ECONOMY, POLITICS, CULTURE INDUSTRY: CASE STUDIES OF THE KANNADA AND BHOJPURI CULTURE INDUSTRIES

I. REPORT ON THE KANNADA CULTURE INDUSTRY

By P.Radhika, CIDASIA, CSCS with inputs from
S.V.Srinivas and Sravanthi Kollu, CIDASIA, CSCS,
Sushmitha S. and B.Shrikanth

Kannada Film Industry and Linguistic Identity

The link between culture and politics has been done in different ways. If we take the specific instance of Kannada cultural production, its centrality in the Kannada identity movement has been argued through tracing how Kannada linguistic nationalism has articulated itself through the site of the print and cinema industry—beginning with the high literary writings of Alur Venkat Rao, Galaganatha and B.M.Srikantiah in the colonial period and then the shift to popular culture, especially Kannada cinema in the post-independence period (Prasad 2003-2004, Nair 2005).[1]

We present a different argument here: Kannada identity politics is a projection of the underground economy of the Kannada cultural industry. Such a mapping should not be mistaken as a reading of an identity politics in 'economic' terms where the linguistic is seen as a 'false layering' to the 'true economic tensions beneath' but as a revisiting of the cultural through the economic in more complex ways.

<u>The importance of understanding cultural economy is not merely confined to financial transactions and profit-making of culture industry but is closely tied to political articulations that emerge from this underground economy.</u> The moment of political articulation is important because it is at this moment that the economic value of the cultural commodity meets its cultural value in a context otherwise of the difficulty of translating cultural value into economic value. Throughout history there have been attempts by the state to bring about the industrialization of the Kannada film industry and make it a profitable business. Often these attempts have only been in contradistinction to a certain route of economic development of the industry itself. As we mention below the government's insistence on developing studio-houses on the grounds of being the touchstone of a successful industry was resisted by the industry itself. Thus, any developmental intervention in this sector, by the state or non-governmental agencies,

[1] This analysis points to early articulations of Kannada identity as marked by Alur Venkat Rao's famous *Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava* (1917) that constructed a glorious Kannada history and exhorted the Kannada speaking people to fight for a unified Karnataka and B.M. Srikantiah's "The Improvement of Kannada Language" (1915) that articulated the need to revive Kannada language. B.M. Srikantiah's lecture, which was a direct appeal to the government to aid the process, was followed by the setting up of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat (1915). This revival was largely sited in high culture and remained so for a long time unlike attempts to encourage reading through library movements and widespread promotion of literacy seen in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. It was only in the post-independence phase that the domain of popular culture became an important site for the assertion of Kannada identity (Nair 2005). It is then that the star Rajkumar emerges as a representative of Kannada identity (Prasad 2003-2004).

should be made with caution. We will map below the important periods of articulation of Kannada identity and the fraught debates in Kannada culture industry during those times.

Rajkumar's *Ranadheera Kanteerava* (1960) and Rajkumar's *Hosabelaku* and *Halu Jenu* (both 1982) were films that generated controversies because of the non-availability of theatres for their release and Kannada producers complaining about exhibitors' preference for other-language films over Kannada films. It is perhaps a coincidence that these years were the very years of the Kannada movement (1960) and Gokak movement (1982) and the time when Kannada cinema becomes a site for the articulation of Kannada identity but that they are related is indisputable.

Before we get into the specific periods of the 1960s and 1980s, we will briefly sketch the relation between the three sectors of the film industry in Kannada. The Kannada production sector from the beginning has been an afflicted sector seen as needing government support and the sharing of the costs by distributors and exhibitors. As has been noted of Indian film producers unlike in Hollywood (Prasad 2000), producers here too were not big business magnates. They were not the studio houses that the government wanted to set up and for the construction of which they provided support. Even with the construction of studios, like Premier Studios and Navjyoti Studios in Mysore, the constant demand from the industry during the 1960s was the need to subsidise production in Karnataka, something that was eventually brought about by the state government in 1967. Though the subsidy itself did not lead to any significant rise in overall production that rose from 20 (1966) to 26 (1967), it did bring about a change in the number of films that were shot in Karnataka, which saw a jump from 1(1966) to 11(1967). We thus need to make a distinction between film industry in Karnataka and 'Kannada industry' or films in Kannada language, a distinction important in understanding how the exhibition sector is not invested in the language of the film.

Unlike the production sector, the distribution and exhibition economies are fairly stable, especially the latter. K.V. Gupta, an erstwhile distributor who started Vijaya talkies in 1958, while reiterating this fact added that exhibition was a sector that a businessman could get into as long as he could make an initial investment from which he didn't expect immediate returns. The sector did not require further investments and soon yielded a steady income (Personal Interview 2009). In villages and small towns, incomes generated from agricultural incomes that rose post-independence found their way into the setting up of theatres. There is mention in M.N.Srinivas of a Lakshmana from Rampura who buys a theatre in Mysore (Srinivas 1976).[2] Exhibition was the first film related trade within Karnataka that got organised. Mysore Film Chamber of Commerce (MFCC), that was set up in 1944 and later became Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC), was primarily taking care of exhibitors' needs, such as the carbon requirements of the theatres, thus earning it its name of 'carbon association'. It was only much later that the distributors and producers formed part of the Chamber (http://www.chitraranga.com/en/ARCHIVES/ filmchambers.htm). Throughout the history of Kannada industry, whether

[2] It is interesting how Srinivas traces an agriculturist Lakshmana's career from being a farmer to entering the transport business, politics and then the cinema industry. Srinivas suggests that such a move helped farmers learn the trade and make government contacts which would be useful in setting up ones' position in the industry (1976).

the 60s, 70s or 80s, there have only been complaints about the lack of theatres in the state which implies a high demand for theatres.

The problem of few exhibition centers, the producers say, is compounded by the fact that Kannada has to share these centers with other language films. Kannada films are said to comprise less than 30% of the total exhibition of films of all languages put together. Though the following break-up of the films shown in the city of Bangalore is of the 1990s, it is said to be applicable to other times and other main cities in Karnataka. Of the 93 exhibition outlets (mainly theatres), Kannada films were screened in 29 theatres, followed by Tamil in 23 theatres (among which 15 theatres traditionally screened Tamil films) English in 15, Hindi in 13, Telugu in 6, Malayalam in 1 and others either screened second-run pictures or had miscellaneous charts (KFCC 1995).[3] The complaints about the difficulty of procuring theatres were especially stark during periods of increased film production such as the early 1960s.

The exhibition sector is the one that is taxed by the government in the form of Entertainment Tax (ET). In 1974 the government increased the ET from 60% to 100%.[4] In addition to the tax, the revenue generated in the exhibition sector has sought to be put back into production. In August 1972, the Chamber decided to create a rule wherein the theatres had to follow the 'percentage wise' division of profit collection and renting process (Vijaya et al 1984). This suggestion of profit sharing goes back to the 1960s and was made by producers like G.V.Iyer (1964) and Premier studio owner M.N.Basavarajiah (1966). Their argument was that such a system would avoid dependency on the Tamil film industry and ensure money circulates within the state. This argument to build a local industry is later transformed into one of protecting linguistic identity.

Similarly the distribution sector till the mid-80s has been a sector that has been relatively stable except in the nature of leaks through middlemen. Otherwise it was merely a few distributors who held the entire distribution rights in Karnataka from the 1960s to the mid-1980s. The distribution of films during this period was taken up by a main distributor for the entire state of Karnataka through a commission paid to the producer, which was a percentage of the gross collections of the movie. The distribution in Karnataka was divided into three provinces: Mysore province, Hyderabad province and Mumbai province.

Mysore province used to provide the largest market for Kannada films. While 65% of the industry's income came from the Mysore region, Hyderabad Karnataka contributed 15% and Mumbai Karnataka 20%. The main distributor who retained under his jurisdiction the Old Mysore State and the 12 districts within it would usually get all the prints of a cinema (around 8-10). He would lend the same to the distributors of the other two regions as 'lend prints'. The distributor attempted to realize his investment in the entire picture—

[3] Also given that there has not been any particular rise in the number of theatres in a given year. Many attempts by the government through its development corporations—Karnataka State Film Development Corporation and Karnataka Film Industry Development Board (1970)—to set up new theatres have failed.

