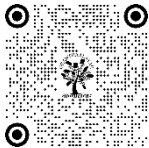


EXPLORING AN ANTI-HERO NARRATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF ARDHARAATHRI SWAATHANTHRYAM

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ABSTRACT

Cinema as a cultural artefact, by adapting, modifying, and reimagining narrative structures from mythology, folklore, and ancient storytelling traditions, has traditionally embraced single hero-centric narrative structures. Telugu cinema, one of the regional film industries from India, has significantly adhered to this conventional storytelling pattern, featuring star heroes who are strong, handsome, powerful, morally upright, and have God-like characteristics, confronting single-centric antagonists characterised by opposing traits. However, "Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam (1986 - Telugu)", a film by R Narayana Murthy under the production house Sneha Chitra Pictures, challenges this norm by shifting the narrative focus away from the hero to societal issues. Departing from the traditional hero's journey, the new genre's narrative highlights the societal problem as the central theme, providing raw material for examining the complex historical trajectory from a counter perspective. The current study employs Joseph Campbell's mythological framework 'Hero's Journey' as the foundation to explore this unconventional narrative structure with the transformative learning theory and the concept of oppositional consciousness to enrich the exploration of the film's nuanced narrative. By unravelling the complexities of Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam's narrative dynamics, the study provides a deeper understanding of narrative forms that challenge established norms and encourages a more nuanced exploration of societal challenges and collective resistance.

Keywords: Cinema, Narrative, Hero, Anti-Hero, Social Change, Collective

1. INTRODUCTION

We all have heard stories that began with "Once upon a time there was a man who had an okay life but felt a desire and wish for change and adventure" (Lehner, 2022). In the realm of such hero-centric stories, the narrative often follows a classical pattern where the hero embarks on a transformative journey, encountering challenges and adversaries that test determination. The hero embarks on a quest, faces trials and tribulations, and ultimately returns home triumphant, having achieved salvation or victory. Once the hero completes his journey and returns home, the story does not conclude entirely. Instead, it subtly implies a passing of the torch, where the hero, having imbibed wisdom from his experiences, passes down values, ideals, and the essence of the journey to the next generation. Here, hero-centric stories or narratives ensure the continuity of noble traditions through heroic

legacies, and “these are the collective stories of change that we tell each other for inspiration, hope and initiation” (Lehner, 2022). Such tales meticulously showcase the hero's charisma, strength, and moral integrity, traits that resonate profoundly with viewers. The characteristics attributed to heroes in storytelling are intricately interwoven with elements such as colour, culture, religion, gender, tastes, choices, power, authority, etc. These elements serve as essential components in shaping the identity and narrative arc of the hero, where the popular global cinema has been dominated by such hero-centric narratives (Booker, 2004). However, a single hero, typically a man, often becomes the central theme of the story, around whom the entire plot revolves.

Such storytelling traditions are rooted in mythology, folklore, and influenced global cinematic narratives (Campbell, 2004). This hero was designed to be relatable or admirable in some way, possessing qualities such as god, king, intelligent, saviour, survivor, rebel, handsome, strong, and many more individuals in the forever changing world. In this most common approach in stories, heroes are created with specific traits and characteristics, often developing from the imagination. In order to showcase the hero's qualities, within the narrative, storytellers created tensions and conflicts around the hero, who goes on an adventure to meet his ultimate villain with the “other” (Beattie, 2004) qualities. In narrative building, while framing the ‘antagonist’ or the ‘villain’ or the ‘problem’ or the ‘other’ in cinema through visual representation, such conflicts between right and wrong, moral and immoral, ideas and ideologies, old and new, individual and individual, individual and community, hero and villain, etc, are laid out. These contrasts/conflicts between two different perspectives, lives, cultures, beliefs, actions, people, goals, ideologies, and more forms have become the primary basis for stories or narratives, driving the plot forward.

