need. This is an extremely useful analysis which presents the case for the emergence of a regional political formation to reflect changing social realities. For Reddy's narrative the anthropologist's question as to why people vote for film stars is irrelevant. In fact, by contrast to most existing accounts, Reddy tries to present the TDP as the brainchild of Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, NTR's second-in-command who defected to the Congress in 1984 in an attempted coup that ended in disaster (see below). NTR thus becomes a puppet of history, and the purity of the political economy framework is thereby maintained.

---

[14] As regards the Weberian categories of authority, while film stars have been attributed charismatic power by some writers (Dyer, Bakshi), Dickey seems to find evidence of both charismatic and traditional authority. Our own position is that while charisma is in operation at some level, what we are dealing with is an event whose significance exceeds the sum of all the ingredients in the mix and can only be explained as *an event*, and not the predictable outcome of a series of predilections.

The limitation of the anthropological approach to the question, which invokes all the established academic truths about Indian personality, behaviour, religious and caste identifications etc, is that it reduces to nothing the sheer novelty of cinema within the Indian context. It dissolves the new medium and its effects back into the already known: at the heart of this approach is a deep-seated prejudice of which the scholars themselves may be unaware but whose effects are unmistakable. Indian political behaviour even in a democratic context can only be explained by reference to longstanding patterns of behaviour which have been studied and recorded by field anthropologists. It is a sort of scientific enterprise that borders on entomology. The political economy school, on the other hand is indifferent to what it probably perceives as the purely incidental details of how a social fact came into being. It treats NTR as simply the particular historical agent through whose mediation the laws of political economy fulfilled their mandate. But for us it is not just a question of rescuing the masses from the prison of spontaneous behaviour conditioned by belief and tradition in which anthropology has placed them; or of rescuing NTR from the immanent causality of historical forces and rendering him a free agent creating new worlds out of nothing. But the project of understanding of contemporary Indian reality needs to be taken out of the frameworks where precisely what is subtracted from every account is *the contemporary*, the irreducible difference of the present of an event from all pasts.

Like MGR, whom he reportedly regarded as his "elder brother", NTR also introduced a series of "populist measures". Like MGR (see Pandian 1992), NTR too reneged on his promises and his policies did not always benefit the poor who voted for him. While he may not have resorted to extreme repressive measures like MGR, arbitrary and authoritarian measures and proclamations were not unknown. His stint in power was shorter and less absolute than that of MGR, but he left behind the Telugu Desam as the embodiment of Telugu nationalism, which along with the Congress has so far dominated the political scene in Andhra Pradesh. After his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu's hostile takeover during his lifetime, the party became a major rallying point for the emergent Andhra Pradesh bourgeoisie. The role that it played in this regard may have been crucial in frustrating the efforts of NTR's second wife Lakshmi Parvathi to secure control of the party by claiming a greater legitimacy. Unlike Jayalalitha, whose successful appeal to the masses may well have relied precisely on her "illegitimate" association with MGR, Lakshmi Parvathi found that inheriting NTR's political estate was not so easy. The ADMK was backed largely by the ordinary masses, whose faith in MGR was nurtured at the movies; the

more pragmatic evaluation of political leaders by the bourgeoisie would have at least initially pre-empted any rallying of that class around him. At that time the Tamil Nadu bourgeoisie or the rural rich had other parties they could do business with. In Andhra Pradesh (AP), however, the situation was such that the Telugu Desam was in a position to play a key role in uniting the bourgeoisie to create a relatively autonomous zone of economic activity.

The convergence of the film industry and the print media at this historical juncture must also be taken into account. The rise of NTR was preceded and backed up by the astonishing rise of the newspaper *Eenadu*, whose owner Ramoji Rao is one of the foremost industrialists of AP today. The linguistic reorganization of states led, in AP as elsewhere, to the consolidation of a national elite, composed of the intelligentsia and a usually fledgling bourgeoisie. In AP, this consolidation of the "regional elite" was also furthered by the green revolution which "gave new economic power" to the agrarian classes and generated surpluses that were invested in the industrial sector. The rise of this new class which is also dominated by the dominant Kamma caste, which invested heavily in agro-industries, the Telugu press and the cinema, coincides with the emergence of an aggressive, baroque and partisan Telugu press, of which *Eenadu* was the pioneer and remains the unchallenged leader to this day. *Eenadu* in turn "played a significant role in the origin, development and success of the … Telugu Desam" (Reddy, 321). As Reddy sums it up, the social composition of the *Eenadu* readership and the social base of the TDP are not very different.