[4] It must be noted however that Kannada films incurred about 54% tax of which the exhibitors paid 27% tax, distributors 7% and the producers 13%. Subsequently in 1996 Kannada films were completely exempted from tax.

commission, publicity etc—within a period of 11 months. In the event of the failure of realization, the producer was bound to pay the amount to the distributor. During the time of production under this system the producers would borrow money from the distributors without any interest and would also get financial assistance from exhibitors (with the promise of releasing the movie in their theatres). Post-1985 there has been a decentralization of the distribution process, what in the industry is called the buyer-seller system or the district-specific distribution system. Here instead of the three provinces, a total number of seven zones were created:

Bangalore/ Kolar/ Tumkur
Mysore/ Mandya/ Coorg/ Hassan
Shimoga/ Chikkamagalur
Chitradurga/ Bellary/ Davangere
South Canara
Mumbai Karnataka- Belgaum/ Hubli-Dharwad/ Bijapura/ Bagalakote/ Haveri
Hyderabad Karnataka- Bidar/ Gulbarga/ Raichur/ Koppal

This system was successful for producers as the source of revenue multiplied (seven distributors) yielding better profits. As a result production activities gained momentum—for e.g., actor-producer Ravichandran started increasing production costs depending on returns/collection. Talking about the shift, Ravichandran says, "There is plenty of money in the industry. But [there is] mismanagement of capital [and] there is also monopoly. A centre which often had collections in thousands all of a sudden collected 2 ½ lakhs in my film. It only means that producers do not get their money because of too many middle men and their greed." (Vijaya et al, 1984). However, distributors like K.V.Gupta who started Vijaya Pictures in the late 1950s decided to get out of distribution in 1983 because of the new system of distribution. He lamented that "it was like the shift from a joint family to a nuclear family" (Personal Interview 2009).

Also, in the 1980s, cable television and home videos not only created new avenues for profit to the producers but became business enterprises that were both linked to but autonomous of the film industry. So too with Kannada film audio, with Lahari Recording Co. being one of the pioneers that bought the music rights of Ravichandran's *Premaloka* for a record sum of Rs. 1,80,000 in 1986**.** Thus, along with decentralisation of distribution, there has also been an increasing fragmentation of the film commodity itself.

Let us now specifically look at the two periods of political mobilization in the history of the Kannada film industry—the Kannada Chaluvali or Kannada Movement (1960) and the Gokak Chaluvali or Gokak movement (1982).

The Kannada Chaluvali starts in 1960 with writers A.N.Krishna Rao (popularly known as Aa.Na.Kru) and Ma. Ramamurthy's demand to have more Tamil artists in the Ramotsava festivals but there is specificity to the agitation within the film industry.[5] In 1963, there was a rise in the number of films by almost 100%--from 12 to 21 (Vijaya et

[5] The usage of 'Ma.Ramamurthy' (instead of M.Ramamurthy) draws on a practice within the Kannada-speaking public and intellectuals. Since Ma.Ramamurthy is recognized by that name the usage here seems appropriate.

al, 1984) with the industry becoming a new place for the investment of agricultural-surplus. We see the entry of producers like KCN Gowda during this time.[6] This is because of the rise in sugarcane prices in the early 1960s in the Mandya and Shimoga regions following irrigation provided by the Krishnaraja Sagar Dam and the increase in agricultural income for farmers because of reduced taxation by the government post-independence.[7] This led to both large scale migration of middle and rich farmers into Bangalore from the surrounding areas and investment of agricultural surplus into industries in Bangalore. Janaki Nair points to Kannada migrants joining public sector industries in large numbers such that by 1967 the Workers Unity Forum consisting of middle peasant caste migrants were challenging the constitution and issues taken up by AITUC on the grounds of language (Nair 255). We suggest that it was another set of rich farmer migrants who invested in the film industry. With the rise in producers entering the market there was an emerging conflict between the production and exhibition sectors. Whether this can be read as a conflict between the agricultural classes vs. the mercantile class is a question we would explore while furthering the project.

It is important to see that the migrants coming into Bangalore, the Kannada Chaluvali and the shift of the Kannada film industry from Madras to Bangalore—the three events that are seen as marking the 1960s (Nair 2005)—was no mere coincidence; they are inextricably tied to each other. Not only was the migrant population forming Kannada-centred unions inside the public sector as has been documented but they were raising questions of identity outside it, central to which the Kannada film industry was a site. If we look at the protest against the anti-Kannada representation in *Kanchi Thalaivan* (1964) or the demand to show more Kannada films in the city, led in the forefront by Vatal Nagaraj who threatened to shut down theatres showing Tamil films, it is symptomatic of the conflict between producers and exhibitors in Bangalore, that can perhaps be mapped onto the migrant Kannada population and non-Kannada mercantile class. As a consequence of Kannada Chaluvali new government orders were passed in relation to exhibition stating that government licenses would be provided to theatres only if they signed a treaty affirming that a minimum of 8 months per year would be rented out for Kannada films (Vijaya et al 1984).

The 1960s also marks the rise of actor Rajkumar as a star with appeals to other actors like Kalyan Kumar to restrict their acting to Kannada films (Nair 2005, 248-9). The failure of the film *Ranadheera Kanteerava* at the box office because of the lack of theatres, the very film that launched Rajkumar as a star, probably ties the newly-emerging star as a point of negotiation for Kannada film producers through invoking Kannada identity. And of course, Rajkumar as star was to become the foremost representative of that identity. The Flood Relief Fund instituted by the newsgroup *Deccan Herald-Praja Vani* in the 1960s, where Kannada film actors Rajkumar, Narasimharaju and Balakrishna toured the entire state to collect money and that is seen as prompting the shift of the industry from Madras to Bangalore (Vijaya et al, 1984) coincides with this new role of the actor as star who takes on a public-political role exceeding that of an actor.

---

[6] He came from the silk-industry business held in Doddaballapura near Bangalore.

[7] The harvest price of sugarcane rose from Rs.14 to Rs. 43 per ton in Mandya and from Rs.13.33 to Rs.42.22 per ton in Shimoga (Mysore Season and Crop Report 1962, 87)

The **Gokak movement** of the 1980s is the other significant moment where Kannada identity and film history intersect. The Gokak agitation in 1982 started with its centre in Hubli-Dharwad and later spread across Karnataka with Bangalore taking over as centre-stage. The agitation was set off with the committee headed by V.K.Gokak which recommended the primacy of Kannada in state schools. The ruling Congress government headed by Gundu Rao did not implement the report thus prompting the Gokak movement. It has been well documented that the movement that was initially led by intellectuals became a mass movement with the entry of the Kannada star Rajkumar. As Nair suggests, "it was the entry of Rajkumar and the Rajkumar Abhimanigala Sangha (Rajkumar Fans' Association) into the Gokak movement that decisively altered the nature of its mass appeal" (Nair 2005, 256-7).

The standard reading of Rajkumar's entry is that the star presence of Rajkumar was used by intellectuals like Lankesh and others in the movement to mobilize the masses (Huliyar 2009). However, Rajkumar's entry exceeded this instrumental function attributed to him, not merely in the sense of differently conceptualizing the relationship between the star and the fan in terms of the representational function the star embodies but also because of a greater stake for Rajkumar and the Kannada film industry during the Gokak movement. The late 1970s witnessed another rise in film production from 35 to 51 and a subsequent lack of theatres, somewhat replaying the 1960s story. This is despite a greater involvement of actor-stars like Rajkumar in production and the film chamber's active intervention making it mandatory for all theatres to exhibit only Kannada films for at least twelve weeks every year. The complaints against exhibitors not co-operating continued to persist (Vijaya et al 1984). Also, exhibitors were seen as raking in huge profits while the producers themselves were getting a paltry sum in return for their investment. Two events exemplify the conflict between the producers and exhibitors.

One, *Shankar Guru* (1978) a film that Rajkumar produced and acted in, was exhibited in Sagar theatre for twenty five weeks. After the deduction of taxes the gross collection was about Rs. 10, 32,930 of which the share of the producer-distributor was merely Rs. 3, 74,190. In 1979-80, the chamber suggested a plan to overcome such imbalance by introducing a 'percentage wise' profit sharing of film collection by producers, distributor and exhibitor. Under this scheme, theatres around Kempegowda road[8] were to share profits as follows: If the collections were between 90%-100%, 35% would go to the exhibitor and 65% to the producer/ distributor. If collections was around 80-90%, 40% would go to the exhibitor while 60% to the producer-distributor. As the collection decreased the exhibitors share increased—with collections less than 25%, 85% of the profits would go to the exhibitor (Vijaya et al, 1984). Though producers procured some relief with this scheme, manipulation of the scheme by exhibitors and exhibitors demanding protection of their interests resulted in the continued strife between producers and exhibitors.

Two, in May-June 1982, Santosh theatre was procured for the movie *Halu-Jenu* produced by and starring Rajkumar. Amitabh Bachchan's *Namak Halal* which was supposed to be

[8] K.G.Road and the surrounding streets are known to have around 14 theatres, one of the largest number in any given area in India.

released in the same theatre was then shifted elsewhere. An article in 'Trade Guide' from Mumbai reported the incident and criticised Rajkumar calling him 'junior Hitler'. The article created a furor and the preference for other-language films over Kannada films in Karnataka was reiterated. Both the anti-Kannada attitude of the exhibitors and the strong grip of other languages in the local market were issues that Rajkumar foregrounded in his speeches during the Gokak agitation, especially his valedictory address at the national college grounds (Vijaya et al, 1984).