This ‘other’ side perspective provides rich material for exploring themes, ideas, and ideologies. Once it becomes more distinct to read such themes, patterns, perspectives, deviating from the conventional single centric hero's journey, the cinema's focus can shift to societal issues, making ‘villain’ a representation of broader problems (Ganti, 2004). Here, the villain is a mere adversary and formidable opponent meticulously designed to challenge the hero's strengths and willpower but also faced a greater exploitation by the cinema, where the hero is created and produced by dominant castes, peasant castes in the case of Telugu film industry (Srinivas, 2013). However, the characteristics of the ‘problem’ or the ‘villain’, often designed to oppose the dominant, traditional, single-man-hero's virtues and values, challenge not just his physical prowess but also his ideologies and perspectives, giving a voice to the unheard from the ‘other’ sections of society. The study, where the ‘other’ sections represent the marginalised or the voiceless, provides a platform for revisiting histories from the ‘other’ perspective for nuanced understanding of everything related to our culture and society.

2. CONJECTURE

In the Telugu film industry, where the writers ideate, develop, and write stories centred around star-heroes, the study poses a primary question - what if the writer ideates a villain-centric story? Villain being the societal issue. By identifying obstacles in the hero's journey, which are nothing but the personifications of the villain, the villain centric narratives could be structured. Where the mainstream narratives have been soaked with the stories about specific dominant communities' heroes (Srinivas, 2013), these villain centric narratives provide space for the marginalised unheard voices to tell their narratives to the world. When heroes come

from marginalised sections, their main obstacles such as injustice, exploitation, greed, oppression, corruption, societal problems, etc, become their mutual villain. Here, storytellers start their narrations by focusing on the destruction done on a bigger scale, which hurts “collective consciousness” (Combs & Kripner, 2008) and becomes the obstacles or the villain. Exploring such narratives, where heroes are from marginalised sections, surely provide rich material for the discourse on ideologies, cultures, tastes, choices, power, etc. and play a significant role in shaping society.

3. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study is to counter the traditional popular dominant single-star-hero centric narrative and apply the ‘other’ narrative perspective to the film “Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam (Telugu, 1986)” (v9 Videos, 2021), which laid the foundation for a film genre called “red- film” (iDream Media, 2016) or “Naxalite film” (Srinivas, 2015) from Telugu film industry. Although such red tags are stereotypical in association with the popular way of labelling where there is a clear direct red symbolism seen in the film’s visual representation, the study refers to it as the “other - film”. The reason for choosing this film is that there is a clear counter narrative structure presented, where multiple heroes or representatives from various oppressed and marginalised sections of the society, with similar goals and hopes, are represented. They go on a collective journey or path, forming collective consciousness, fighting the common villain. By looking into the characteristics of these collective heroes, the study attempts to identify their common enemy, and forms the villain’s characteristics. Finally, the study explores the villain’s journey to analyse the societal problems represented in this ‘other’ narrative.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Joseph Campbell’s seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* discovered a universal pattern by meticulous comparative analysis of stories and myths across cultures. Through the exploration of psychological and spiritual dimensions, archetypes and monomyths, Campbell (2004) presented a compelling argument for the enduring power of the hero’s journey. With archetypal characters such as the hero, the mentor, the threshold guardian, the shadow, and the boon, among others serve specific functions within the narrative, shaping the hero’s transformation and growth. The monomyth framework outlines various stages of the hero’s adventure, illustrating the cyclical nature of heroic quests such as the Call to Adventure, Crossing the Threshold, Trials and Tribulations, and the Return with the Elixir (Lehner, 2022). Through these stages, the myths reflect both individual and collective human experiences, providing profound insights into the human psyche, personal transformation, search for meaning, and purpose in life, where the contemporary stories lazily followed these archetypal patterns of the hero’s journey. Campbell (2004) interprets these myths as symbolic representations as well as psychological and spiritual processes, emphasising that myths are not just ancient stories but metaphors representing the human journey. By connecting people with their own stories beyond the personal, “the collective and the numinous” (Lehner, 2022) extends the argument and postulates that a myth is also a guide for transformation, initiation, and individuation. Investigating such hero archetypes, Goldberg (2009) focuses on the hero’s evolution throughout history, and its significance in contemporary cultures, stressing on the hero’s constant transformation throughout time which mirrors the changes in the society’s beliefs and values, as highlighted below. “... despite the time period or dominant means of

communication, the heroic ideal is defined in the same way: as an individual who overcomes a great challenge against all odds, who is capable of seizing an opportunity and taking leadership, who has admirable moral character, and who puts other individuals' needs before his or her own" (p. 65).