Just how much of a blow the rise of TDP was to Congress domination was amply demonstrated by one of the most scandalous episodes in India's parliamentary history which occurred in the second year of TDP rule (Tummala 1986) On Independence Day 1984, the Congress High Command, using a puppet Governor, dismissed the NTR ministry and tried to install its own government, led by a disgruntled defector[15]. The drama that ensued was played out in Delhi, where NTR paraded his MLAs before the president, in Bangalore, where the state government helped NTR to keep his MLAs in a hill resort until the matter was settled, and all over Andhra Pradesh, especially the Rayalaseema districts, where widespread popular protest was met with police gunfire, killing several, and contributed to the shamefaced withdrawal of the plotters. For

---

[15] For a sympathetic account of Bhaskara Rao's conduct, see Ram Reddy (288).

Eenadu this was the second moment of glory after the election victory of Telugu Desam. It became the voice of the struggle against what was universally described as a betrayal of democracy. The state of vigilance which prevailed among the people in those days was a crucial factor in influencing the behaviour of MLAs. As a political analyst observed: "Whatever others may say NTR knows full well that scores of MLAs clung to him not out of any commitment to the party or reverence to him but because of their fear of attacks on their families and properties (there were several such incidents) from the irate mobs and also the unprecedented public sympathy for him" (cited in Ram Reddy, 289).

Eenadu is also known for the way it has been able to turn issues of importance to the people into issues that will win votes for the Telugu Desam. The most famous instance of this is the way in which it turned women's demands for restriction of arrack sales into a massive state-wide campaign against arrack, leading to the imposition of prohibition in the state (see the Anveshi study). The language of the paper encouraged passionate engagement with political issues, rather than a neutral objective view of events. On the other hand, as Reddy points out, it is very important to note that it is the regional language press, where rivalries between media firms often overlap exactly with political rivalries, which have created a space for an active and ongoing debate over important social issues such as Dalit and backward class mobilization and feminism. (Reddy, 325). The existence of these newspapers and the way in which they work together with political parties may seem to indicate the absence of a voice of reason in the state, especially if we take the voice of reason to be by definition a neutral voice. But it is also possible to read it as a situation of intense struggles between social forces, a struggle which does not regard the issue of the State and the law as a closed issue. Rather, these struggles seem to indicate that the State, as the emblem of the political reconstitution of society, is as yet a negotiable eventuality.

While there were many Telugu-speaking members of the Justice Party, the Andhra region as a whole was much more significantly involved in the national movement than in the kind of social reform projects espoused by the non-Brahmin movement. There was a literary and cultural "renaissance" comparable to the Bengali one, and limited to the upper castes. A historian has characterized the limited social reform movements of this era as "at best…a period of transition from a feudal economy to a capitalist economy and this process was not carried through to its logical end" (V. Ramakrishna cited in Ram Reddy, 275). The state of Andhra Pradesh was also

sharply divided culturally and historically by the fact that the Telengana region was under Nizam's rule while Andhra was part of British India. Like Karnataka, the formation of Andhra state was also preceded by considerable mutual suspicion and hesitation among the three principal components, Andhra, Telengana and Rayalaseema. In the end the formation of the new state boosted the prospects of the Congress and led to the decline of the hitherto powerful Communist Party. Congress ruled without a break until the TDP victory in 1982. In the decade preceding this turn, relations between Centre and states had shifted around until the state party became a helpless instrument of the authoritarian high command. This period which saw a high turnover of chief ministers, and some instances of humiliation suffered by state leaders at the hands of their masters, is often cited as one of the provocations for NTR entering politics and for the resounding victory that he achieved. However there are other reasons too that must be explored. Congress policies during this decade of authoritarianism, marked by programmes aimed at improving the lot of the poor and the lower castes, had considerably scrambled the stable patronage system that had prevailed until then, raising fears of instability and social polarization. The dominant castes, the kammas in particular, were exploring new arenas of economic opportunity. The picture of state Congress abjection struck a discordant note in the middle of this growing entrepreneurial energy. "The youth, the educated middle classes, the Backward castes and the industrial classes were in search of an alternative to the Congress" (Ram Reddy, 285).

In such a situation, NTR's ability to mobilize the masses became an opportunity for the bourgeoisie. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK wanted precisely such a synergy of mass mobilization and bourgeois consolidation, but the dual origins of DMK politics in the upper caste trade unionism of the Justice Party and the radical reformism of the DK, rendered its path towards this goal difficult and led to the current paralysis. In AP, the circumstances favoured a complementary rather than a conflictual evolution of mass and elite politics. The Telugu nationalist dimension of NTR's appeal was stronger than the fragmentary invocations of socialism.

