

*Textual Analysis of the Publicness in Exploring Indian Hero Films and  
Democratic Practice of Citizen Participation*

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**Abstract**

South Indian movies bring new public imagination with a variety of plots related to public issues. This study explores how citizens and heroes interact in political thrillers in Tollywood and Sandalwood movies with themes to solve election violence, corruptions, loan defaults and illegal expropriation of land. Textual analysis is conducted for six movies: Sarkaru Vaari Paata, Rangasthalam, K.G.F, K.G.F Chapter 2, Bharat Ane Nenu, and Maharshi. By defining six categories of heroes, this study focuses on public heroes and chaotic heroes by exploring how their backgrounds push them to connect people and turn the victims and truth-seekers to become citizens. The shaping and formation of citizens could become a beacon of hope in a disordered democratic society by uniting people to push for answers for issues. Heroes often resort to violence or utilize their expertise to tackle corrupt governments, local criminal forces, exploitative officials, or replace themselves in corrupt structures. However, this analysis focuses more on the following findings: South Indian movies narrate the potential for class mobility, depicting the relationship among the following people as slaves, lower-class citizens, citizens, and issue participants in political events. From the perspectives of commercial logic, citizen demands, and the significance of issues, the plots about the involvement of elites with people in promoting issue solution is highlighted. Entertainment effects, commercial logic, citizen demands, and issue visibility all have the potential to be addressed through movie-watching rituals. The possibility of enhancing publicness through the combination of popular culture, citizen resistance, and market elements is also discussed.

Keywords: South Indian Movies, Public Imagination, Hero Films, Democratic Practice

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## Introduction

India is rising with the potential to have more oriental impact on the world. This paper discusses publicness in exploring Indian Hero Films as popular culture. The democratic system requires a discursive framework to examine the public domain through the life world and, in the public sphere, to discuss the legitimacy of authoritative institutions, thereby forming a responsible political system. However, in the political process of many developing countries transitioning to developed nations, they often face challenges such as government corruption, the dominance of local warlords challenging the central authority, and the risk of citizens becoming victims of tyranny. In areas beyond the reach of government rule of law, people may fall prey to nefarious forces, gradually becoming modern slaves. The condition of modern slaves even descends to the point of a living hell, making it difficult to imagine. Despite India's rise and the long-standing promotion of a democratic system, it has been consistently criticized for its culture of corruption and has also become a popular theme in Indian films. This study explores how citizens and heroes interact in political thrillers in Tollywood and Sandalwood movies with themes to solve a variety of issues as symbols to explore democracy which depends not only on elections, traditional social or political elites but also how the public interact with the leadership of individual heroes or saviors to take back their power of sovereignty. How citizens and heroes interact in the public issues and themes related to election violence, corruptions, loan defaults, illegal expropriation of land, modern slaves as victims of local loan frauds, encroachment and embezzlement on private land, kidnapped mine workers in this study.

Tollywood and Sandalwood movies bring new public imagination with a variety of plots related to public issues. This study conducts textual analysis for six South India movies: Rangasthalam, K.G.F, K.G.F Chapter 2, Bharat Ane Nenu, Maharshi, Sarkaru Vaari Paata, Popularity of the six movies is analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of popularity of the six movies

Movie	Rank as the highest-grossing South Indian films Worldwide	Year	Gross ₹ Core	Language	Rank as the highest-grossing films in Indian movie market
Rangasthalam	Top 31	2018	210–215.70	Telugu	
K.G.F: Chapter 1	Top 21	2018	250	Kannada	
K.G.F: Chapter 2*	Top 3	2022	1,200–1,250	Kannada	Top 2
Bharat Ane Nenu	Top 37	2018	187.60–230	Telugu	
Maharshi**		2019	149.2	Telugu	
Sarkaru Vaari Paata	Top 25	2022	230	Telugu	

\* K.G.F: Chapter 2 is the highest-grossing Kannada film and the Top 4 India film for Worldwide gross collection

