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IDEOLOGY AS REPRESENTED JUSTIFICATION OF COMEDY THROUGH FILM
LANGUAGE: A VIEWPOINT FROM TELUGU MOVIES

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ABSTRACT

Laughter is human beings' special quality which is transmissible too. The noteworthy object about laughter is that it arises in human beings automatically. It has become part of life; we can understand the necessity of it in life by many laughing clubs established all over the world. Laughter is the effect of comedy as genre in movies, writings and laughing clubs. Comedy can be perceived as the sub domain of the entertainment in which humour or laughter is turned into art in many sense. Aristotle when he categorises comedy with tragedy and other genres he mentions words like 'superior' and 'inferior' but he does not take into account the accountability of ethical while creating comedy or enjoying comedy, but in this present world two adjectives 'superior' and 'inferior' mentioned in his definition are intriguing arguments for examining the invisible ideology in minds as a creation. The representation transpires with preconceptions, with intended ideas then it is called as an ideology in certain sense. The ideologies do confront with the other, or try to dominate in nature by hegemonic attitude. Comedy as an ideology, the hegemonic assertiveness is inscribed in films through representation by belittling certain sections of community. The preconceived ideas or notions in society turn into stereotypes. These stereotypes explicate the cultural images of people in the society. When the mass media like films take up these stereotypes as their themes, then the meanings are attributed through the images on screen. These images help to represent certain ideology of filmmakers. The stereotypes turn out to be concepts for filmmakers in films to generate comedy. These interpretive concepts function as an arrangement of representation. These representational concepts regulate through language into communication. The production of communication through language concludes the sphere of representation. Language expresses a social process of meanings that makes world of events. Nevertheless, in the absence of language there is no possibility of representation and in the absence of language the intended meanings are not conceivable. The significance of language plays dynamic role in production of signs and symbols which again assist to formulate meanings. The preservation of meanings for purposeful representations fluctuate the social relations of power. Thus, the representation of ideologies is part of language system in generating comedy in films.

Key Words: Comedy, Ideology, Representation, Hegemony, Language, Power, Conceptions, Domination, Inferior and Superior.

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An Outline of Laughter

Laughter is common and transmissible. Laughter is part of the worldwide human language. All members of the human species understand it. Unlike other languages, we do not have to learn to speak it. We are born with the capacity to laugh. One of the remarkable things about laughter is that it occurs instinctively. We don't adopt to organize it. While we can consciously constrain it, we don't consciously produce laughter. That is why it is very hard to laugh on demand or to fake laughter. Laughter provides authoritative, unrestricted intuitions into our unconscious. It simply bubbles up within us in certain situations. We do know that laughter is triggered by many feelings and thoughts, and that it activates many parts of the body. When we laugh, we alter our facial expressions and make sounds. We also know that laughter is a message that we send to other people. So, we laugh by reading something, watching something, thinking about something and listening to something that makes us laugh without inhibitions. It has become part of life; we can understand the necessity of it in life by many laughing clubs established all over the world. Laughter is the effect of comedy as genre in movies, writings and laughing clubs. Comedy can be perceived as the sub domain of the entertainment in which humour or laughter is turned into art by mime artists, dramatists, television writers, cartoonists, music hall singers, stand-up comedians and many others, including millions of 'funny people' who bring comedy into everyday life. Apart from it we keep on trying to create comedy in films, books, etc. and we call this phenomenon as genre of comedy.

Comedy as a Classification

According to Wikipedia explanation the word comedy has a long history, though it is derived from the Greek word 'komodia', it has taken different meanings in different languages from different times. The main purpose is to amuse by inducing laughter. The genre of comedy has various multiple sub genres which are based on the source of humour; the person who delivers it and the context it is delivered. It has black comedy, blue comedy, wit, satire, character comedy, observational comedy, insult comedy, spoof, musical comedy and many more. Aristotle's lines on comedy differentiate comedy with tragedy. He defines:

"Tragedy imitates "the action of superior people" is a generic specification concerning what tragedy 'imitates' and not a requirement concerning what tragedy 'should imitate.' Similarly, not only the ideal comedy, but every comedy imitates "the action of the inferior people." The adjectives 'inferior' and 'superior,' then, cannot be taken in an ethical, but rather in an aristocratic sense of the word. Tragedy imitates actions of mythical heroes and heroines and comedy those of ordinary people".