Rajkumar and the character of Karnataka politics

In Karnataka, the formation of a regional political force has not proceeded with the decisiveness that has been the hallmark of the developments in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. One of the first inklings of the possibility of such a formation was the launching of the regional party Karnataka Kranti Ranga (Karnataka Revolutionary Platform) by Devaraj Urs who quit the Congress after having served as a popular chief minister of Karnataka known for his loyalty to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Devaraj Urs mobilized the backward castes through a series of reforms[16] (a strategy that was later to be adopted by V.P. Singh at the national level) and became so powerful in Karnataka that he made bold to challenge the High Command. In 1979, he formed the regional party KKR while he was serving as Congress chief minister. The party failed to generate the necessary momentum for survival, after Urs was replaced by Gundu Rao as chief minister in 1980. The party then merged, or rather disappeared into the Janata Party. S. Bangarappa relaunched the party in 1983 and Urs' daughter also tried to keep it alive, without success. What is interesting, however, is that at this juncture, between the formation of the KKR and its re-launching by Bangarappa in 1983, an agitation of historic significance was launched in Karnataka around a set of issues concerning primacy for Kannadigas in employment and for the use of Kannada in education and administration. The immediate provocation for this agitation was a report submitted by a committee appointed by the state government which recommended such reforms. Popularly known as the "Gokak report agitation" or simply the "Gokak agitation" after the chairman of the committee, this was initially a lukewarm agitation confined to government servants and literary figures until the actor Rajkumar entered the field. Under his leadership the agitation spread like wildfire across Karnataka and turned into a genuine mass movement.

During this entire period of agitation, it was assumed by many and was actively desired by others, that Rajkumar would join a political party. The KKR was considered the most likely platform for Rajkumar to launch himself as a politician. On 17 December 1982, when the agitation was at its peak, the *Indian Express* published an opinion survey which claimed that 74 percent of those polled wanted Rajkumar to join the KKR and enter politics full time. They wanted him to form a

---

[16] See Manor (1989) for a detailed account of the Devaraj Urs era of Karnataka politics.

government which would implement the Gokak committee report, "end goondaism in the state," wipe our unemployment, arrest inflation and "bring back Ramarajya" (*Indian Express*, 17.12.82; NFAI Pune). He had demonstrated beyond doubt the power to mobilize the entire state. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that for the regional political formation to consolidate itself, it required the services of a charismatic personality like that of Rajkumar. This pressure continued throughout the days of the Gokak agitation. Udaykumar, who was once briefly a competitor to Rajkumar in the industry, speaking at a meeting, urged Rajkumar to enter the political field in order to protect the Kannada film industry (*Vijayachitra*, April 1982, p. 9). The Janata Party offered to field him in Chikmagalur (*Vijayachitra* May 82, pp. 22-23). During the artistes' *jatha* that toured the state and mobilized the masses for the Gokak agitation, Rajkumar would sing songs from his films, including "Naniruvude Nimagagi" (I exist for your sake alone), but at the same time, declare, "I have no interest in politics. But Kannada is facing danger. I am participating in this programme only for the sake of protecting our mother tongue". (*Vijayachitra*, June 82, p. 6).

But in the midst of pressure from all those around him, Rajkumar firmly resisted the temptation of political glory. Some of his responses to his fans' repeated pleas to him to enter politics are quite moving in their straightforward and peasant-like honesty. In late 1982, fans organized a "tulabhara"[17] for Rajkumar in the presence of the Kannada writer Gorur Ramaswami Iyengar, to commemorate his completion of 25 years in the film industry. In his speech at the function, Rajkumar replied to fans' slogans demanding that he join politics with these words: "You all know very well that your Rajkumar will never enter politics. Why do you keep repeating the same demand? In any case, what good can I possibly do by joining politics? In that parliament or whatever it is called, if I am asked something, will I be able to speak? You tell me. [Here he seems to consider the argument as won, assuming his fans would agree with him about his inability to answer questions in parliament.] Therefore I will definitely not join politics. Your Rajkumar will continue to be as he is now. If there are people's problems, problems regarding language, or life, say the word, and we'll jump right in. That's all." (*Vijayachitra* December 1982, pp. 14-17). While this demonstrated Rajkumar's exemplary honesty and modesty, it also shows, in a negative mode, how essential some form of charismatic focus of mobilization is for

---

[17] A practice of weighing an eminent person in precious metals by seating him one on side of a balance.

the formation and consolidation of regional political forces. KKR was the first sign of a will to national political identity in Karnataka, but it could not take off as a properly nation-invoking force (like Telugu Desam), because it was unable to break out of the mould of established political traditions to recompose itself on a new basis. The founder Devaraj Urs belonged to a school of politics that would not have countenanced such a turn but those who sought to revive it like Bangarappa, were probably motivated precisely by the possibility of luring Rajkumar into the party. Thus it ended up disappearing into the Janata Party, leading in the end to the rise of the Janata Dal as the Karnataka variant of the regional (like the RJD in Bihar, the CPI-M in Bengal, the SP in UP etc).