Drawing on transformative learning theory, Lehner (2022) conducted a workshop on the heroine/hero journey, exploring their "internal call for transformation" (Rebillot & Kay, 2017) and the resistance to leaving one's comfort zone. It finds that the hero/heroine archetypes set out on an adventurous journey, pursuing her/his call for transformation. Such internal calls need not be hero character's but rather could be of individuals such as the filmmaker. When narrative shifts focus from hero's call for adventure to the filmmaker's or an individual's call for adventure, the individual's initial intention plays a significant role in the narrative construction. Along with the study on the hero (protagonist), Bordwell et al. (2020) emphasises the role of villain (antagonist) in the discourse on narrative dynamics. They argue that instead of following the hero centric narrative, some narratives place the message, moral, or value at the centre, challenging the traditional storytelling conventions.

When the 'message' becomes the central theme of the narrative, stories of the oppressed carry greater social significance than that of a dominant single hero's story. Such revolutionary ideas/messages or the idea of revolution goes beyond just the change of political systems but to encompass shifts in cultural consciousness, where such revolutions alter the way individuals perceive and experience the world in which we think about ourselves and also the others, and about the ways in which we imagine the future (Appadurai, 1996). However, as Gramsci (2021) argues that cultural hegemony is keeping the existing power structures alive, highlighting the role of dominant narratives in maintaining power. He highlights that challenging hegemonic cultural norms is essential for revolutionary movements which seek for social change. Such important oppositional consciousnesses, as means of challenging patriarchal power structure, allows us to critically look at the dominant culture, to see how it operates, to recognize its oppressive dimensions, to imagine alternative ways of living, and to foster social transformation (Hooks, 2015). Overall, by bringing these theoretical perspectives, the study offers a critical lens through which one can analyse film narratives from the 'other' perspective. It also provides a nuanced understanding of the complex societal issues and offers a fresh perspective on film narratives.

Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam (Telugu, 1986): Behind the Screen

"Once upon a time there was a young man, inspired by the heroes on silver screen, started his hero's journey to Madras (present Chennai), to become one"

Figure1



Figure 1 Film Poster. "Freedom at Midnight". Thumbnail (v9 Videos, 2021)

The film title literally translates to “Freedom at Midnight”, referencing India's independence where the country got its freedom at midnight. The film was produced by a group of friends with collective funds under the banner (production house) Sneha Chitra Pictures in 1984. The film was written, directed, and produced by R Narayana Murthy, who also provided screenplay and acted in it. This film had taken a real-life social movement, Naxalbari Movement (Chandra, 1990) as a central theme to the narrative, not revolving around a single centric hero. Although sometimes his ‘other’ film characters played by himself might seem hero-centric but not stereotypical dominant-single-star-hero centric. All his film narratives are ideated from real-life social problems, strikes, protests, and activism where majority is unhappy, discriminated, exploited, or faced injustice. The film, as the director narrates to the researcher, “When India got its independence from the British, the people who really fought for Independence were exhausted and sleeping, and all those fruits of freedom were taken away by thieves, looters, criminals, and offenders who were awake. In the light of the fruits of that freedom bided by constitutional rights and for that utopian freedom, what provoked the common citizen to fight, is what my first film deals with”- (Narayana Murthy, personal communication, 2019)