Though, Aristotle says not to take the words 'superior' and 'inferior' in to accountability of ethical while creating comedy or enjoying comedy, but in this present world two adjectives 'superior' and 'inferior' mentioned in his definition are intriguing arguments for examining the invisible ideology in minds of creation. It is very essential to study and understand these two words because who are the people involved in these separation in Aristotle's perspective. Heroes and heroines involve in tragedy where they lock the spectators' mind with their pity and fear in drama or movies. Whereas inferior people who are treated as lesser in society involve in comedy. They are looked at wittily, they are laughed at satirically, though there is pain in comedy characters, it is turned to be humorous. Suppose a beautiful girl comes on to the stage and stands, nobody will laugh, but if she speaks with blur voice then people start laugh at her. This means the demerits of human beings are cause to laugh. Though, pity and pain are essential for both tragedy and comedy, in one genre pity and fear generates mourning in spectators in another genre the same pity and fear produces laughter. Here our main intent is not to differentiate between two genres but to look up who are involved in these two genres and how they are characterised accordingly. Is every form of comedy is put under the scrutiny to divulge the idea of creating comedy? Why some form of comedy is objectionable to people or some sections of society? Why do people agitate against comedy celebrated in films? Or why certain castes are dragged into the comedy of genre in Indian scenario?

Ideology and Representation

In what way the intention of ideology is perceived in creating comedy in films? The fathoming answer could be, perhaps to claim the concepts of superiority or inferiority in society. Which means the ideology seeks

to legitimate the power of a dominant social group or class. John B. Thompson in his book *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* says that "in order to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination." (Thompson, 1984: 6) in every action of human being or in every circumstance there can be identification or representation of some preconception or pre-conceived idea. When the representation transpires with preconceptions, with intended ideas then it is called as ideology in certain sense. The ideologies do confront with the other, or try to dominate in nature by hegemonic attitude. Coming to the comedy as an ideology, the hegemonic assertiveness is inscribed in films through representation by belittling certain sections of community. Comedy is an escape, not from truth but despair: a narrow escape into conviction. In tragedy lead characters suffer pain; in comedy people with foolishness, ugliness and lower status in society suffer pain gladly. The difference between tragedy and comedy is the difference between experience and perception. In the experience characters strive against every condition of animal life, death, frustration of ambition, against the instability of human love. In intuition characters trust the difficult oddities they are born with and see the oddness of any creature never adapted to being created.

Moving on to justification of these two important adjectives 'superior' and 'inferior' in thought of comedy is juxtaposing the adjectives in film comedy give purposeful depiction. Almost every day people come across these adjectives in day today life. Whether, the above adjectives attributed to human beings by money (economic), by power (political), by advantage (social), but almost all people fall under either of these two categories. Deliberately, these two objectives are linked with Indian caste system. In Indian caste system there are superior castes and inferior castes. Superior castes take the advantage by constructing certain rules and apply them in various situations and places. So, automatically economic, political and social are deficient for lower castes as a result they are inferior. The reason to bring caste here in the context of comedy is that caste becomes an element of argument where comedy is instilled by mentioning certain caste's cultural doings. The triggered point is that caste becomes a procedure for creating comedy in Telugu films. John Morreall in his book *Comedy, Tragedy, Religion* states that there are three theories about humour or comedy. They are superiority theory, congruity theory and psychic release theory. The author elucidates on humour that:

"According to superiority theory, humour is generated at the cost of others making you feel superior to them which mean mocking others or simply the indignity of others generates humour. In incongruity theory humour is generated when there is conflict or incongruity between what we expect to occur and what actually occurs. According to psychic release theory humour is a method of releasing us from our inner battles and torments, and thus humour is often generated when giving the sense of release from some threat that is being overcome." (Morreall, 1999: 121)