However, the film industry's stake in the 1980s was not limited to the articulation of problems of Kannada producers, constituted by the landed migrant class. It signals the attempt of another kind of migrant population in Bangalore who were working in the film industry to consolidate their position. This migrant population, unlike the 1960s farmers who brought into the city agricultural surplus, were moving into the city in search of employment in a context where agriculture was no longer a sustainable source. If the naxalite movement and the farmers' movement during the time represent one response to this condition, migrants in search of city-jobs represents another kind of response. With the increasing number of people joining the industry, we see the beginning of the unionization of the industry workers in the late 1970s, starting with the production assistants followed by the drivers and light-men association (1979-80). They later come together under the umbrella organization, Karnataka Film Workers Artists and Technicians Federation (KFWATF) in 1987. The 1980s was a time when studios were set up in Bangalore as a means to guarantee employment to the industry workers. Shankar Nag's Sanket Studio was an important landmark in this history and it is around Shankar Nag's name that the workers consolidate their place in the industry. It is thus no accident that Shankar Nag is the one who represents Kannada identity, along with Rajkumar, though he is not an actor-star like Rajkumar.[9] Thus, if the film economy was exclusive to rich farmer migrants in the 1960s, we see a massification of the economy in the 1980s, with the workers in the forefront of, though not exclusive in, articulating the Kannada identity.

A brief look at the statistics of workers in the Kannada film industry show us the districts in Karnataka they come from. Among the total of 5000 workers in the KFWTAF today, we have taken a sample of 364 workers belonging to four unions—Production Assistants, Cleaners, Set Associates and Costumers. The figures below reveal the number of people who come from Bangalore and those from outside:

1. Production Assistants: Total number – 138 **Bangalore – 57 (Outside Bangalore-81)** 1. Mysore – 17; 2. Mandya – 9; 3. Udupi – 7
2. Cleaners: Total number – 77

[9] The other reason for Shankar Nag's picture found on Bangalore autos, whose drivers unionize around the Kannada identity, is because of him acting in a film (*Auto Raja*) where an auto-driver is a protagonist. For a picture of Shankar Nag at a Kannada flag-post, please see—"Monarchical Flourish" from the Janaki Nair Collection, "Beladide Noda Bengaluru Nagara" http://www.cscsarchive.org:8081/Bangalore/home.nsf/%28docid%29/3C33E1B433555D76E5256A2C001EC227.

Bangalore – 41 (Outside Bangalore-36) 1. Mysore – 14; 2. Tumkur – 9; 3. Udupi and Mandya – 4
3. Set Associates: Total number – 42 **Bangalore – 16 (Outside Bangalore-26)** 1. Hassan – 4; 2. Mysore and Tumkur – 3; 3.Kolar – 2, Udupi and Gadag – 2
4. Costumers: Total number – 107 **Bangalore – 45 (Outside Bangalore-50, Outside Karnataka-12)** 1. Mysore – 9; Hassan and Tumkur – 7; Kolar and Mandya – 3

As the figures above indicate there is a greater number of workers who have come from outside of Bangalore (about 60% of the total workers), and this is notwithstanding the fact that many outsiders mention a Bangalore address, since they do not want to reveal their home address (because they might have a police case against them among other reasons). This predominance of migrant population constituting film workers was the case in the 1980s too (Uppendu 2009). Bangalore thus gained a centrality in the articulation of Kannada identity during the Gokak movement, though there were mobilizations across the state, because of the Kannada migrant populations into Bangalore making claims to livelihood through the Kannada identity. This perhaps explains what Nair sees as a "disproportionate gain" of Bangalore from the Gokak agitation that began in Hubli-Dharwad (2005, 280).[10]

As has been noted, by the 1980s Kannada identity was gaining legitimacy beyond the intelligentsia. Perhaps the 1980s signals the beginning of the identity's association with the 'masses', an association that continues to this day. This massification of the movement is signified in the symbolic re-territorialisation of Bangalore through the Kannada flags that happened after 1982 though the flag itself was designed by Ma. Ramamurthy in 1968 (Nair 2005, 258). Intellectuals like U.R.Ananthamurthy did not support the Gokak movement on the grounds of its anti-minority stance (Nair 2005, 266). Likewise, K.N.Harikumar, editor-proprietor of the leading newspapers, *Deccan Herald* and *Praja Vani* stated that language, unlike class, might not be a legitimate basis for solidarity (ibid.). However what these positions crucially missed out was that it was precisely linguistic identity that was emerging in the 1980s as not only a legitimate identity but literally functioned like an empty signifier that all other movements sought to fill in with some meaning. Both the dalit movement and the farmers' movement that gained visible presence in Bangalore[11] not only *supported* the Kannada agitation, as has been suggested, but articulated their concerns *through* the Gokak movement.[12] Though

[10] "If anything, the Kannada movement in Bangalore gained disproportionately from state-wide mobilizations centred in Hubli-Dharwar, historically the cultural centre of Bombay Karnataka and home of Kannada Ekikarana movement" (Nair 2005, 280).

[11] The new visibility of dalits and farmers in Bangalore is noted by scholars. In 1981, 2 lakh dalits came to Bangalore from all over Karnataka for the unveiling of the Ambedkar statue. Lankesh in his autobiography mentions the truckloads of farmers with the green turban/towel coming to Bangalore.

[12] By the time of the Gokak agitation of 1982 (it demanded sole first language status for Kannada), which was supported not just by the intelligentsia but by Kannada sanghas in various industrial units, Dalit

the movement became such a site for different kinds of investments, at the heart of the movement, we suggest lay the concerns of a Kannada migrant population who constituted the film industry workers.

Thus, what we are trying to present through the explication of the Kannada Chaluvali and Gokak Chaluvali is that, unlike an argument that might see the two as times when a beleaguered Kannada language and identity find their voice, these two periods represent times when the economics of a culture industry—of which cinema is representative—takes on a political form.

Tabloid (Print) Industry and Kannada Identity

We look at not the entirety of Kannada print industry but specifically the tabloid press because of the latter's intricate connection with migrant economy. If the economics of production and the migrant as producer is central to thinking through the link between film industry and linguistic identity, the economics of consumption and the migrant as consumer predominantly features in the link between the Kannada tabloid industry and linguistic identity.

We specially look at the tabloid *Lankesh Patrike* that exemplifies the moment of political articulation when economic value meets cultural value. That is, the Gokak agitation in the early 1980s was the time when *Lankesh Patrike* was launched and became a profit making enterprise. We address this curious fact because culture industries like the tabloid press are not conventionally profit-making enterprises. Tabloids like *Lankesh Patrike* are different from newspapers like *Praja Vani* because the former do not have the backing of big business or advertising revenue.[13] Neither did *Lankesh Patrike* run on black money, which is in contrast to the later tabloids *Hai Bangalore* (ed. Ravi Belegere) and *Agni* (ed. Sridhar) that have money from the underworld flowing into it.[14] In fact, *Lankesh Patrike*'s editor-proprietor P. Lankesh was broke when he started the paper, having resigned his job as a lecturer in the university and in debt because of investing in film production.[15] Adding to the problems of a small newspaper, the newsprint allotted to *Lankesh Patrike* was inadequate and hence had to be bought in the black market for much higher rates. Also, unlike small newspaper ventures that are run by cutting staffing costs, Lankesh is known to have paid his employees better than the regular Kannada newspapers—he used to pay royalty to his regular writers even if they did not write for a month.

The question we ask is how did then *Lankesh Patrike* manage to not merely survive but succeed in being a profitable enterprise from the beginning itself where it was making

organisations, and professional groups, the Kannada movement had found a new and confident voice (Nair 2005, 280).

[13] *Lankesh Patrike* does not carry ads as a policy in order to retain autonomy from government influence (excepting the supplement of ads that was brought out with the first issue and the random ads in the first ten issues).

[14] Ravi Belegere of *Hai Bangalore* is said to extort money and Sridhar of Agni is said to have brought in money that he had gained while he was in the underworld earlier (Huliyar 2009).

[15] Lankesh is one of the pioneering new-wave film-makers in Kannada, known for the films *Ellindalo Bandavaru*. While starting his paper he had made losses from his film *Pallavi*.

about 22% to 25% profit? In 1980 when *Lankesh Patrike* began and was selling at 60 paise, it is said to have made a profit of about 20 paise on each issue. During the mid-1980s the profit margin for a 1 rupee issue was about 30 to 40 paise (Anandur 2009).