The above statement is clearly not the hero-centric theme but moreover the opposite to it, a common citizen, not the upper caste dominant superstar becomes the central character. The societal issue or the central theme was ‘what’ provoked the common citizen to go on a quest, not the hero’s spiritual journey. Although the common man can be defined as a hero character in film narrative, it clearly explains that the idea or the intention of achieving utopian freedom was the main motive behind the film. The filmmaker also provides reasons for making this ‘other’ film, explaining why the Naxalbari Movement took place? And why did the youth, farmers, working class, and unemployed participate in the movement? He further explained that oppressed people fight against the oppressors, which “gave inspiration” (Narayana Murthy, personal communication, 2019) to him. Even the film’s main cast and crew such as Bollimuntha Shiva Ramakrishna known as T Krishna (revolution films director and inspiration), Vangapandu Prasada Rao (people’s poet, revolutionary balladeer, Song writer, and actor), P L Narayana (actor, artist, and dialogues), and the director himself share a collective consciousness for better society. Their off-screen association with revolution, communist parties, praja natya mandali (a branch of the Indian People's Theatre Association or IPTA (Association, 2020)) was brought into the film production and narrative. However, with this ‘other’ narrative, the focus shifts from the dominant hero’s journey to the marginalised peoples’ journey with societal issues as a central theme, providing an important ‘other’ perspective for the study.

5. NARRATIVE: ON THE SCREEN

“Once upon a time there was a group of people who had oppressive life but felt a desire and wish for better world, equality, social justice and change”- (Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam, 1986) A ‘Woman’ escapes ‘wife sale’ and faces injustice in a government hospital, reacts and gets arrested. A ‘Dalit youth’ does not find a drop of water to drink in a casteist village structure, questions and gets arrested. An ‘Unemployed’ finds no job to work for his country, revolts and gets arrested. An ‘Aggrieved Student’ frustrated with the corrupt political system, protests and gets arrested. And a poor ‘Petty Thief’ is exploited by police, threatens to tell the truth and gets arrested. The common ‘injustice’ faced by them, created a common goal for these oppressed who decided to take action to correct the corrupted system. Inside the jail, they get inspired by a ‘Revolutionary Balladeer’,

who calls for a revolt, and decide to go on the journey of armed struggle. But the jail 'Warden' mentors them to choose a non-violent journey to achieve their collective goal, equal society. Following their new mentor's advice, they start their adventure to an Adivasi area to educate, mobilise, organise, and turn each Adivasi into 'a weapon-alike' to fight the injustice and bring change in the society.

They face their first obstacle in the form of an 'Adivasi Youth' attacking them for entering their area. The oppressed heroes easily win over him and ask for reasons for his action. With a flashback, the 'Adivasi Youth' explains the atrocities done to them by an 'outsider' who becomes panchayat president of the region, along with Karanam (chief accountant) and Shaavukaaru (businessman). The outsider 'President Dora' follows acts such as installations of alcohol stalls, providing loans for interest, snatching food grains as interest, beating up youth who raised their voice, getting fingerprints on promissory notes, and grabbing their land forcefully. Knowing this, the oppressed-heroes find their next immediate goal/action of defeating 'President Dora' and help/support Adivasi in their ultimate journey (equal society) to defeat their common villain (oppression). They help Adivasis form a self-help collective group in the Manyam area, a forest region where Adivasis live. Through the self-help group or Sangam, they give education, teach patriotism, provide health care, conduct legal advice campaigns, expose corruption, give warnings to the exploiters, mobilise Adivasis through songs, and stand by the Adivasis. They also fought alongside Adivasis, when they called for a revolt against the President & Co. to get their lands back. With these acts, they transform into "Annalu" (it is a Telugu word that loosely translates to 'elder brothers', 'comrades', 'family members alike' or 'associates'; The term is also used to describe sympathisers or supporters of Naxalism in the Telugu region) and become the agents/representatives of the protagonist in the film narrative. To face these new heroes from marginalised sections of the society, the villain(s) use strategies such as manipulating the Adivasi community head of Manyam forest region, giving bribes to police, filing cases on Annalu, spreading communal hatred among people, creating fear among villagers, giving sweet warnings to government officials, and keeping politicians under their control. On the other hand, Annalu also implement strategies such as gaining Adivasi trust, requesting government officials to take up action, defending against police brutality, giving warnings to the cheating businessmen, approaching court for justice, and finally revolting against 'President Dora' along with the Adivasis. The 'Aggrieved Student' gets married to the Adivasi head's daughter and starts a new life, where the 'Unemployed's journey ends in the Adivasi land struggle by virtue of Karanam's murder scheme. This scheme refers to the epic Mahabharata where a similar military formation was used to surround enemies in a war. After losing the battle in the hands of Adivasis and Annalu, the 'President Dora' and 'Karanam' approach police and begs for safety, upon which the police provide unconditional support, announces Annalu as anti-nationals, declares Manyam region as 'problematic area', issue arrest-warrants on the marginalised heroes, and appoints a special police officer for implementing those actions, all in the name of keeping the law & order under control.