In close reflection to the definition, in both the theories mentioned by the author the meaning is almost same but with slight difference. In superiority theory humour is targeted or it is created at the cost of others. It is related with social groups, in Indian context social castes. Humour is created on others' weakness, misfortune, defects but superiority should be maintained. One fine example of this kind would be, if a drunkard is walking on the road splashing with clamorous words at a girl passing by, three other people (modern in appearance) are sitting nearby commenting him and laughing at him. All of a sudden the drunkard has fallen in to the mud. Now the laughing reaches to the peak stage. Then an elderly teacher who is observing the whole episode comes to three people and asks them why are they laughing instead of stopping him? Then one of them who try to behave as a good man explains in such way that he has tried a lot to control the situation but the drunkard is out of control. But actually he has neither tried to control the situation nor supported the girl when drunkard commenting filthy jokes, but he tries to get good opinion from people. He has enjoyed by drunkard's behaviour and his comments to girl, but still manipulating to show himself as better human being than drunkard.

The superiority of him has not lost in the whole episode and laughing at others is a bonus for him. This kind of behaviour gives human beings a confidence and makes him feel happy because he is not in a place of drunkard or a girl. There should be somebody to create laugh for these people though some one gets hurt. Coming to the second theory incongruous, the example would be from the movie *A Beautiful Mind (2001)*.

Russell Crowe is the lead actor in the movie who acts as a Professor John Nash. In one scene, Hero (Professor) walks out of class, he slightly hobbles in walk as he becomes older. A group of students standing nearby imitates him and tries to get some stuff out it to make others to laugh. Here the disability of the professor becomes an interesting aspect for the students to create laughter. Here everyone is laughing with others, laughing at some one. The last example for relief theory is a bunch of students have come to class without finishing home work. Class teacher beats everyone who has not submitted homework, now each one of them laughs at the student who is beaten by teacher, but everyone undergoes the same punishment, but still it becomes the pleasure when other student gets punishment. Laughing at other student gives rest of the students' immense pleasure for their previous punishment. So, laughing at one student releases the other students a kind of relief in their bad moments. So, in all these theories there is one phrasal verb used which is 'laugh at'. What is the exact meaning of this phrasal verb? According to Oxford English Dictionary, laugh at means treat with ridicule or scorn. In *YouTube* there is a lesson on phrasal verbs laugh at and laugh with. The teacher says laugh at means people laugh at others treating that some stupidity lies in them or in their actions.

When human beings laugh at others, they think that someone is stupid, someone's behaviour is awkward. So, there is underlying meaning that people with better qualities than stupid and the stupidity can be laughed at others. Film as mass media applies this particular theory of laugh through representations and generates some ideology or modifies already existing ideology in shaping ideology as hegemonic but still invisible in its sense. Let the question be clarified before moving to further argument, what is representation? Is ideology inscribed in representation? Stuart Hall in his article "*Representation and the Media*" describes that:

"The idea of representation is that media practices, among other things, represent topics, represent types of people, represent events, represent situations; what we're talking about is the fact that in the notion of representations is the idea of giving meaning. So the representation is the way in which meaning is somehow given to the things which are depicted through the images or whatever it is, on screens or the words on a page which stand for what we're talking about." (Hall, 1997: 6)

Stuart Hall insists on representation as conveyer of meanings to people, things, events and situations. Films do act as representations to create ideas, to deliver ideas, to pass ideas to others and finally to construct newer ideologies.

Language and Power

The preconceived ideas or notions in society turn into stereotypes. These stereotypes explicate the cultural images of people in the society. When the mass media like films take up these stereotypes as their themes, then the meanings are attributed through the images on screen. These images help to represent certain ideology of filmmakers. The stereotypes turn out to be concepts for filmmakers in films to generate comedy. These interpretive concepts function as an arrangement of representation. These representational concepts regulate through language into communication. The production of communication through language concludes the sphere of representation. Language expresses a social process of meanings that makes world of events. Nevertheless, in the absence of language there is no possibility of representation and in the absence of language the intended meanings are not conceivable. The significance of language plays dynamic role in production of signs and symbols which again assist to formulate meanings. The preservation of meanings for purposeful representations fluctuate the social relations of power. Language adds to the domination of some people on others, because, the perception of language and making use of language is the first step for deliverance.

