

An Insight Into The Projection Of Psychological Disorders In Telugu Cinema

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Introduction

Telugu, the largest spoken Dravidian Language, has occupied its prominent place in all cultural forms of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Telugu Cinema, the pride of all Telugu people is the best form of entertainment to different sections of the society. The first full pledged Telugu Talkie cinema “Bhaktha Prahlada” that was released on September 15th, 1931 directed by Sri.H.M.Reddy was the dawning spirit for the development of Telugu Cinema. A multitude of movies were produced and directed revolving around different genres like dance, music, family, love, devotional, historical, comedy and the like. One such innovative genre that has been throbbing the hearts of audience is the depiction of “Psychiatric Disorders” in Indian Cinema.

Even though, this genre was captured in Telugu Cinema earlier in 1960s, today the trend reveals that this genre has gained the attention of audience. Many Legendary Telugu Directors have made their best efforts to portray the “Psychological disorders” in Telugu Cinema. Though a quite number of films projected the theme successfully in all Indian languages, some of them failed to protrude the “Mental Disorders” as per the set standards.

Need for the Study

Even though, much efforts have been made to project “Psychiatric Disorders” in Telugu Cinema, only a few of them could make it to get to the top. But a comprehensive study of the same in Telugu is insignificant. Hence, an attempt is made in this paper to focus on different types of Psychological Disorders portrayed in different films to fill the gap in the Literature of Telugu Cinema.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the Study are:

1. To analyse “Psychologically Disordered Based Films” in Telugu language and review whether such movies are capable of portraying the Disorders as per the Psychiatric Standards.
2. To highlight the capabilities and disabilities of the crew to handle such challenging movies.
3. Finally, to invite suggestions from few prominent Psychiatrists and Psychologists for the better projection of these movies.

Methodology for the Study:

The study is based on the Qualitative analysis and interpretation of results from the same. An attempt was made to collect “Psychological Disorder” movies in Telugu Cinema from various sources like Literature on Telugu Cinema, Telugu Cinema Journals, Internet and interviewing prominent Psychiatrists and persons who have the knowledge about the same. Analysis is also made based on watching movies and information from Web Sources. As per the available information, the present study collected information about 15 such movies.

Literature Review:

Maximum efforts have been made to collect all the available Literature from different sources, like Journals, Newspapers, Articles, and most importantly, information about the disorders is being collected from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association.

George Domino, (1983), in his Research article, “*Impact of the Film, “One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest,”*” on attitudes towards Mental Illness, opined that the influence of films have been neglected by psychologists, yet their powerful impact is shown in a field study. Prior to the release of this film, 146 college students were administered a questionnaire on attitudes towards mental illness. Subsequent to the release of the film, they were re-administered the questionnaire and the analysis indicated substantial negative changes in attitude in four of the five areas investigated after viewing the film.

David.J.Robinson (2003), in his book *“Reel Psychiatry: Movie Portrayals of Psychiatric Conditions”* discussed films that have attempted to showcase various psychiatric portrayals accurately. The main feature of this book is that it is based on DSM axes, along with the related symptoms and conditions.

Prasad CG, Babu G.N, Chandra P.S, Chaturvedi S.K(2009), in their article *“Chitrachanchala (Pictures of unstable mind): Mental Health Themes in Kannada Cinema”*, stressed that Regional Language movies in India play a vital role in portraying mental disorders along with the awareness and attitudes of society towards mental health problems. Kannada cinema has produced a variety of movies reflecting conditions ranging from psychosis to personality disorders.

R.Mangala,R.Thara,(2009), in their article, *“Mental Health in Tamil Cinema”*, discussed about the comprehensive view of the growth of Tamil cinema, and analysed the way in which mental health has been tackled by Tamil films. They opined that cinema is the effective medium to improve awareness on mental health issues.

Gurvinder Kalra (2011), in his research article, *“Psychiatry movie club: A novel way to teach psychiatry”*, reviewed that since long time, psychiatry as a branch of medicine increased awareness among the general population. Moreover, popularity of films showing various aspects of mental illnesses enabled educators and teachers to utilise them for education of medical students and psychiatric trainees.

Krishan Kumar, Arunima Gupta, Rajiv Gupta (2012), in their Review Article, *“Mental illness in India: A cinematographical review”*, viewed Cinema as a powerful medium to depict various societal problems. But psychiatric disorders have been portrayed in an exaggerated manner. So, there is a need to develop a methodologically efficient approach for the better projection of problems like autism, mental retardation etc. Utmost care need to be taken to ensure that only scientifically sound messages need to be transmitted to the lay audience.