After the win over 'President Dora' and his companions, the 'Unemployed's death did not scare Annalu to end their journey and return home, instead it motivated them to carry on their collective consciousness's great journey, to visit other villages and help those in the need of heroes, in their fight with ultimate villain – the oppression. When the news of police orders reaches them, they decide to fight back but Adivasi Head turns as guardian and requests Annalu to save their lives for now as the police have more force/power with them. He sends Annalu in different ways, providing each one an escort. He himself escorts his daughter and Aggrieved

Student (son-in-law) to send them off safely. And after finishing his role, loses his life in the police's gun shot. While a group of police surrounds and fires on the Dalit Youth in a no-escape corner, another police constable shoots the Woman from behind hiding in a tree. She dies writing 'the system of exploitation must be destroyed...' on a wall with her blood, while the Dalit Youth take the life of a police officer while dying. Watching all the police encounters, a police constable who framed 'Petty Thief' in the beginning, realises his department's atrocities, lets the 'Petty Thief' escape, and resigns from his job. Here, the Annalu or the marginalised heroes' story ends but the film's narrative continues. Afterall, it was not constructed around them as heroes but around the 'collective consciousness', where Annalu can become supporting characters or the representatives of the central hero of the story, the 'message'. Hence, another hero is born, where the fight for justice and equal society continues.

After various acts such as police encounters, attacks on Adivasi villages, torture of the remaining Adivasi in their houses, and a lot of sudden searches, the special police officer issues a final warning to surrender. But the 'Adivasi Youth' (filmmaker), inspired by Annalu's acts, chooses to continue the Annalu's journey or path, motivates his villagers to take up arms and fight back survival and justice. Along with this newly born young hero from the oppressed, many Adivasis die in the police combing operation and encounters and the rest (the old and injured Adivasi) get arrested. The story again does not end here. The story needs another hero or follower to continue the journey, but finds no one alive. Meanwhile, the non-violent guide/mentor (Warden) comes to Manyam, gets deeply disturbed by seeing the Woman he sent on quest is dead, cuts his finger in symbolising his non-violence journey's end and taking up Annalu's journey, completes the unfinished blood quote on the wall, questions the special police chief about the corrupted system, resigns from his job by throwing his hat away, takes up gun, kills 'President Dora', 'Karanam', and 'MLA', and dies as the special police chief shoots (as an act of encounter) him. The journey, even after the mass funeral of dead bodies, with no one in the frame, doesn't end. A naked Adivasi kid, who has been hiding behind a tree with fear during the massacre, comes out with a hope, leading the narrative. His journey must start! There is no home to go, family is dead, no government support, finds his favourite black shawl with red colour borders, ties it around his naked waist, runs towards the sun-light, starting his hero's journey. With that and an end quote, the film ends.

Figure 2



Figure 2 The End Quote. "By Placing a Palm, Sunlight Can't be Stopped". Still. 02:10:09:22

6. DISCUSSION

To find out the central theme of the narrative, the study investigates the "dramatic goal" (Cattrysse, 2010) which refers to an intention, an objective, behind

all the heroes and their departure from life setting. Similar social exploitations such as patriotism, caste system, corruption in government, injustice in the police system, and corrupted political system caused the heroes from marginalised to react, leading to the formation of their intentions, goals, to reach their ultimate destinations. Inspired by a revolutionary balladeer's goals, all the five oppressed set their goals or find their collective goal(s) such as to fight patriotism, to abolish caste system, to mobilise and educate people, to correct the corrupted system, and to fight the oppressors if and when needed. They strongly agree that there is no other option, trying various approaches under warden's guidance, choose a weapon as the last option to fight for justice and equal society. To achieve this goal, they find 'oppression' as their common villain in their lives, and pave a path to their next goal "fight for justice" in their ultimate quest "equal society". When this major 'societal issue' or the 'problem' as the villain becomes the central theme of the narrative, multiple oppressed representatives form 'counter' or 'other' or 'social' goals or narratives to the traditional hero's selfish journey with just one's intentions or goals or narrative. However, by making the 'problem' as the central theme of the narrative, the film starts with the introduction of 'oppression' by showing its atrocities, only then heroes from the oppressed are formed in reaction to the villain's atrocities.