The production of meaning means that there exists a figurative effort, an activity and a practice, which explicate meaning to things and people and in communicating that meaning to someone else is apparatus, the media being one of the most powerful and wide-ranging organizations does the active part to circulate the meaning. The purpose of ideology is done when it intervenes in language. The intervening ideology with the use of language manipulates power through representations or by passing ideologies to other through language. Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the common and

mutual procedure of society and through language the individuals' social behaviour is examined or estimated. The social behaviours form ideologies in capturing power relations in society. So, in overall sense, the politics of power relations occur through representation, which consists of use of language through signs and images which stand for representing things. A film as communicative system is an effect of language. The language is inscribed while creating comedy in films. But, the representation of ideologies is part of language system in generating comedy in films. Stuart Hall when speaks about language, he mentions variety ways of language.

"Language here, of course, I mean a very wide range of things, I mean the language that we speak and the language that we write, I mean electronic languages, digital languages, languages communicated by musical instrument, languages communicated by facial gesture, languages communicated by facial expression, the use of the body to communicate meaning, the use of clothes to express meaning, anything in the sense in which I'm talking about can be a language." (Hall, 1997: 11)

As Hall references for ways of language, human body as communicative meaning, clothes as expressive meanings indulge in generating comedy in films. Human beings' way of language using or the dialect of language, their way of dressing, and the way of work people are indulged in become language systems and these are implanted in generating comedy by mocking these cultural components.

Comedy implanted as an Ideology in Films

Now moving to main argument of this paper, the deliberation is done in previous page in explaining who are involved in archetype of 'laughing at'? People who are considered as inferior in society like drunkards, tall, short, ugly or people with some disabilities are trapped into this category by superior people or acting superiors in the society. The superiority can be acquired by power, money, or socially. In observing Telugu movies, for that matter any movie of world cinema, these are the people who are involved in comedy. As this paper restricts to Telugu movies, it would be appropriate taking some examples and put forth for argument. First of all, should there be any limitation for comedy in movies? I use word limitation in the sense of objectionable. In recent times some protests have taken place in the context of *Dhenikaina Ready (2012)* movie's objectionable scenes against Brahmins. Supposing, M.S. Narayana, a Telugu comedian has acted in many Telugu movies. He has done many movies as a drunkard. In *Swayamvaram (1999)* movie, he is a drunkard and he forgets everything, so all his family members make fun of him including his wife. This may not be offensive idea for the spectators. The reason is that all drunkards would not behave in same manner and here in the movie the character drunkard is not a target to any particular drunkard. In the same way the above mentioned disabilities and the comedy produced through disabilities would not be offensive. But how come a caste comes into genre of comedy. Is it justifiable to attribute a certain kind of humorous quality to particular caste? Norman Fairclough in his book *Language and Power* states that:

"Class struggle is a necessary and inherent property of a social system in which the maximization of the profits and power of one class depends upon the maximization of its exploitation and domination of another." (Fairclough, 1989: 35)

In Fairclough sense, the class struggle could be an inherent property of social system, and the same can be admissible in Aristotle's sensitivity too as he connotes the meaning that Man is a social animal. So, definitely, human beings strive for superiority in relation to the societal structure. Human being is never satisfied with attributed meanings exists already but strives for better in his/her survival. The struggle for domination over the other is inevitable and perpetual. But, in Indian scenario, the class struggle is not based on economic structure what Marxian philosophy contemplates the meaning of society and its structure.

India as conglomeration of different castes and classes, the economic, political and social connotations of individuals or group of castes decide the domination of certain castes or the exploitation of certain castes. Certain castes are backward in all senses hence, they cannot encounter with the higher castes when their castes are attributed in mockery to create comedy in movies. Brahmin is highest caste in caste system ladder, they are socially aware of society and its modulations, representations but they are at times recessive in economic and political fields. Accordingly, they resist to the representations in films against their

caste but lower castes do not get aware of representations and they are not in positions to resist to the exploitation by higher castes.

When a script writer or a story teller aims at intent in his comedy he has to check whether there are any offensive words or expressions which target particular caste or community. There should be acceptance from the spectator, the comedy would be better when it has less intensification of hurt to spectators and more healthy receiving to people. Everybody has freedom of expression in democracy state but at the same time everybody has certain duties to recognise his fellow beings and not to hurt anybody.