The financial success of *Lankesh Patrike* we suggest is because of the high circulation figures of *Lankesh Patrike* which touched about 1, 60,000 in the mid-1980s, a figure almost on par with the highest-circulating big newspaper *Praja Vani*. One of the reasons for this circulation is that though there have been other tabloids like "Kidi" (ed. Sheshappa) before,[16] *Lankesh Patrike* was the first to have an organized structure of production and distribution in place—its own set of reporters and distribution agents (Lankesh 1997). The agents in and outside of Bangalore would then supply the paper to the various stalls, of which in Bangalore itself there were around 1,400 (Anandur 2009). The number is significant because it points to both the sales of the tabloid and the livelihood it generated for a large number of people as vendors. Even if the number does not compare to the film industry it is large by tabloid standards and gestures towards our argument around the importance of culture industries in providing livelihood.[17] It is possible that a tabloid like *Lankesh Patrike* created the 'newspaper vendor' as a new category of livelihood, including both those who set up stalls and those who sold at road junctions and the bus-stand. Unlike big newspapers like *Praja Vani*, subscription was not a significant means for distributing the tabloid.

It is perhaps not difficult to believe that *Lankesh Patrike* was run through paper sales, agent deposits and, as some mention, personal donations.[18] The high and increasing circulation is what allowed for *Lankesh Patrike* to rapidly increase the selling price of the paper—it almost doubled in two years and almost tripled in four years.[19] We propose that the reason for the high circulation of *Lankesh Patrike* was because of the new market it constituted in the 1980s. Let us understand this new market by placing *Lankesh Patrike* against what Robin Jeffrey calls India's newspaper revolution of the late 1970s-80s, a phenomenon that refers to the rise in circulation of existing regional language newspapers and the beginning of new ones (*Eenadu*) in India because of a growing market for regional language newspapers (2000).[20]

One of the reasons for the creation of India's newspaper revolution according to Jeffrey is the changes in printing technology in the form of computer typesetting and offset press

---

[16] In terms of content "Kidi" was equally known for its criticism of the ruling government (the then Congress govt. headed by Hanumanthiah and Nijalingappa).

[17] The office staff on the other hand was limited to about 8-10 people, including reporters, writers and production staff.

[18] Since Lankesh was a well-known writer, he is said to have procured donations from friends, to whom he subsequently supplied the equivalent number of issues.

[19] The selling rates of the *Lankesh Patrike* over the years was:
1980- 60 paise (8 pages)
1981- 70 paise
1982- 1 rupee (12 pages)
1983- 1.25 rupees (16 pages)
1984- 1.50 rupees (20 pages in colour)
1984 April- 1.60 rupees

[20] In between 1976 and 1979 circulation rose 40 per cent for daily newspapers and 34 per cent for periodicals.

(Jeffrey 2000, 38-50). In the context of Kannada newspapers, a paper like *Praja Vani* was in the forefront of procuring the latest machinery and technology for printing, something that *Lankesh Patrike* did not match. It started in fact with the old letter press but it is noteworthy that in a matter of years there was a shifting to newer modes of printing. *Lankesh Patrike* shifted from block press to sheet fed printing in 1981 and then to colour plate printing in 1983, thus reducing time taken for printing and improving the quality of photos and text.[21]

The second reason for the revolution is the capitalist turn to the industry—an increase in advertising revenue that was caused by an expansion of the market especially into smaller towns and villages (ibid, 65).[22] In the Kannada context however, Jeffrey argues that the expansion did not occur till the 1990s when there was a clearer picture of who the audience for a Kannada paper was (Jeffrey 1997, 569-570).[23] For *Lankesh Patrike* capitalist expansion does not apply since they never carried any ads. However, they constituted the 'Kannada reader' across Karnataka. The absence before, Jeffrey suggests, was because of the commercial non-viability of a Kannada paper since there were competing languages in Karnataka (Tamil, Telugu) that were seen as having a cultural valency that Kannada did not posses—he cites that the selling and the ad revenue even for the widest selling newspaper *Praja Vani* was very miniscule. Further, Jeffrey points out that existing Kannada newspapers did not reach out to such a Kannada reader but were region specific and catered to different parts of Karnataka—*Praja Vani* to the South and *Samyukta Karnataka* to the North. This division did not predominantly change with the reorganization of states (1956) or with the 1980s' expansion of the market (ibid.). *Lankesh Patrike* filled this gap through interpellating the 'Kannadiga' (a Kannada person). Gowri Lankesh mentions how *Lankesh Patrike* did not address district-specific issues unlike other papers like *Eenadu* that had district-specific supplements with regional stories and which crucially led to their market-expansion (2009). And it is this imagination during the context of the Gokak agitation that led to *Patrike*'s wide market and its emergence as the representative of Kannada nationalist identity.

We need to however read the universal appeal of *Lankesh Patrike* to the 'Kannadiga' as being simultaneously tied to the 'local'. This is not the 'local' that Jeffrey argues as being the cause for market expansion where he points to the localizing of content and a simplification of language that was evident in district dailies that were brought out by *Eenadu* (Jeffrey 2000, 97) or the rise in the number of newspaper offices in small-towns, thus moving out of the city-centre (*Eenadu*, *Dainik Jagran*). <u>The 'local' in the case of *Lankesh Patrike* was not produced in opposition to the 'metropolis'—the village/small</u>

[21] In sheet-fed printing, positives are taken on butter sheets, to which photos and titles are added and from which prints are taken.

[22] This market was especially in Class III towns—country towns of 20-50,000 people (Jeffrey 2000, 65). The NRS 1978 estimated an increase of a two-thirds rise in readers since the 1970s and hinted at a great untapped pool of readers in the countryside and held that the countryside held about 160 million literate people.

[23] The expansion of the Kannada market happened only in the 1990s. This was because of a new market that the papers envisaged and also the consolidation of Kannada language/identity by then, whether it was literally because of compulsory Kannada education in schools by 1982 set off by the Gokak report and movement might be doubtful.

town vs. city—but in the context of the reshaping of the 'metropolis' in terms of the local.

The local was constituted in Bangalore as discussed above with a new set of social and economic changes that Bangalore was witnessing in the 1980s. One is the aspect of migration into Bangalore that led to a demographic leap in 1971-81 from 1.6 million to 2.6 million with an increase by 76% (Nair 2005, 127-30 and 274). This rise is attributed to land speculation.[24] Though this might not be untrue and perhaps more accurately describes the 1990s, it does not entirely explain the phenomenon. Another important reason for the census-data showing a rise is because of the incorporation of populations around Bangalore into what came to be known as Bangalore Urban Agglomeration (James 2009). This has led to researchers today asking the question of whether the 1980s was one of the two periods in Bangalore's history that can be seen as witnessing the highest demographic leaps (1941-51 being the other period when the population became 9.91 lakhs from 5.1 lakhs with an increase by 94.9%). Irrespective of the finding there is consensus that population growth in the city from the 1950s has been largely because of migration for employment and many studies have focused on migratory flows into the public sector industries and modern/organized sector.[25] However, given that 70% of the Bangalore population works in the unorganized sector (Nair 2005, 119), we need to further investigate the percentage of migratory population in the unorganized sector vis-à-vis the organized sector in order to get a complete picture. Though it cannot be denied that the public sector industries generated employment at not only the main industries but also ancillary units tied to them, recent studies on cultural and creative industries draw attention to the importance of these industries as housing a large percentage of employed people—about 30% (Sethi 2006). Hence, if some of the middle peasant migrants formed the Kannada Sanghas in industrial units (Nair 2005, 280) others formed neighborhood Kannada Sanghas that for instance became closely linked to auto-drivers unions.

We argue that a tabloid like *Lankesh Patrike* catered to this constituency of Kannada readers—who have been variously characterised as 'non-brahmin' (Huliyar 2009), 'politically conscious'—but who we suggest includes the migrant Kannada population articulating a Kannada identity. It would also include another Kannada middle class who might not have distanced themselves from a Kannada identity movement as the movement had not yet taken on connotations of 'lumpenization' and 'violence' attached to it today. It also included another class of people—teachers, officials, college students who were migrants to Bangalore. Thus, *Lankesh Patrike* can be seen as part of a migrant culture that was located in Bangalore—including migrants who had village-small town origins and a population that was traveling between Bangalore and its place of origin. As mentioned in the earlier section, with Kannada intellectuals like U.R.Ananthamurthy and newspaper editors like Harikumar criticizing the Gokak movement, *Lankesh Patrike* provided a primary forum for spearheading the agitation. Thus, *Lankesh Patrike*'s emergence as the representative of a Kannada nationalist identity in the 1980s is

[24] Between 1970-90 speculation in real estate resulting in surge in real estate prices in the mid 1990s where 80% of the flats were bought by not users but land speculators (Nair 2005, 133).

[25] For e.g., the reason for the population increase in the 1950s is stated to be because of public sector industries like HAL and ITI that employed about 1,10,000 people by 1961 (Nair 2005). See also Johnson and Lingaraju 1989.

simultaneously tied to its appeal to a larger Kannada identity and a specificity to the migrant as 'local'.