Rajkumar's importance to the Kannada national identity is evident right from the 1960s, when on the occasion of a public meeting to celebrate his completion of 100 films, the popular Kannada writer AaNaaKru (A.N. Krishna Rao) presided and after expressions of admiration for the actor, exhorted him to serve the cause of Kannada. Throughout the 1960s we see such acts of "adoption" of Rajkumar as the saviour of Kannada. The literary intelligentsia, almost alone (barring a few politicians) in its dreams of a Kannada national identity, and marginalized politically by the demographic insignificance of its readership (although it was culturally very powerful), recognized in Rajkumar the film star, and in cinema, the popular medium that reaches the unlettered, an important weapon of mobilization that was capable of integrating the Kannada speaking population. In 1983, Rajkumar was awarded the Padma Bhushan. At the felicitation, the then Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde described him as "the uncrowned king of Kannada Nadu".

In all three states, it was clearly the idol of the masses, the king of the virtual republic of cinema, who rose to the position of absolute power, commanding the total and unquestioning loyalty of the people. But in Tamil Nadu, because of the deep vertical divisions that mark Tamil society, but also possibly because the masses' chosen hero was a Malayali (which for the middle classes constitutes a fundamental breach of the logic of cultural representation, as evidenced by the quick relapse into ethnic discourse by the DMK after the split), he never came to quite represent the Tamil nation, remaining until the end, the monarch of only half the kingdom so to speak. In Karnataka, although there were efforts to produce alternative stars to suit the middle classes' cultural proclivities, the people's actor Rajkumar, being a Kannadiga, was able to attain a

position of national icon. The middle classes identified with him, eventually, by a process of indirect belief: they believed in the belief of the masses and saw that his supremacy was important for forging a national unity across class and caste barriers. Andhra Pradesh was the most successful in incorporating the symbolic authority of NTR into a process of national unification. In Karnataka, it has not been possible to deploy Rajkumar's power in a project of unification. His supremacy remained at the cultural level and was not marshalled for any political reconstitution of the Kannada nation, leaving Rajkumar in a position of parallel and informal authority. He remains a monarch outside the parliamentary system. What will happen to that position after him is I think a crucial question that bears on the future of Karnataka.

We conclude this chapter on the political careers of our stars by briefly discussing a moment of transition between the virtual political careers of the three stars and their entry into actual politics.[18]

Was it a mere coincidence that in 1968-69, each of these stars acted in a film in which they stood for elections? It began in 1968 with NTR acting in a film called *Kathanayakudu* (Hero). This film opens with an introduction to the hopeless condition of the country, with corruption, poverty, apathy and a host of other evils plaguing the land. At the end of this sequence, the voice-over commentary concludes with the observation that to combat all these ills, "a hero is needed". From this we cut to the title, *Kathanayakudu* as NTR walks into the frame. He then sets about fighting corruption. The film quickly lapses into a manageable melodrama by embodying the social evils in three or four individuals who will then need to be vanquished. In the course of this struggle against them, NTR is put up for election, against his wishes, by the poor people of the slums, and he wins handsomely. The next year, the same film was remade in Tamil as *Nam Nadu*

---

[18] In the case of Rajkumar, while he did not follow the example of his neighbours, he did galvanize the language agitation in Karnataka, which was a crucial moment of Karnataka's national self-definition. This was, undoubtedly, a "real political act". And it was perceived as such at the time. This is how a newspaper report on Rajkumar's entry into the Gokak agitation begins: "At last it has happened. All those denials about not being a politician seem to be that much hogwash. Our hero of the silver screen – Rajkumar—has been launched. What better platform than a cause dear to the people – Kannada and the Gokak committee report…. A normally non-committal Raj Kumar was suddenly found making the strongest of statements against the Government." (*Indian Express,* 23.4.1982). While the paper's reading of Rajkumar's intentions proved quite wrong, its perception of the meaning of his actions during the Gokak agitation as political was shared by many. In 1992, a full ten years later, the Rajkumar Abhimanigala Sangha, by now a well-organized state-wide fan association, was still proclaiming its readiness to enter politics, if Rajkumar approved. Rajkumar's firm refusal, in spite of such sustained pressure, is all the more astonishing. (see M.D. Riti, "Fan Club turns Political" in *Illustrated Weekly of India,* Feb 15-21, 1992, 10-12.)