Paul Sturges, a professor from Dept. of Information Science Loughborough University in his article '*Comedy as Freedom of Expression*' argues that

"Freedom of Expression is an absolute principle but the Universal Declaration on Human Rights' Article Nineteen and other such statements do identify limits that might reasonably be applied in practice. These possible limitations do open the door to censorship when administered by systems of law and justice unsympathetic to free expression. Those who exercise their right to free expression have to do so in awareness of possible limitations and ultimately they must accept responsibility for what they say, and understand the possible consequences to themselves, friends and family, society as a whole (including its minorities) and international relations. By extension, those who act as intermediaries for communication, be they publishers, broadcasters, Internet services providers, or information professionals, must understand this clearly too".

In many Telugu movies, Allu Ramalingiah acted as a Brahmin who gives advices to villains and make comedy out of it. But offensive part of this kind would be his appearance like dress, his language, and his walking style resemble a Brahmin. I think this kind of activity would be the first attempt to bring caste system into comedy and attributing some affidavit qualities in Telugu cinema industry. Similarly *Adhurs* (2009) and *Dhenikaina Ready* (2012) patch up this kind of stuff and end up with negative feedback from spectators. If we observe these two movies, I could see inferiority in these comedy characters. Brahamanandam is the comedian in these movies. In *Adhurs* he is a Brahmin, intentionally, he is mocked at throughout the movie. As the hero is Brahmin in the movie, his appearance is changed; he tries to be humorous in his dialogues and behaviour. But the comedian Brahamanandam is centred to create humour. His ways of physic, behaviour, etc. are the causes to produce humour. In one scene, he gives explanation for his growing belly; the explanation clearly gives a picture that Brahmin's duty is to chant mantras during rituals by sitting all the time, so there could be chance of getting belly. And his food habits also might be cause for his belly. First of all, this kind of statement is ludicrous but exuberant celebrations in reviews on this comedy are offensive.

In another movie *Dhenikaina Ready*, Brahmin caste is entitled to make humour throughout the movie. The ways of Brahmins cause to get wit and satire. The hero is a Muslim, but he acts as a Brahmin and mocks the life style of Brahmins. The agitation explicates the dissent on this movie in Tollywood during its release. This paper mainly focuses on why the lives of Brahmin are centred to get laughter? Why particular caste's life style becomes the main target to mock, not only in this movie, but in many. Before concluding the argument, another point to rise is that in movie *Rudraveena* (1988) dalits are shown as drunkards and they are used as comedians. In particular scenes their behaviour as drunkards is publicized and their caste is an underlying hint for their particular behaviour. The hero who is a Brahmin portrayed as reformer for dalits. Interestingly, the director of the movie is also a Brahmin. So, in his idea of society there are two castes in this mentioned movie, one is Brahmin and another is Dalit. One caste is superior and another is inferior, according to their status or according to the given societal position a particular picture is assessed. There were no protests or any sort of activities when the movie was released. The reason could be the 'inferior' category might not be aware to put a stop to freedom of expression. Here, my main argument is that first of all should there be limitation line; if at all limitation line has to be drawn, who decides the parameters in comedy?

Conclusion

Comedy is stimulating aspect as it discloses a lot about culture, social constructions and public attitudes of a society. It even brings the domination of particular language or certain diction within language

which is again the language of dominant caste or community. As mentioned earlier caste inscribed in to genre of comedy disturbs the harmony of the society. The society is not the society which is in the eyes of limited people (castes or community). The Brahmins protest is meaningful and acknowledgeable but it would be genuine when the offense is placed on others. The meaning of offense should not be changed according to situation or caste involved in comedy. If it is so then it becomes duplicity. If the idea is like since Brahmin is highest in caste system, he is superior in society so he should not be dragged to inferior category, reveals the utter cynical attitude. If the cause is candid then it is praiseworthy and there is need for keeping limitations for comedy in Telugu movies.

If there is a common response then they (directors) must balance the convincing need for free expression when focused at the influential, spiritual and secular alike, whilst working out tolerance, delicacy and contemplation when dealing with expression that might insult the inferior and powerless.

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