The inextricable link between the migrant and linguistic identity that underlies the economy of a tabloid like *Lankesh Patrike* is not unique to it but characterizes present day tabloids like *Hai Bangalore* and *Agni*, both of which started in the late 1990s. In taking this project further in the future, it would be interesting to map the nature of Kannada identity articulation today with a migrant population who constitute the readership of today's tabloids.

References

Anandur, Satyamurthy. Personal Interview. August 2009.

Andhra Pradesh Film Chamber of Commerce. *Andhra Pradesh Film Diary 1995*. Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Film Chamber of Commerce.

BMP Property Tax Handbook, 2009, Annexure 7. http://www.bmponline.org/propertytax/Hand%20Book/annexure_VII.pdf. Accessed on June 1, 2009.

Chandrashekar K.C.N. 2009. Personal Interview. June 2009.

Gupta K.V. Personal Interview. 23rd June 2009.

Jeffrey, Robin. *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press, 1977-99***.** New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Johnson, Samuel M. and M.Lingaraju. "Migrants in Bangalore." ISEC Working Paper 13, 1989.

Huliyar, Nataraj. Personal Interview. 3rd August 2009.

NFDC. "Statistical Digest" *Indian Cinema '81/'82*. New Delhi: Directorate of Film Festivals, NFDC.

Dharap. B.V. *Indian Films 1975*. Pune: Motion Picture Enterprises, 1976.

Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce. *Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce Golden Jubilee 1944-1994*. Bangalore: KFCC, 1995.

Karnataka GO No.RD 123 ESR 94. Karnataka Government 1994.

Lankesh, Gowri. Personal Interview. 6th June 2009

Lankesh, P. *Hulimaavinamara: Ondu Athmakathana*. Bangalore: Patrike Prakashana, 1997.

Mysore Season and Crop Report 1962.

Nair, Janaki. *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth Century*. New Delhi: OUP, 2005.

Prasad, M.Madhava. *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*. New Delhi: OUP, 2000.

---. Cinema as a site of Nationalist Identity Politics in Karnataka. *Journal of Karnataka studies*, No. 1, November 2003 - April 2004.

Sethi, Rajeev. “Making, Doing, Being: A Time for Joined-up Thinking.” *Positioning the Big Idea-India*, New Delhi: Asian Heritage Foundation, 2006.

S.Shivaramakrishna. Personal Interview. 1st July 2009

Srinivas, M.N. *The Remembered Village*. New Delhi: OUP, 1976.

Uppendu, Shivaramu. Personal Interview. 2nd June 2009.

Vijaya et al. eds, *Kannada Vakchitra Suvarna Mahotsava 1934-1984: Smarana Sanchike.* Bangalore: Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, 1984.

II. REPORT ON THE BIHAR CULTURE INDUSTRY

By Ratnakar Tripathy, ADRI, Patna

I. A Survey of the Music Industry in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh

This section will lay down the conclusions of the project along with the objectives mentioned in the proposal in the same order. The conclusions were laid down briefly with minimal discussion. It needs to be mentioned that these are not the only conclusions arrived at. Neither is the conclusions given below always unambiguous. Clearly, this report will be followed by a series of analyses of material in forthcoming articles with due acknowledgements.

1. *To map the growth of recorded popular music among Biharis based in Bihar and elsewhere in the past three decades*.

The main challenge with mapping the growth over the last three decades is that among the persons interviewed, there were very few whose career spanned the entire era. When we did finally manage to obtain approximate figures, it was by comparing the pre-CD markets with the very last phase of the cassette industry rather than its birth. It would seem that given the twin factors of technology and costs, there is a clear analogy between transition from the LP era to cassettes and between cassettes to CDs. Another smaller transition, namely from audio CDs to VCDs must also be taken into account. The opinion on the matter among the interviewees ranged from a 10-time growth to 100. The wide range makes it difficult to make any sense of the scenarios unless one looks at the factors causing divergence of perception. E.g. when a veteran lyricist looks at the markets of two or three decades ago, he is confused mainly by two main issues. First, in terms of daily life the number of people involved in music has indeed grown by something like 100 times or more. Second, again due to impressions taken from daily life, a lyricist, unlike a dealer is very likely to mix up live shows and the CD industry. In any estimate of the growth of the CD industry thus these may be the chief corrective measures to be employed. But these are not the only factors affecting individual perception. At least in one case, a well-educated former film director and now a music producer claimed that the industry has grown 1000 times since the 1990s. Here again, one can see that the person is taking the then non-existent movie industry into account to form a mental picture.

The fact remains that the only absolute figures publicly available, however speculative are for the Bhojpuri film industry. Even here the range of per annum turnover is between 80-150 crores, which may be Rs 200 crore for good years. This figure despite its precariousness may be the only foundation for building up a series of rough estimates. For some reason, the common impression among those interviewed is that the music industry is ten times the size of the movie industry. If one compares the figures derived in interview no. 71 and the figures mentioned here, one begins to get a sense of the magnitude of the industry. It is pointless to insist on accuracy when the absolute figures range between 800 crores to 1500 crores. Clearly, if the debate is between 10 times growth and 100 times growth, there cannot be a dispute around the dynamism of the market and the industry. Given that ‘hype’ is endemic to the entertainment industry, one would expect that the figures would always be inflated. It is often also the other way – a producer-studio owner confessed during the interview that his best career performance was a CD selling 500,000 copies – a fact he will not admit publicly.

2. To trace the linkages between the music industry and Bhojpuri cinema;

This objective was framed with implicit biases originating in the Hindi film and music industries. The fact is that it is possible to make the extreme assertion that there are no linkages between the two industries. But this assertion needs to be qualified. True, the investments in music and movies come from disparate sources. True, the two industries are manned by two sets of populations which rarely overlap. True, film producers and music producers rarely think in terms of diversification into the other area. But the fact remains that they both share the same audience. The fact also remains that the music has a vital presence within Bhojpuri films through its singing stars, its lyricists, and its second rung actors. At a deeper and more fundamental level however it is the music industry which has over time created the Bhojpuri film audience. Despite the structural discontinuities between the industries, the film industry is sustained and nourished by the musical culture of the region. But this can be demonstrated in a detailed research paper and does not directly follow from facts and figures quoted here.

3. To quantify and identify the scales of growth of both Bhojpuri film and music industries with as much precision as possible with specific reference to the number of people who are employed in various capacities;

As for the growth of the two industries, the matter has been dealt with as much precision as humanly possible. At the level of personnel, a calculation may be made as follows. The prevalent view is that for every 100 singers in the field, 10-15 are able to make a full-time living out of music. These figures however do not distinguish between the live shows and the CD industry. But one would suspect that if one were to do calculations for the CD industry alone, the figure may be as low as .25 in 100. This is clearly not a very impressive figure and does not match with the turnover figures. However, it has been found that the live shows and the CDs are structurally inseparable and any attempt to sever them would lead to misleading figures – one would completely lose view of the musical phenomenon one set out to investigate and perhaps come to the absurd conclusion that the industry barely exists.

The above paradox may be resolved however through the following reasoning. If one were to take the singer as the central figure and borrowing figures from a typical live show add around 15 personnel, it becomes possible to take the calculations ahead. If the figures of 50 full time/part time singers stand true for towns like Ara and Siwan, the 50 or so districts of Bihar, UP, and Jharkhand give us a figure of 2500 notional singers in the entire region. The figure for the personnel around the central figure of the singer would thus come to 125,000. Notably, this figure does not include personnel employed by the music companies, dealers and the outlets. But fixing the number of outlets at 50 for every district, the number would come to 12,500 if one were to keep 5 personnel for every outlet. Add to this the employees of bigger dealers, companies, producers and studios and we begin to reach the figures of 140 -150,000. A similar calculation is unlikely to work for movies which are not as personnel intensive as music. Also, given the overlaps between Bollywood and Bhojpuri cinema, it is difficult to claim that it is a major source of livelihood for Bihar and UP. This is one of the major complaints against the film industry – that it often finds finance in Bihar but gives all the jobs to professionals in Bombay.

4. To analyze the internal structure of these industries and the varied business models

The findings here are relatively clear and quite startling. Put in staccato terms – movies, CD industry and live shows have there distinct sources of finance. Movies are financed by big businesses that also reap the profits, the CD industry is, in the main, financed by singers and local producers while the profit goes to the music labels and dealers. The live shows industry is financed by groups of local audience through commissioned fees and 'inam' and the profits stay with the professionals. This is the case, broadly of course. Music companies do continue to make some investments in recordings, significantly more in replication and publicity but their investments pale in comparison to the singers and local financiers including parents of singers.
Structurally, it is interesting to see live shows as the chief source of finance for the CD industry. This also explains the vibrant state of the companies even under the overwhelming threat of piracy. Typically, the Bhojpuri audience is a person who will not hesitate to buy a pirated CD but who will also contribute for a live show and even clamber on to the stage to reward an artist.