- 1) **Call to Adventure:** The narrative approach of this 'other' genre, exemplified by "Ardharathri Swaathanthryam," offers a departure from conventional hero-centric storytelling models and offers the 'other' perspective, instead of opting for a multifaceted portrayal of societal issues as mere obstacles in traditional hero's narrative. Starting from the transformation of R Narayana Murthy, who desired to become a hero, when the time came to make his own film, the filmmaker chose to put himself away as the central theme and a singular hero, constructing the story around societal issues. The young rebel, who wanted to question the injustice in the society, through "transformative learning" (Mezirow, 2018), challenged the dominant narratives and amplified the voices of the oppressed. Although, he also acted in the film but not as one of the main heroes, but a keen 'Adivasi Youth' who turns himself as a hero for a very short time before getting killed in a police encounter at the end. The individual, R Narayana Murthy doesn't turn into a single centric hero, becomes part of a collective consciousness or a community of artists or heroes such as T Krishna, P L Narayana, and Vangapandu Prasad Rao who carry similar ideas, ideologies, morals, goals, and known for revolution. A similar transformation is reflected in the film narrative, where Annalu community is represented as the 'collective heroes' and 'Adivasi Youth' (filmmaker) gets inspired and follows their footsteps towards equal society. As Campbell (2004) notes, "the essential nature of the Hero's Journey is the adventure of problem solving but only through personal transformation". However, by not answering the call to adventure as a capitalist star hero, R Narayana Murthy answered to a community of collective heroes with similar goals or destinations, already fighting the same villain.
- 2) **Crossing the Threshold:** This deliberate framework, by crossing the threshold of making another film about another dominant caste "star" (Srinivas, 2006), shifted focus to the societal issue, constructing oppression - the villain with the characteristics such as greed, authority, patriotism, corruption, and exploitation. The film crosses the threshold of typical hero entry to the introduction of the atrocities. Until the last scene, where a lone boy runs towards light with hope, the narrative never shifts its focus from

the 'other' side – the villain. This 'other' perspective highlights both possible perspectives; from the hero's perspective, where 5 heroes are introduced in their world or from the villain's perspective, where the oppression is introduced with its grand entrance. Framing heroes and villain(s) in such a way, encouraging viewers to recognize their role in the fight for justice, provides the study a structured framework to draw the interconnectedness of individual experiences within broader societal structures. Take the hero's journey or join a collective's journey? In this narrative, the absence of a singular hero serves to symbolise the abstract characteristics of capitalism and oppression, allowing for a nuanced exploration of systemic issues faced by oppressed groups such as Women, Dalits, Poor, and Adivasi communities. President, Karanam, Government officer, MLA, and Police Officer(s) represent the same oppressive characteristics, acting as agents of the invisible villain – the oppression. 'President Dora' is the embodiment of the powerful and wealthy class that exploits the weaker sections of society for his own benefit, where Karanam is depicted as a manipulative and cunning person who uses his intelligence to maintain his and President's power in Manyam. This is an example of how individuals can use their intelligence and cunningly exploit 'others' for their selfish gain. Government officer portrays someone who is knowledgeable about laws & regulations and principles in nature but is caught between the demands of the heroes and the limitations of the system and its owners. And the MLA serves to offer some insight into the political climate of the narrative, and in this film, he presents a negative depiction of a politician who is more interested in preserving his power than in serving the people. They are not merely representatives but embodiments of the systemic issues that preserve capitalism. The narrative's focus never sidestepped societal issues, even when only just the heroes are gathered when they always discussed about the villain or fighting the villain's representatives. Even the family and love scenes are also filled with debates about the villain or problem.