Alekha Acharya, SahityaMaiya, Simon Laishram,(2014), in their article on *“Effect of Representation Of Mental Disorders in popular Indian Cinema”*, observed that accurate portrayals may leave a relatively correct impressions on the viewers. But there is always a possibility that the most clinically accurate depiction of a mental disorder is misinterpreted. It was

proposed that more accurate portrayals will definitely reduce the chances of misconceptions in the viewers-about the mental health in general and mental illness in particular.

Ratnakaran B, Anil S.S, Thomas S, Ampanattu SD(2015), in their Research paper “*Psychiatric disorders in Malayalam cinema*”, proved that Malayalam cinema is rich in projection of mental illnesses. It is commendable that different types of psychiatric disorders, along with various personality traits, find place in the respective characters. But, despite such portrayals of mental illness, majority of films don’t have a scientifically credible standards.

Analysis of the Study:

In this study, 15 Telugu Cinemas based on various Psychiatric disorders and mental illnesses were analysed. The real projection of the Cinema in the light of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) was also analysed. The analysis also includes the alignment of the opinions from prominent Psychiatrists and Psychologists about the correct portrayal of mental disorders in various films.

ACUTE PSYCHOSIS: CHIVARAKU MIGILEDI (1960):

Perhaps the first movie in Telugu Cinema that projected the *Acute Psychosis* is “*CHIVARAKU MIGILEDI*”, released in 1960. The genesis of the film based on philosophical view of “What remains at the end” was written and directed by Guttha Ramineedu. This film was a remake of the commercial success Bengali film “Deep Jele Jaye”. The story is based on the life of a nurse in a psychiatric hospital, played by the Legendary Actress Savitri, in the role of Padma in the movie. As a “Friendly Counsellor”, she is supposed to refrain from any emotional attachment and just to help the patient recover from mental illness. The movie focuses on the neglected emotional trauma of this nurse and finally, she becomes the victim of mental illness, where she is being admitted to the same ward where she used to be a nurse. “I wasn't acting, I couldn't”, the final words whispered by her reveals her involvement with the patient.

PHOBIA: PUNARJANMA(1963):

‘*Punarjanma*’, means Reincarnation, is a Telugu film based on *Pyrophobia and amnesia*, released in 1963 was directed by Sri.K.Pratyagatma. The film was remade in Hindi as *Khilona* (1970). Gopi (Akkineni Nageswara Rao), a son of a Zamindar (Gummadi), is a sculptor, creates a

statue so passionately and names it as 'Dream girl'. But unfortunately, the statue was destroyed by fire and Gopi gets a mental shock. Prior to this incident, Gopi is in love with his cousin Vasanthi (Vasanthi). The doctor observes that Gopi is able to retort to music and advises that a beautiful girl who knows dance and music as his caretaker may help him to become normal. Zamindar brings a beautiful girl Radha (Krishna Kumari) to take care of Gopi. After a series of events, Radha's priceless efforts makes him normal and the concluding note was happy with the reunion of Gopi and Radha. Akkineni Nageswara Rao excels in his role with typical gestures as an annoying mad patient.

DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS: SARADA(1973):

The movie "SARADA" based on the **Hysterical Amnesia**, portrays the story of an insane woman. Directed by the Legendary Director of Telugu cinema Sri.K.Viswanath in 1973.Sarada (Sarada), an innocent village woman was liked by all in the Village and also a doctor (Sobhan Babu) working in the village loves her. They wanted to marry with the consent of elders but on the date of marriage, doctor, while attending an emergency case dies in a river mishap. Due to this mental shock, Sarada loses her sanity and forgets everything. At the same time, a psychiatrist (Sobhan Babu) visits this village for a friend's marriage. Since he resembles her husband, Sarada stresses that the psychiatrist is her missing husband. On the other side, the psychiatrist (Doppelganger) knows about the miserable story of Sarada by their village elders.

As a Psychiatric Doctor, he wants to help her regain her sanity by acting as her husband. After some time, Sarada becomes normal and regains her past due to a mental mishap when her relatives abuses her. The Director portrays this conscious state of Sarada in the climax, when she closes the door and transforms herself into a widow by wearing white dress. Finally, she dies in the hands of her brother while crossing the river. The role of Psychiatrist as a trained professional in the film was rightly portrayed by the Director.