5. To analyze the relationship between the Bombay based Hindi film industry and Bhojpuri film industry, which too has its production centre in the city.

As indicated earlier, the intuition reflected in this objective proved to be completely off the mark. Delhi and not Bombay is the centre of the Bhojpuri music industry.

6. To analyze marketing practices of these industries paying particular attention to the means by which these industries target migrant workers in different parts of the country and abroad.

An earlier project on Bhojpuri cinema had revealed that the migrant population in the metropolises played a trendsetting role during the initial years of the boom. But later on the local audience took over. Something similar seems to be true for music as well. Since the first generations of musical stars were created by T-Series during the cassette era, the publicity was mostly confined to the metropolises and those specific locales with large migrant populations. Although posters and stickers have been in use for a long time, what really works for the Bhojpuri audience is continued exposure. This is often done through loudspeakers during festivals and marriages. It is often taken for granted that the listener will buy an album only after listening to a song or two from it. Thus the practice of including a couple of hits from star singers in albums done by debutantes, started. Even today, a new singer is always on the lookout to include a few numbers by known singers. This is one of the main reasons why a singer would prefer a big company to a smaller one. While the singer may pay for his own recording and a limited stock of CDs, he still cannot afford the publicity expenses.

Additionally, just a CDs work as means of publicity for live shows, live shows in turn work as means of publicity for CDs. During the interview team's tour in small towns it was found that paan shops, roadside stalls and hotels carried posters and pictures of various albums. In the metropolises, paan shops often carry displays and sell CDs of the recent hits. Traditionally, what has worked best with the Bhojpuri audience is the word of mouth buzz which often starts with a small group of youngsters. The recent ringtone industry has provided a measure of publicity hitherto unavailable. Almost every album now carries details for downloading and an account of its ranking in the ringtone order. Recently, the internet has provided one more means of publicity. But typically, the best popularizer of music is best understood through a cliché – the image of a migrant returning home with a player and a stock of selected cassettes or CDs, which then begin to echo in the remote village. Conversely, very much like the musical fan groups in the West, utter interiors are now able to create a widespread buzz through the mobile phones. As a musician admitted to the team during an interview in Benaras, the best way to find out what songs are topmost in the charts, one simply has to note down the requests made by an insistent crowd during a live show.

7. To analyze the relationship between the Bhojpuri music and film industries as they have existed since the 1980s and the E & M industries, focusing on the plans the latter have for 'local content' and the ways in which these might affect the former.

Here again, the findings have been counter-intuitive. A superficial look at the industry may give the impression that Bhojpuri forms are being abandoned in favour of alien ones, which is indeed a favourite complaint for many within the industry. Looking closely at the successful trends over a long period, it would seem that the process is a lot more complex. If one can imagine a process where novelty consists of both innovative borrowing from outside and deeper thrusts into the tradition itself, the developments in the course of the music industry become a bit clearer. To illustrate, if Manoj Tiwari has been the greatest hit so far, it is because he made use of hitherto untapped sources of music but also because he brought the remix style into fashion. One of the veteran aficionados in Ara pointed out; thanks to the CD industry he now hears folk forms he thought were extinct long ago. There is indeed a lot of culture critique doing the rounds which is simply not based on facts. This is true of music as the movies.

Traditionally, certain folk forms have been associated with specific contexts or were not sung out in the open. These have now been released from their constraints. E.g. songs associated with childbirth, or songs sung in the birth chamber by women can now be heard on loudspeakers.

Thus the mining of local content is a more complex process than has been admitted so far. Although it remains true that the local content is not going through some kind of ideologically projected 'revival', it is being constantly recycled and imbibed within the new technology. Another example is the singing of ribald songs which was confined to occasions like weddings or holi – such songs may be heard the year round and have become context-free, which many find to be culturally disturbing. On the whole, the use of local content is not a straight and unimpeded royal road, but a path strewn with twists and turns, and reinterpretations of the past. These points apply not simply to the movies and music but also to the upcoming TV genres.

II. Structure of the Bhojpuri Film Industry

During the interviews with film professionals, it became clear that when talking of Bhojpuri film industry, references to Hindi cinema [and even Tamil, Telugu or Bangla cinemas] are unavoidable. Understandably, these comparisons permit us to position the Bhojpuri industry vis a vis the rest and bring out its unique or salient features. This section on the structure of the Bhojpuri industry can be seen in terms of a series of subheadings.

a. Scale

When questioned about the uniqueness of the Bhojpuri film industry almost all the interviewees failed to mention any significant differences between Bollywood and Bhojpuri. And yet, the question of scale turned out to be one of the most significant pointers through the conversations. Bhojpuri films are made with what may seem ridiculously low budgets when compared to Hindi films. Reluctant to mention their own latest figures precisely, most of the interviewees arrived at a crore and a half as the magical figure. In the late 1990s, the great hit 'Sasura Bada Paisewala' was made with a budget of 40 lakh rupees. Since then the figures have been inflating. Nevertheless, as one film director mentioned, a Bhojpuri film can complete its entire schedule with the money that a single Hindi film set would consume. It is because of the factor of scale alone that the Bollywood industry looks upon Bhojpuri cinema as an opportunity. When questioned about the 'risk' factor, the professionals claimed almost unanimously that Bhojpuri productions carry exactly as much risk as Hindi films. This view went contrary to the assumptions in the media that Bhojpuri films, as if, guarantee success or something close to it. In fact, several professionals claimed that the stampede in the industry during the period 2004-2006, which resulted in the making of 76 films in 2006 was caused precisely by a deluded market sentiment, an exuberance that has since been curbed. The agreed figure for 2008 stands 42. If one were to take the number of films under production at this point which goes above 80, the situation in 2009 would seem as fluid and unpredictable as ever.

Some of the producers and financiers interviewed have also been involved in the Hindi film business. They argued that they landed in Bhojpuri not because of any hype or illusion about the 'risk' element. They spelled out the reasons as twofold – they blamed the stranglehold of a few old and new film making companies and distributors and the heavy star fees for being pushed into Bhojpuri and other regional cinemas. The year 2008 has been particularly good for both Marathi and Bangla cinema, and in this sense Bhojpuri remains a preference only for the large audiences and box house returns it may offer. Bhojpuri cinema has thus opened up a fresh entrepreneurial possibility for small and medium sized production companies unable to compete with the big fry. The extent of the monopoly alleged and mentioned above may be gauged by the fact that finding a release for film is considered the most nettlesome task by the smaller producers. The fear that a film may have to be shelved or sold at unacceptably low price to the distributors is the prevalent fear. In trade circles, the commonly used phrase is 'selling over the table', which in effect means that a producer is able to look at his entire business process at one go and at times even make his major chunk of profit even as a film project is put together and basic calculations, claims and payments are made. The actual business process that may take more than a year simply fills up the details.

The turnover of the Bhojpuri industry in 2008 is pegged at 100 crores but many interviewees were of the view that it is just a notional figure. One of the interviewees asserted that 100 crores are quoted just to round off figures. But broadly, there seemed to be a consensus over a scale of 50-100 crores between 2000 and 2008. Interviewees were neither concerned with nor knowledgeable about the earliest years [1998-1999] of the upturn in Bhojpuri cinema.

b. Revenues and distribution network

The following are the main producers and distributors of Bhojpuri films:

Producers:

Madhusudan Mehta
Chandrashekhar Rao
Sandeep Mehta
Jeetesh Dubey
Abhay Sinha
Alok Singh
Sunil Bubna
Ank Media

Similarly, the list of distributors is as follows:

Dr Sunil Kumar
Abhay Sinha
Lala Damani
Harbans Bittu
Rajesh Pappu
Pradip Bhaiya
Ramakant
Navtej
Balaji Films

The above list has been compiled after some sorting of a bigger list culled from different sources. This is important as in the past few years a number of Hindi producers and stray businessmen made inroads into Bhojpuri territory and are commonly labeled as ‘transients’.

c. Contribution from territories/segments in the revenue

The two major issues discussed with the professionals was that of revenue contributions from different parts of the country, the main purpose of which was to get a comparative view of ticket sales in bigger cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Jaipur on the one hand and smaller centers back home such as Patna and Benaras and other smaller district towns in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. On the whole it seems that in the 1990s, Mumbai and other migratory centers contributed the greater part of the revenues. By

2008, this has changed – the major chunk of revenues now comes from Bihar instead, with contributions from Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Nepal. This statistic is of crucial sociological significance and will be analyzed at a suitable point in the report.

On the basis of several conversations, the researcher was able to construct a model revenue account, as close an approximation as possible, which is as follows: Given the crude assumption that a film ended up with returns of 1 crore, this is what the average breakdown will look like.