(Our Nation) with MGR in the lead. Both films had Jayalalitha as the heroine. (The same film was also remade in Hindi in 1972 with Rajesh Khanna in the lead, but *Apna Desh* did not quite do for Khanna what it seems to have done for the other two, although the Hindi version too was a smash hit and Rajesh Khanna went into politics). The other important film of this period was not a remake of this one but a different one in Kannada, with a partly Capraesque feel. It was Siddalingaiah's *Mayor Muthanna (1969)*. In this film an honest landless peasant, wrongly accused of theft and driven out of the village, arrives in Bangalore and with the help of the comedian-sidekick, intervenes in the corrupt urban world and finally stands for election as mayor of Bangalore to continue his good deeds on a different scale.

These films may be said to mark the entry of electoral politics into the dramatic content of popular cinema years before the reverse, the export of the dramatic content of popular cinema into the arena of electoral politics came to pass. What was happening here? In these films, the hero acquires a public persona that is more important than and completely overrides his family location. While hitherto the family had remained firmly in place in the social, by the late sixties all these stars have outgrown the roles that they play in the family and acquired a new persona. In a sense this persona that is only reflected concretely in the films in 68-69 is only the virtual realization of the position that the stars had already been enjoying in the imagination of the fans. The new kind of role is a tribute to their position in the eyes of their fans. But it is also the case that the late 1960s is a time of slowly mounting political crisis which would soon culminate in the movement of Jayaprakash Narayan, and Indira Gandhi's response of authoritarian populism leading up to the Emergency. It was a time when the melodramatic family, hitherto a sufficient site for all representations, was being marginalized and a new figure of the man of community was being forged.

References

Aranthai Narayanan. *Thamil Sinimavin Kathai*. Chennai: New Century Book House, 1981.

Baker, Christopher John. *The Politics of South India: 1920-1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Bakshi, Rajni. "Star Charisma" in *Seminar 306* (February 1985), 26-29.

Barnett, Marguerite Ross. *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Dickey, Sara. "The Politics of Adulation: Cinema and the Production of Politicians in South India", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (1993), pp. 340-372.

Forrester, Duncan. "Factions and Filmstars: Tamil Nadu Politics since 1971". *Asian Survey* 16.3 (1976). 283-296.

Frankel, Francine R. "Introduction." In Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao eds. *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*. Vol 1. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, 1-20.

Geetha V. and Rajadurai S.V. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium*. Kolkata: Stree, 2001.

Hardgrave, Jr., Robert L. "When Stars Displace the Gods: The Folk Culture of Cinema in Tamil Nadu" in *Essays in the Political Sociology of South India*. Delhi: Manohar, 1993, 92-124.

Harriss, John. *Capitalism and Peasant Farming: Agrarian Structure and Ideology in Northern Tamil Nadu*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Irschick, Eugene F. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Krishna Reddy, G. "Forging Public Opinion: The Press, Television and Electoral Campaigns in Andhra Pradesh" in Bernard Bel et al eds. *Media and Mediation*. New Delhi: Sage, 2005.

Manor, James. "Karnataka: Caste, Class, Dominance and Politics in a Cohesive Society" in Frankel and Rao, 321-361.

Muktha V. Sinivasan. *Thamil Thiraippada Valararu*. Chennai: Gangai Putthaka Nilayam, 1993.

Pandian, M.S.S. "*Parasakthi:* Life and Times of a DMK Film", *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 1991, 759-770.

Pandian, M.S.S. *The Image Trap: M.G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics.* New Delhi: Sage, 1992.

Price, Pamela. "Revolution and Rank in Tamil Nationalism", in *Journal of Asian Studies,* 55.2 (May 1996), 359-383.

Ram Reddy, G. "The Politics of Accommodation: Caste, Class and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh", in Frankel and Rao eds. *Dominance and State Power in India: Decline of a Social Order.* Delhi: OUP, 1989, 265`-321

Sivathamby, Karthigesu. *Tamil Cinema as a Medium of Political Communication.*
Tummala, Krishna K. "Democracy Triumphant in India: The Case of Andhra Pradesh." *Asian Survey* 36.3 (March 1986), 378-395.

Washbrook, D.A. *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Washbrook, D.A. "Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamil Nadu: Non-Brahmanism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism" in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao eds. *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order.* Vol 1. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, 204-264.