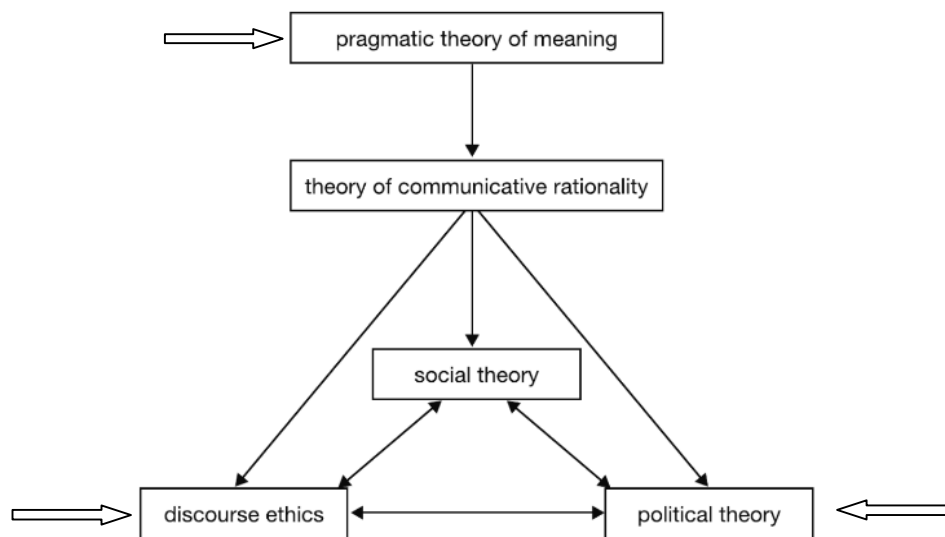
\*\* Films Box Office of Maharshi is considered as a hit.

## Heroes as Agents Search for Answers With the Public for Discourse Ethics, Moral Ethics and Truthfulness

This analysis focuses more on the following findings: how heroes narrate the potential for class mobility and depict the relationship among the following people as slaves, lower-class citizens, citizens, and issue participants in political events. From the perspectives of

commercial logic of popular culture, citizen demands, and the significance of issues, the plots about the involvement of heroes with people in promoting issue solution are highlighted. Entertainment effects, commercial logic, citizen demands, and issue visibility all have the potential to be addressed through movie-watching rituals. Characteristics of popular culture are related to concepts of people, popular, beyond class division, open markets, rules and transparency of market reports, business policy, public discourse. Therefore, it is not easy for consumers to have a local product which can have the genre as public heroes in political thrillers since political and social criticism is seen as taboos in many nations.

Finlayson (2005) describes connection of programs of Habermas for meaning, discourse ethics, communicative rationality with social and political theories (See Figure 1). In the first pragmatic theory of meanings, it explains how speech coordinate the actions of social agents by three kinds of validity claim – to truth, to rightness, and to truthfulness. Speech coordinates actions through validity claims to elicit rational consensus (p.166). Political theory discussed here focuses on whether officials are legitimate for their title. Three programs in Table one help analyze the six movies: political theory, pragmatic theory of meaning and discourse ethics. In these six movies, the reason to connect the public with heroes is not about people with disputed ideologies but about mobilization to change the corruption of political atmosphere. He explains the conception of ethical discourse from Habermas as “where pragmatic discourse takes one’s desired ends as given, and deliberates the best means to achieve them, ethical discourse evaluates those ends” (p.69). If we connect social theory with moral discourse, the purpose is to uncover the conditions under which modern moral agents can successfully answer moral questions for themselves (p.77).



**Figure 1: Connection of programs of Habermas for meaning, discourse ethics, communicative rationality with social and political theories**

Figure adapted from Finlayson, J. G. (2005). Habermas: A very short introduction. p.20, New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Arrows added by the author.

The discourse theory of morality is distinguished from the discourse theory of morality, two of which are included in the program of discourse ethics. The discourse theory of morality explains how moral order rests on the existence of demonstrably valid norms and the fact that most agents are disposed to adhere to them. What makes a norm valid is that it demonstrably embodies a universal interest. In contrast, ethical discourse concerns question of individual

happiness and the good of communities. Ethical discourse involves critical appropriation of traditions and the interpretation of values.