1. VASANTHA KOKILA(1982):

An amazing piece in Indian Cinema with a tinge of simple pleasures in life was Balu Mahendra's Vasantha Kokila, which was dubbed from Moonram Pirai-(Tamil) starring Kamal Hassan and Sridevi. Her portrayal as a mentally challenged woman, and her behaviour like a small child throughout the film reveals the spectacular act by the Director.

The film begins with a happy moments in which Lakshmi (Sridevi) is enjoying with her friends in a picnic and she meets with an accident. The striking performance of Sridevi will be cherished by the audience from this scene, as she was diagnosed with **Amnesia** after the accident. Incidentally, she meets Sreenu (Kamal Hassan).

A School teacher, Sreenu, after knowing her mental condition wants to give her a new life and renamed her as Viji and gets emotionally bonded to her. Sreenu heals the disease of Viji with the treatment from an ayurvedic doctor. But the real agony of Sreenu starts when Viji forgets her relationship with him. Kamalhasan puts his maximum efforts by acting and showing the good moments with Viji. All his efforts go in vain as she is unable to recollect her past. The phenomenal expertise of Kamalhasan's performance is a valuable asset to the movie.

2. **GHAJINI(2005):**

'Ghajini' was originated from the American film "Memento" which itself was adapted from the short story 'Memento Mori'. Chitra (Nayanatara), a medical student and her friends works a research on Human Brain and she wants to investigate the curious case of Sanjay Ramaswamy (Suriya), a prominent Chennai based businessman, who is diagnosed with **Anterograde Amnesia**. Sanjay loses his memory every 15 minutes. Sanjay uses the technique of taking photographs, writing notes, and pasting tattoos on his body to recover his memory after each cycle. Sanjay wants to take revenge on the death of his lover Kalpana (Asin). His main target is Lakshman (Pradeep Rawat), and when Lakshman hits him over the head with an iron rod, Sanjay after being badly wounded on the floor, sees a vision of Kalpana. Sanjay's brain remembers only a couple of incidents but with the encouragement of Chitra, Sanjay regains the incidents and kills both Lakshman and Ram, that concludes his revenge towards the murder of her lover.

MENTAL DISABILITY: ANJALI(1990):

Anjali, the movie about a small kid called Anjali (Baby Shamili), who suffers from mental disability was directed by Mani Ratnam in Tamil and the same was dubbed in Telugu. It is the story of a family, consisting of wife, husband and their two children. The joy of the family enhances when Chitra (Revathi) conceives and immediately takes a U turn when they came to know about the death of the delivery baby.

After a series of events, Chitra comes to know that her third child is alive and was suffering with Terminal Illness. She compels Shekhar(Raghuvaran) to bring Anjali (baby Shamili) back to home. But Anjali rejects her mother and her siblings dislike Anjali. As Anjali is not a normal child, she needs special care and attention. All children starts teasing Baby Anjali and her brother Arjun(Tarun) fights with them for teasing his sister and then starts bonding among the siblings. One morning, Anu (Shrithi) wakes up Anjali and screams for Anjali's reply but unfortunately, the little baby found to be dead.

The film focuses on the challenges faced by families in the brought up of a mentally ill child. Director ManiRatnam succeeded in his efforts to project Anjali as a mentally disabled child and to his credit, this film won three National film awards.

DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDERS: A. SPLIT PERSONALITY DISORDER:

CHANDRAMUKHI (2005):

Kailash (Prabhu) and Ganga (Jyothika) are happily married couple. Being wealthy, Kailash buys an abandoned palatial mansion on the request of Ganga. But later, they found it as haunted house. Eeswar (Rajnikant), whois friend of Kailash, is a Professional Psychiatrist from America and was interpreted as the student of famous Psychiatrist David.C.Bradley from Chicago University. He visits haunted house and studies it and comes to know that the ghost of Chandramukhi haunts this mansion.

The problem starts when Ganga begins to feel that she is Chandramukhi, strengthened by her childhood moments. In a possession state, Ganga develops a **Split Personality Disorder**. When unforeseen incidents start to happen in the house, family takes the help of Ramachandra Acharya, a Swamiji. But after entering into the house, he feels the presence of evil spirits and clarifies that it can be cured only by Eshwar. Finally, Eshwar uses an Innovative method in Psychosis (Psychodrama) to separate Chandramukhi from Ganga. The Psychiatrist succeeds in his efforts and Ganga was made normal. Directed by P.Vasu, the movie focuses on the role of a Psychiatrist in solving complex psychological problems.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER: .APARICHITHUDU(2005)

Ramu (Vikram) is an orthodox Brahmin lawyer, helping dispossessed poor people fight for justice, He feels that every citizen should be like Gandhi, and takes his thoughts very seriously.