Bihar ------------------------- ---------------------------40 lakhs
Mumbai [including Pune, Aurangabad etc.] ---------- 20 lakhs
Delhi and Uttar Pradesh---------------------------------- 10 lakhs
Satellite rights --15 lakhs
Audio/video sales --13 lakhs
Nepal --2 lakhs

These figures were arrived by discussing the detailed budgets of three films made since 2005, the names of which interviewees refused to reveal. But in all three, a similar pattern was seen. It deserves to be reiterated that during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the figures for Bihar and Mumbai were roughly the reverse, namely whereas Bihar contributed 20% of the revenues, 40% came from Mumbai.

The above table was prepared after a great deal of trepidation as trade figures quoted in the industry are invariably part of the promotional exercise – one of the producers illustrated this point by specifically mentioning the case of a recent release ‘E Bhauji ke sister’, which is supposed to have returns from Bihar ranging between 15-95 lakhs. Such imprecision must be unique to the entertainment industry. The editor of ‘Bhojpuri City’, the only trade journal devoted to Bhojpuri cinema follows the practice of publishing data supplied by the producers and avoids second hand data even when they see glaring discrepancies in it.

d. Distribution and its hiccups

Very much like Hindi cinema the business structure of Bhojpuri industry may be represented through the following chain:

Producer – Star – distributor – exhibitor

The above diagram of course reflects the entire financial cycle a film project must go through. It has been used here, however to analyze the state of the power structure within the industry. One of the major recent trends in Bollywood according to the interviewees has been the growing stranglehold of the distributors. In fact the interviewer was startled more than once by the overt use of the word ‘cartelization’ to describe the phenomenon. There is a clear perception in the trade that with the onset of the 2000, power equations within the industry have changed drastically. Old production houses such as Yashraj Films despite their enormous clout no longer have the muscle they once did. The multiplex owners have taken full command of the situation and the fate of a film project depends largely on what deal they offer to a producer. Time and again, the professionals used the case of a recent Hindi release ‘Tashan’[2008], which caused a showdown between the giant Yashraj group and the multiplex owners, as a result of which Yashraj decided to release the film in single screen theatres refusing to make a compromise with the multiplex owners. As a result ‘Tashan’, an ambitious project turned out a miserable flop. That the audiences may have rejected it seems to be just a side plot to the main story.

Placed against this broad background, Bhojpuri cinema finds its space in the single screen segment. And yet, the chief irony of Bhojpuri cinema, the disparateness of its production base in Mumbai and its audience base in Bihar remains relevant to all aspects of Bhojpuri cinema. From numerous descriptions by the interviewees, it slowly dawned on the researcher that even Bhojpuri is ridden by a different kind of cartelization. The Bihar -Jharkhand territory, which is the main revenue source of Bhojpuri films, is entirely in the hands of a few distributors who have the final say in all matters pertaining to revenue. Partly through political mobilization and partly by holding the exhibitors captive, these distributors have a stranglehold on the main business territory. When translated into plain facts, it often means that the Mumbai-based producer has no control of the situation in Bihar; he has no access to the real box office figures, and has to passively accept whatever returns are offered by the Bihar distributors. After numerous discussions with the professionals, it became clear that this is indeed the chief issue facing the Bhojpuri industry. What would have been a highly profitable enterprise becomes entirely iffy because of this one lone factor. The interesting thing here is that there is no move on the part of the Mumbai-based producers to take measures, political or otherwise to counter such a situation. The two solutions used by the Mumbai-based producers instead are as follows:

a. To be resigned to losses in Bihar, the main market for Bhojpuri films. This would in effect become a provision in the budget/ account even as a project is conceived.
b. To create tie-ups with the Bihar distributors even as a project is launched to ensure a fairer deal. The reasoning here is obvious – if the distributor has a stake in the project, he may put on his best behaviour.
c. To use the ‘star’ as a pawn in this power game. This in effect means that you package your films with so many stars that the distributor is forced to swallow his pride and do a deal on your terms.

On the whole thus, the economics of Bhojpuri cinema is going through a crisis and the solution is nowhere in sight. Despite the difference between the Hindi and the Bhojpuri industry, the requirements seem to dictate that only major hits will sustain a production house in the longer run, which again is quite difficult, indeed almost impossible to sustain in the risky business of entertainment. It is to be noted that both the problems – cartelization of distributors and unreasonably high star fees create a catch-22 kind of situation, especially when the heavy presence of big stars in a film is seen as the only remedy for the distributor’s stronghold.

e. Revenue sharing between the producer and the distributor

From various conversations it emerged that there are three main models of revenue sharing in practice. The individuals concerned had different preferences and practices but the list below comprises all possible practices prevalent in the industry at this stage. Before listing down the practices/conventions however it needs to be mentioned that a majority of interviewees expressed their opinion that till recently [1990s], the producer/production house was the main powerhouse in the supply chain and the ultimate authority lay with him rather than the distributor. The industry regime, according to them has changed in a basic sense, in that the distributor has become the chief arbiter in the industry. Such an opinion has to be taken with a pinch of salt of course. There is no way to confirm if this shift has been as drastic as reported by the professionals. The distributor's have their own sob stories to do mainly with low ticket prices in single screen theatres willing to show Bhojpuri films. Additionally, they also complain about their lack of control on the sales reports from the box office. The crises faced by the single screen exhibitors are of course more universal and better known. The financial arrangement between the producer and the distributors are of the following types, put in phrases used in the trade:

a. sharing basis
b. minimum guarantee
c. fixed rental

The above terms are somewhat self-explanatory but need to be elaborated further. In the sharing basis system, the producer is required to keep track of the box office revenues on daily basis. This requires considerable acumen, networking and data maintenance. The producer also needs to have informers at various levels which enable him to keep a tab towards daily earnings in a large number of centers and cinema halls. This activity is particularly hectic during the first two weeks when major earnings are made. Also, very often the ratio of producer-director revenues change as the weeks pass, and the concerned clauses are put into effect in advance during the initial contracts. Thus what seems to be the most judicious method is actually also the most hazardous from the producers viewpoint.

Minimum guarantee as implied by the phrase carries a minimal rental amount for the exhibitor beyond which the producer and distributor operate on a sharing basis. This approach clearly indicates the producer's trust in his product but also takes his financial commitments beyond the stage of production-publicity.

Fixed rental may be a preferred method at times. It generally rules out disputatious confrontations between the producer and the distributor but can be disadvantageous for a distributor when the film turns out a big hit. Nevertheless, at least in theory it seems to be the most trouble-free for both the producer and the distributor.

In most of the cases, even as a project is launched and the story, stars and music are lined up, the distribution deals are done 'on the table', the common phrase used in the trade. This in effect means that a producer knows in advance how much profit to anticipate. Projects which do not seem viable 'on the table' are often abandoned. This is the closest the film industry may be said to come to an organized and planned approach. Eventually the audience of course can decide to belie all expectations through either enthusiastic endorsement or rejection of a film.

f. An instance of vitiated producer-distributor economics

In more than one interview an informal aspect of film economy cropped up that deserves close attention. It seems that when a film project runs into trouble, the project managers at times approach a distributor for finance, thereby incorporating him in the production process. This may allow a project to be complete but the accounting system gets terribly muddied in the process, giving the distributor extra muscle despite a low but critical investment in the project. This typically happens to director driven projects when the original financiers are unable to keep up their commitments over time. It seems that during the years 2000-2007, such occurrences were rather common, leading to uncompleted projects and canned films which never saw the light of the day. Such instances are to be distinguished from strategic tie-ups between the producer and the distributor which have an altogether different function and role in the Bhojpuri film industry.

g. The star syndrome; financial implications

The Bhojpuri producers worry a lot about their control over the distribution process. Nearly equally worrying is the star syndrome, which has created a crisis of gigantic proportions in Hindi cinema and is now dogging Bhojpuri as well. The three main stars of Bhojpuri, Manoj Tiwari, Ravikishen, and Nirahua Yadav charge close to 30-40 lakhs per film. These figures do not match the budgets of early 2000 when an average Bhojpuri film got made for 50-80 lakhs. The recent years have seen a massive inflation of budgets entirely due to star fees, and the doubling or tripling of budgets does not reflect in the production value of the product. Several professionals complained that this will soon lead to an impasse. Sandwiched between the distribution problems and increasing star fees, Bhojpuri cinema may run into an economic deadend.

Several professionals quoted the example of Bangla and Marathi cinema where stars charge a fee of Rs 5 lakhs. When asked what figures will make their budgets comfortable, the reasonable figure came to around 15 lakhs, which is still considerably higher than both Bangla and Marathi industry. On the other hand, it is well-known that regional films in Bangla and Marathi are not as star driven as Bhojpuri. The stars thus carry a heavy value quite simply because they are instrumental in both returns at the box office and retrieval of greater revenues from the distributor. Star fees are thus part of the 'risk package' that is typical of the entertainment industry. Not investing in stars somehow conveys the message that the producer is only looking at modest returns. As we all know, the very nature of the entertainment business is such that one looks for a good mix of losses and high profits rather than regular and repeated and assured success.