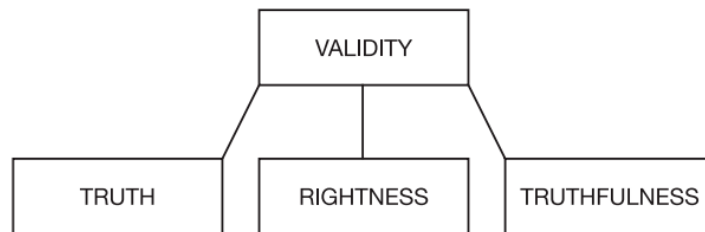


Figure 2 adapted from Finlayson, J. G. (2005). *Habermas: A very short introduction*. p.64, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

**Figure 2: The three validity dimensions**

### **Nine Steps to Overcome Issues or People’s Hardships for Heroes’ Interaction With the Public in the Six Movie Context**

Analysis results in this study of organized pattern for heroes and the public to solve issues is described as follows:

First, heroes erupt extreme violent conflicts against corrupt officials or villains. Second, networks of criminal behaviors described; Third, truth found under a specific profession or background; Fourth, Heroes face obstacles but choose to stay with the public or slaves and pursue the truth and ideas to success; Fifth, heroes calling for the participation of the public to end their sufferings; Sixth: Truth is found. Seventh: Justice is served as extreme killings or punishments of officials, business tycoon or local gang leaders. Eighth: solutions of improvement: new leaders, elections, political or policy reform. Ninth: law and order is recovered and the people are prosperous and happier.

Classic American hero stories typically highlight both individualism and heroic character, emphasizing personal perseverance, courage, and sacrifice as core values in constructing American culture. Individualism and hero character are often interwoven in popular culture as movies. In a philosophical level, individualism encompasses hedonism, which emphasizes personal pleasure; humanism, which emphasizes personal dignity; and egoism, which underscores the primacy of personal interests; and existentialism, which emphasizes the creation of personal meaning in life (Leung, 2017). Individualistic behavior tends to be self-referential, measuring personal actions from internal standards, diverging from using others (external reference standard) as reference points by comparing ideas of “the personal and the collective; the public and the common (p.362).” On the political level, individualism signifies that the sole function of the government is to protect the freedom of each individual without infringing upon the freedom of others; applied in political life, it means safeguarding individuals' autonomy from interference by society and the state. He explains that the public represents a collective embodiment of the individualistic concept, while the common represents a synthesis of many individuals, aligning with the concept of the collective self. The characteristics of shared, owned, and common public interests lie in not compromising private interests but individualism still asserts independence and transcending private interests for the sake of comprehensive, collective benefits. The ultimate collective self surpasses specific groups, embodying a universal human conscience and serving as a synthesis of human sensibility and rationality. Therefore, heroes solve issues to save the public rather than wait for the help from government especially when the government itself is

the problem. Basically, heroes are usually senses of morality, ethics or humanitarian approaches to awaken the public when facing issues or themes usually related to major corruption and crime (See Table 2).

Table 2: Synopsis of the difference between ethical and moral discourse

	Ethics	Morality
Basic concept	good/bad right/wrong	just/unjust
Basic unit	values	norms
Basic question	What is good for me or for us?	What is just? What ought I to do, and why? What is right?
Validity	relative and conditional	absolute and unconditional
Aims	prudential	deontological
Type of theory	advice; judgement preference ranking	establishing valid norms; discovering duties

Table 2 adapted from Finlayson, J. G. (2005). *Habermas: A very short introduction*. p.94, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

When public interests are compromised by government corruption and collusion with business, private interests may be disguised as public interests. Through the historical context, zeitgeist, and actions of public heroes, citizens are called upon to achieve the democratic practice of freedom and human rights. Leung (2017) explains the two sets of cultural genes in the West: Truth and Uniqueness; Humanity and Individuals. Individualism has explained above, concepts about how to practice the truth about pursuit of happiness through values in humanism to expose and solve citizens' miseries are the purposes of this study. Public heroes and chaotic heroes are examined about how their backgrounds push them to connect people and turn the victims to truth-seekers and overturn bad policy or clear bad officials and local villains. As the plots about heroes' struggles are never alone and never give up to reach the goal as to bring well-being for the public. The philosophy of leaders analyzed here bring not only "courage" but also "victory" to the public.