- 3) **Trials and Tribulations:** The constant counter – encounter strategies or fights between heroes and villains, which are presented throughout the film, delve into significant themes and issues that resonate with the complexities of Democracy, Law & Order, Nationalism, etc. The agents of oppression or 'exclusionary regime' carry oppositional characteristics to the heroes' inclusive approach, where the ruling system with its intentions excludes certain individuals or communities, as well as the use of authoritarian tactics. These "conflicts" (Brenneis, 1988) between the heroes from the oppressed and the dominant villains, bring detailed debates, arguments, and more voices throughout the narrative. They expose the obvious oppression and its exploitation living in the society, where everyone is aware of it but less discoursed in the popular medium, cinema. This 'other' film narrative, from the perspective of the societal issue as the central theme of the story, provides a thought-provoking exploration of societal issues. Inspired by opposing ideologies, cultures, and power dynamics, this 'other' genre's narrative brings the faults, exploitations, immoral qualities, and destructive actions prevalent in society into the light. By underscoring the need for change, reform, merits, limitations, pursuit of justice, and the potential for improvement within these aspects of society, the narrative challenges viewers to reconsider their stereotypical perspectives on power, authority, and social responsibility. However, the open-endedness nature of the narrative, with unresolved

conflicts and ongoing struggles, symbolises the persistent nature of societal challenges as Cunliffe, et.all (2012) write, “we make sense in everyday narrative performances, evolving accounts and struggles to create meaning from fragmentary, multiple and contested narratives”.

- 4) Return with the Elixir:** The collective heroes could not defeat the villain and its agents, gave their life or managed to escape from the great evil. The next hero (Adivasi Youth) dies too, leaving a lone boy with a hope that he will join the “other” (Beattie, 2004) community of heroes, rather following a traditional hero’s journey. It is also possible that if the collective heroes win and find their elixir – equal society, then the narrative might complete the traditional hero’s journey. However, this nuanced approach allows the narrative to highlight the consequences faced by those who perpetuate oppression, while leaving the judgement of the villain’s atrocities to the audience, symbolising the people within the narrative. By allowing the invisible villain or the “monster” (Weinstock, 2012) – the oppression to remain alive as it is in real life now, the story leaves a deliberate open-endedness, suggesting that the struggle against oppression is an ongoing battle. By leaving the assessment of the impact of oppression on individuals and communities to the audience, the film can empower viewers to engage critically with the world around them. Rather than delivering final judgement on the villain’s atrocities, the narrative’s ending approach leaves the assessment to the audience, who themselves constitute the collective protagonist in nature.

7. CONCLUSION

Filmmaker R Narayana Murthy’s ‘other’ journey exemplifies the film’s potency as a vehicle for social commentary and activism, amplifying the voices of the oppressed and advocating for social justice. His film narrative, Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam also offers a compelling departure from traditional storytelling models, challenging traditional heroes and film narratives, providing the necessary ‘other’ perspectives on power, authority, and social responsibility (Srinivas, 2013). It could also provide a thought to the audience that there are multiple heroes and journeys where one need not follow the popular and exclude the ‘other’. However, by delving into the intentions and goals of the heroes, the study highlights a thematic framework centred around the common problem (oppression), with each hero embodying distinct counter-narrative perspectives to the traditional heroism. Such a narrative, around collective struggles and fights against oppression, intricately highlights the complexities of societal issues, underscoring the imperative for “collective action” (Ganti, 2004). Through the deliberate choice to focus on the problem rather than singular hero and villain, the narrative framework ties the interconnectedness of individual experiences within broader societal structures. In the current cinema landscape, where the dominant structures often overlook the oppressed communities’ struggles, the film stands as a testament to the power of storytelling in challenging the status quo and advocating for social change (Booker, 2004). By shifting the narrative focus away from the traditional narrative framework, the ‘other’ narratives can offer fresh perspectives on storytelling, highlighting the intricacies of societal issues and the significance of collective action (Srinivas, 2015). Overall, through Ardharaathri Swaathanthryam and other similar works, filmmakers continually expand the boundaries of cinematic storytelling, crafting narratives that resonate with audiences and inspire action for a better world (Campbell, 2004).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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