The Bhojpuri film budgets now range anywhere between 80 lakhs to 2 crores. Star fees are a major component of the budget as Bhojpuri film makers follow a highly efficient or even hurried schedule using minimal sets. The theme and storyline of Bhojpuri films in turn do not require huge sets. Simple rustic settings fully satisfy an audience that wishes to see theatre on the screen. Thus the turnover of the industry was said by the interviewees to vary between 80-100 crore rupees per year with considerable variation.

h. Nature of the audience as seen by the trade

It is interesting to note the variance among the producer-distributor on the one hand and the directors on the other when questions were asked about their opinion of the audience. The businessmen clearly saw the Bhojpuri audience as the type that is not willing to pay for multiplex tickets. The directors on the other hand felt that the audience of Bhojpuri cinema will not be satisfied with substitutes. In other words Bhojpuri cinema already has a loyal audience which will not go back to Hindi films except on an occasional basis. As we know the ticket issue alone is not enough to explain the Bhojpuri phenomenon. The smaller towns after all still run Hindi and even dubbed Hollywood films in single screen theatres. But in the producer's rudimentary sociology this rough and ready formula is accepted as adequate.

The same answer was also given to questions about the future of Bhojpuri films. The professionals felt that Bhojpuri cinema has come to stay. Indeed, the industry has been through a slowdown in the past few years. But this is ascribed to transient producers who hoped to make a quick buck overnight and move on. There is thus a sense of churn in the industry. On the other hand the interviewer was also struck by near uniformity when questions were asked about the most prominent names in the industry. Fairly stable lists of names were rattled off as if on the tip of the tongue. The interviewer's guess is that just five years ago, this may not have been possible.

A small number of interviewees seem to think that at some point Bhojpuri films will find acceptance among the middle classes of the region. But it was not clear how sincerely they felt this. As one of the best-known directors put it Bhojpuri cinema is still in a state of expansion and he regards drawing the masses to cinema halls his main challenge. It is quite likely that Bhojpuri cinema will take a long time to appeal to the middle class audience, and it will clearly lose some of its distinctive features in the process.

The shift of main revenue sources from Bombay to Bihar would also indicate that the 'immigrant' mentality if not the actual immigrant forms the core audience of Bhojpuri cinema in the sense that the lead to patronize Bhojpuri rather than Hindi was clearly taken by the migrant rather than the Bihar-based populations. Interestingly though, Bihar has now become the mainstay of Bhojpuri films.

i. Whither Uttar Pradesh?

Both in terms of hard figures and cultural sociology, Uttar Pradesh cannot be clubbed with Bihar as a market for Bhojpuri films. eastern Uttar Pradesh is often seen as part of what may be called 'purabia' culture along with Bihar and is also regarded as the senior sibling, if anything, owing to the fact that Benaras/Allahabad form the cultural capital of this region. When it comes to Bhojpuri films however, UP is left far behind. Faced with his puzzle, a director with family origins in Azamgarh blamed the shades of difference between the various sub-dialects of Bhojpuri. But this is only partially applicable, as speakers of dialects such as Magahi and Maithili in Bihar have embraced Bhojpuri with much zeal despite a tradition of rivalry between the dialects. It seems that cities like Benaras, Gorakhpur, Balia, and Allahabad do not give Bhojpuri films a good run at all. In fact distributors club Uttar Pradesh along with Delhi in their calculations. This is interesting as data from the market, but even more interesting from the viewpoint of political sociology and could bear with further investigation.

j. Tensions between Patna and Bombay: view from Bombay and Patna

There are several dimensions to the issue of Bhojpuri's presence in Bollywood. During the earlier phase of the project, the researcher was able to get a good idea of how things are seen from Patna. The opinion among the Bombay based professionals on the other hand often came out as quite contradictory, which is interesting in itself. The following passages aim to juxtapose some of the tensions and contradictions.

1. The common view in the press and among the middle class in Bihar is that Bhojpuri cinema's main trait is their singular devotion to vulgarity and obscenity, whatever that may mean. In Bombay, the perception was that vulgarity is a bad business proposition. It may help the ticket sales for a few days at the most but will soon repel the audience.

2. The critics in Bihar feel that Bhojpuri cinema based in Bombay can never do justice to the Bhojpuri culture. Clearly, they seem to forget that Hindi cinema is not based in the Hindi heartland either. The perception in Bombay is that Bhojpuri films address the concerns of the rural Bihari. At least one producer pointed out that Bhojpuri films being completely unlike Hindi films of today are more like the Hindi films of the 1970s.

3. The perception in Bihar is that Bhojpuri industry is fundamentally exploitative in that Bombay film industry scoops away from the Bihar cinema halls. The Bombay producer's complaint is that he is not allowed proper control over the Bihar market. This tension seems to have become severe over time as Bhojpuri films have found in the Bihar territory its main revenue source.

4. The perception in Bihar is that the Bhojpuri film industry is largely manned by professionals including actors who are not from Bihar. Many Bombay professionals agree with the perception but don't see any irony in it. According to them, this is how some of the regional film projects work out. There is a constant coming and going between Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Kolkata. Some of the Mumbai professionals however did assert that even they find it inconvenient to operate from Mumbai given the intricacies of the distribution process.

5. Most of all, the perception in Bihar is that the Bhojpuri industry is churning out imitations of Bollywood in all its aspects. The perception in Mumbai is altogether different – they find it startling that people cannot see the obvious hiatus between the Hindi and the Bhojpuri products. They argue that the concerned audience has a clear preference for Bhojpuri only because of the uniqueness of the Bhojpuri format.

Clearly, these discrepancies are relevant for any researcher in the field, the fact being that the Mumbai-Patna discrepancies listed above are not the only ones and there is still the question of how the media-middle class nexus looks at Bhojpuri films and how its loyal audience sees it.

k. Bihar as the centre of cinema industry

During the year 2007-2008, a major controversy arose between the Bombay film star Mithun Chakravarty and the Patna based distributor Dr Sunil Kumar. Although reasons behind the controversy were purely financial and contractual in nature, the details of which are not relevant here. Sides got taken and very soon there was media hype about the need to start a film city in Bihar. Bhojpuri actors from Mumbai with some support from the government in Bihar made a series of statements about a new initiative to bring Bhojpuri cinema home, so to say, to its own soil. However, almost every member spoken to after some questioning agreed that the entire plan is unfeasible.

The reason producers prefer Mumbai is that for reasons of both technology and personnel. Even shooting in Bihar is prone to serious production mishaps. What plays against this risk is of course the ready availability and cheapness of the locations, not to mention the value of local colour. Increasingly, as the security situation in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh improves, more units may find it convenient to shoot a large part of the films in the region. But the trade off between ready availability of equipments, repairs and maintenance, and personnel and the relative inexpensiveness of locations will continue to remain a basic issue.

l. Requirements of Ideal Budget/business model for Bhojpuri cinema

Not all the persons interviewed were able to quote concrete figures, but conversations with a group of director/financier/producer threw up the following figures.

1. The top stars should charge no more than 15 lakhs for a film
2. This will keep the budget of the film to 1-1.5 crores
3. The recent revival of Marathi and Bangla cinemas has proved that low star budgets [up to 5 lakhs] make regional cinema viable even 'on the table'
4. If the distributors are willing to share the publicity costs, the entire production process becomes free of creases and hiccups.
5. Given these scales, unless a product is of glaringly low quality, recovery of investment should not be a problem, beyond which lies the story of high profits.
6. Finally, the budget of a Bhojpuri film should not exceed 2 crores which is where the risk of serious losses begins. Ideally the budget should be between 80 lakhs – 1.5 crores. Given the size of the Bhojpuri market, these figures make sense while doing business 'over the table'.
7. Bhojpuri cinema should not follow the model of Hindi films and add extra expenses such as big sets. Such extravagance goes waste as it is not in accordance with audience taste. Past experiences seems to have taught everyone a lesson that only a huge hit will save a producer/distributor from losses if he invests more than two crores.

Interestingly, while suggesting the ideal budget, the interviewees did not mention the usual complaints about the distribution process, almost entirely focusing on the star fees. This would indicate ambivalence towards the star system. Curiously, while a producer would want his stars to carry a heavy value, he finds it irksome to fit their inflated charges into the budget. Discussions on the star system, it may be noted generally confine themselves to the relation between the star persona and the audience. The researcher found that the star system is embedded in the production process and the financial logic of film making, and is as much part of the business process as that of wider and rather abstract processes of communication and meaning-creation.