In the movie KGF Chapter 1, the protagonist's mother told him to be a successful leader by standing in front of followers not behind followers when facing war.

*If you gain courage because a thousand people are standing behind you, then you can only win a war. But if a thousand people get courage because you are standing in front of them, you can conquer the world. The breath of a wounded lion is far more terrifying than its roar !!!*

In the movie Maharshi, the protagonist said, "One who seeks victory is a man. One who spreads victory is a 'Maharshi'." He encourages people to be open to the definition of success as "There are no full stops in success. There are just commas. Success is not a destination. Success is a journey" and "If we step into the game with the fear of losing, we can never win."

In addition, the shaping and formation of citizens could become a beacon of hope in a disordered democratic society by uniting people to push for answers for issues. Heroes often resort to violence or utilize their expertise to tackle corrupt governments, local criminal forces, exploitative officials, or replace themselves in corrupt structures. Heroes' views about public reform projects are conducted in a harsh way but doable due to ethical and moral concerns which awaken the people.

Hero types, background of heroes, truth of issues, level of social capital, and results are analyzed and presented for six movies in Table 3. To what degree heroes connect people to which level of social capital are also specified which possibly empower the victims into truth-seekers and escape their public disasters. When examining roles of public heroes or the savior of slaves in these six movies, it is interesting to find out how a protagonist's will can be connected to the public to coordinate them to achieve their goals. Habermas' discourse ethics and meanings help explain how the public evaluate validity through dimensions of truth, rightness, and truthfulness.

Table 3: Analysis of hero types, background, issues, level of social capital for six movies

Movie	Hero types as leaders	Background of heroes	Truth of Issues	Level of social capital to connect people and results
Rangasthalam	Dual heroes with hidden status as pariah	Two brothers united as heroes as their villagers live in a remote and underdeveloped rural areas.	*Exploitation by local gangsters by manipulating elections, loan frauds for 30 years. *Discrimination against Dalits	Bridging: Connecting people in rural areas to state law makers and local administrative authority  Results: new leader of the village and the stop of the exploitation by gangster
K.G.F: Chapter 1	disputed, dark savior for slaves	Following his mother's last words, he transformed from a notorious gangster figure into a wealthy villain. Unexpectedly, he rescued a huge group of slaves and became revered as a god by them	The rule of laws and order as a country are disregarded. The underworld reigns supreme, and the people are reduced to slaves. The state fails to uphold justice, as government officials themselves become wrongdoers. Strangely, it is the wrongdoers who end up resolving the issue of slavery.	Linking: Worldwide connection for illegal gold business  Results: Slaves are liberated.

K.G.F: Chapter 2*	disputed, dark savior for slaves	Revered as a god by his followers with a villain image, the savior of modern slaves make his reputation to a new notorious national level	As the new Prime Minister ushers in reforms in India, how will the controversial liberator of slaves respond to the changes? Or who might be a better national reformer?	Linking: Worldwide connection for illegal gold business  Results: Slaves are liberated and life conditions are improved.
Bharat Ane Nenu	policy reformer as creative thinker and doer	Born as the son of murdered, top- one political leader, the hero witnesses corruption of his political party	As the new Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the hero solved rigged elections, corruptions, murders, irresponsible mindsets as citizens	Bridging: Connecting people in rural areas to district headquarters of the state capital  Results: successful political reform.
Maharshi**	super genius, CEO of the biggest company worldwide	Born as the son of an ex-public official with financial profession but turned a loser after resisting to corrupt, the hero tries to save his friend's villages from government land expropriation.	Under the guise of false investment, government acquisition of land as a cover for the real theft of people's land	Linking: Connecting people in rural areas to the nation, state and the world  Results: Successful agriculture reform for the village and stop the acquisition of that village
Sarkaru Vaari Paata	Social justice warriors for scandals of collusions between officials and businessmen for bank loans	Born as the son of parents who made suicides to protest unfair and failed bank loan policy	Harsh bank loan policy on people in order to compensate huge bad debt for Collusion between government officials and business for fraudulent loans	Bridging: Connecting people to ask a state government to change the state policy of bank loan  Results: the tycoon finally paid back his bad debts to the state bank and people can have normal bank loan policy

### **Heroes and the Public Search for Validity Claims as Truthfulness and Rightness**

Finlayson explains that ethical discourse makes the values salient that are related to an individual's life history, tradition or cultural group to which that individual belongs; the concepts of good and of value bear upon a logical feature of ethical discourse. He explains that the value spheres take place in the wake of the transfer of epistemic and practical authority from traditions to validity, and three distinct kinds of validity are truth, rightness, and truthfulness and the three dimensions of validity truth, rightness, and truthfulness correlate in order with the three spheres of discourse: theoretical, moral, and aesthetic. From the approach of pragmatism, truthfulness is more related to ideas and belief to practice in

daily life and through which the world can be improved and enriched and for the purpose of moral norm is to hold across different and competing cultural traditions, values only hold within a particular tradition or cultural group. The public project in the six movies could be regarded as a symbol as the shaping and formation of citizens could become a beacon of hope in a disordered democratic society by uniting people to push for answers for issues. Although heroes often resort to violence or utilize their expertise to tackle corrupt governments, local criminal forces, exploitative officials, or replace themselves in corrupt structures.

With outstanding character in the face of adversity to achieve remarkable feats by overcoming difficulties and challenges, heroic character underscores resilience, bravery and selfless acts and a spirit of consideration for others. Super heroes dominate themes of movie markets worldwide. Capable of using violence as saviors is an ultimate requirement as one of most important characteristics for super heroes which are explored among main protagonists in these six movies.

### **After Extreme Violent Conflicts, Pragmatic Moral Discourse as a Social Mechanism of Conflict Resolution**

To explore how popularity is related to heroes, we can explore cultural spirit in the development of United States' history that esteems the public, hero and individualism may serve as a reference for this topic. In the 19th century, American society developed a set of values based on new Christian ethics, particularly concerning work. It formed a value system where morality and societal interactions shaped the cultural identity and key terms observed in that time period include citizenship, responsibility, democracy, work, glory, reputation, morality, demeanor, dignity, manliness, and more. He explains that the unique feature of the cultural products of that time was the hope for both individual development and the attainment of moral and social harmony (Teng, 1995, p.60). Religions are important cultural elements not only in the six Indian movies examined here but also common backgrounds for Indian movies. In the early 20th century, the notion of self-sacrifice in America had transformed into the idea of self-realization; as he explains that personality became a central aspect of American vocabulary, and standing out in morality, intelligence, physical prowess, and practicality became crucial. Writers advocated for self-fulfillment and self-expression, while cautioning against excessive selfishness and arrogance; Teng describes that the adaptation strategy focused on how to be likable, demonstrating a unique and outstanding performance of oneself. He explains that as sentiments evolved, individuals were required to possess charm and magnetism, meeting society's expectations of playing one's role effectively and this phenomenon not only could be applied to commercial activities but also extended to discussions about distinctive qualities and charismatic personalities in academic works. The key to success without over confidence is to lay in establishing a favorable impression in the minds of the public, with success hinging on the creation of loyal admirers. An individual's outstanding work or self-expression, without the support of the masses, is deemed "meaningless" (p. 63). As the perspectives of commercial logic, citizen demands, and the significance of issues, the plots about the involvement of elites with people in promoting issue solution is highlighted; in addition, entertainment effects, commercial logic, citizen demands, and issue visibility all have the potential to rituals of popular culture as the possibility of enhancing publicness through the combination of popular culture, citizen resistance, and market elements. The changes in the public and social-cultural foundations discussed here might offer a reference to explain how to observe these phenomena in India.



Combing the concepts between citizens and individualism with popular personality help answer the topic about exploring Indian hero films and democratic practice of citizen participation with the emphasis on public heroes, issues and we the people. Especially, when social atmosphere is related to conflicts or issues hard to overcome. Mangone (2020) cited Sorokin to identify how to produce and improve the love energy such as the increase of creative heroes of love as the great creators and thinkers and the heroes or apostles of love; the increase of creative heroes of truth and beauty, thinkers and creators in different fields of science and the arts of the highest value (p.162).

Scholars have debated about the idea that does ethics have a chance in a world of consumers? (Cheng, 2014). Smith (1999) explains that alternative conceptualization of ethics as a consumer value is more accommodating of a greater variety of consumption experiences and ethical concern as motivating factor. From the perspective of ethics as a consumer value, when the individual engages in an affirmative act of goodness, public hero films may promote one or more moral values for the well-being of others and for reasons of enlightened self-interest. Smith explains that Holbrook proposes a framework or typology, classifying consumer value by three dimensions: 1) extrinsic versus intrinsic, 2) self- versus other-oriented, and 3) active versus reactive. For example, esteem value as reactive value for it is derived from the reaction of others. In contrast, ethics such as justice, virtue, and morality is self-oriented, intrinsic, and reactive in the consumption experience.

Table 4: A typology of consumer value

		<b>Extrinsic</b>	<b>Intrinsic</b>
<b>Self-oriented</b>	Active	Efficiency (Output/Input; Convenience)	Play (Fun)
	Reactive	Excellence (Quality)	Aesthetics (Beauty)
<b>Other-oriented</b>	Active	Status (Success, Impression Management)	Ethics (Virtue, Justice, Morality)
	Reactive	Esteem (Reputation,	Spirituality (Faith, Ecstasy, Sacredness, Magic)

Table 4 adopted from "Ethics and the Typology of Customer Value", in Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research. P.149.

From perspective of pragmatism, William James combines truth with personal practice, viewing knowledge as an exploration of individual practice and he believes that something is true because it is useful, or it is useful because it is true (Yang, 2019). This approach helps explain the validity claim as truthfulness examined by problem-solving ideas presented and explored every day. Yang explains that through the process of cognition, James integrates epistemology as an exploration of personal practice, connecting truth with practice by emphasizing the meaning of behavior through life and practice and he asserts that the existence of tangible objects is not inherently true; instead, ideas and beliefs are related to truth. White indicates that these sentiments of James make it apparent that pragmatism is not so much about scientific truths as it is about ethical truths (2010). James emphasizes that true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify and false ideas are those we cannot; he said that is the practical difference makes us have true ideas; therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as (1928).

James emphasizes a heroic view of history, where great individuals play a crucial role in shaping historical events (Yang, 2019). He explains that building a social historical perspective from human issues and the practical activities of historical figures can underscore the role of individuals in creating history. This perspective focuses on explaining history from the standpoint of the subject, seeking the agency of the actor, and exploring how individuals contribute to the creation and construction of historical events (Yang, 2019). All protagonists presented in the six movies act as supermen physically and spiritually and that reflects the idea that the roles of individuals could possibly create history.

## **Conclusion**

From perspectives of cultural studies, truthfulness as ideas and belief proposed by protagonists are connected people suffering in their public daily life and gradually motivating the public to do ethic discourse and practice connected action for their pursuit of happiness in the six movies analyzed in this study. The possibility of enhancing publicness through the combination of popular culture, citizen resistance, and market elements are discussed. Values, visions, characters could connect people's action with heroes' calling. Values of followers are related to heroes' ideas to find the truth about the pursuit of happiness or ending the hardship of living hell. Wills are circulated through humanistic values as public heroes help maintain order and lead citizens to reform and win victory. Can ethics have a chance in a world of consumers? Maybe these movies can imply some answers.

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