Nandini (Sada), the woman whom he admires, dislikes him. Extreme emotions result in his transformation from the mild-mannered forgiving Brahmin to a ruthless avenger, Aparichitudu, a superhumanly powerful and brutally intolerant of corruption, insensitivity and lethargy in people, Aparichitudu uses Garuda Puranam to punish the offenders. Again he flips into Ramu all over. This collusion turns him into three different multiple persons at different times. Directed by S.Shankar, the film was believed to be inspired by the 1886 Robert Louis Stevenson novel, "Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde".

9. AWE (2018):

Awe is a Telugu Psychological thriller directed by PrasanthVarma. The film deals with Multiple Personality Disorder and social problems like Child abuse, Drug abuse and Sexual abuse. Kali (Kajal Agarwal) is the main character who is linked to all these characters in some way. The movie revolves around all these characters who are all in the same place (except Kali), which is revealed in the pre-climax. Finally, it is revealed that all these characters are multiple personalities of Kali. She was suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder. Moksha's torture with Yogi and Lobo, Radha's sexual harassment from men, Mira's addiction to drugs, Nala trying to get a job as a cook, Shiva inventing a time machine to see his parents (which later becomes a girl as to Parvathy), and Krish as a psychiatrist are all her personalities and reflections of her life. The movie ends with Kali shooting herself because of the burden that she has been carrying in her mind.

SCHIZOPHRENIA: ONE-NENOKKADINE (2014):

The story revolves around Gautham, who suffers from Psychological Disorder **Schizophrenia**. He is an Indian rock musician, missing 25 percent of his grey matter, present in the Brain's central part of the Nervous system. As a child, Gautham was convinced that he was alone, and assumes his parents are dead. He does not even remember their names or how they looked like. He is always in a state of confusion between Reality and Hallucination. He wants to take revenge of three men who killed his parents. According to his Psychiatrist, if Gautham can hallucinate a person other than the three men, he can be treated. That becomes possible with the help of Sameera, Journalist who loves him. With her help, he could be able to recollect his past and the incident where his parents were murdered. The Rubik's Cube which his father gives to him reveals the clue of a Golden Rice, called "Second Green Revolution".

Later he comes to know that his father was murdered by his friend for getting the confidential information about the Golden Rice. The Director Sukumar succeeded in showing the character of Gautham as a Schizophrenic person. The film also projects Parenting as an art when Gautham's mother explains the technique of memory reckoning system that helps him to remember the long route when he forgets to reach his house.

SADISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER: 11. SPYDER (2017):

Shiva (Mahesh Babu) is a dedicated officer working for the Intelligence Bureau, who goes out of what his job profile requires him to do, to tap calls, and listen in on the conversations of people in order to prevent crimes before they actually occur. One night, Shiva listens in on a young girl asking her friend for help as she is alone in her house and scared because there is no electricity in her house, whilst everyone else on her street has it. Shiva goes to the crime scene and finds it has been a brutal murder. He resigned from his job. To find out who murdered them, he sets out to "spy" the girl's chats and whereabouts. From an elderly villager, he learns the past about the guy called, Bhairavudu (S.J.Suriya). He suffers from **Sadistic Personality Disorder** and has an unusual desire to kill people and enjoy the victims' families grieving. Bhairavudu plans to kill Shiva's family but, fails. Through the use of technology and local ladies, Shiva finds and arrests him, and finally kills Bhairavudu and tells the media, "We have only killed the patient but not the disease. We shouldn't use technology all the time because we don't have time to spend with others."

BIPOLAR DISORDER: 12. 3(2012):

The first half packs with a realistic love track, slapping by parents, the girl showing more guts than her boy, dealt in a typical Tamil filmi style. The second half is another film, a psychological thriller which scares us whenever it journeys into the dark chambers of Dhanush's dangerously unhealthy mind. One day Ram (Dhanush) confesses his love, to Janani (Shruti Haasan). Ram and Janani marry without the consent of their parents. However, Janani is unaware of Ram's Psychological condition called **Bipolar Disorder**. Ram attempted for a suicide since he is unable to live with his serious mental disorder. The Hero of the film acted perfectly as the Bipolar Disorder symptoms demand. The most interesting feature of the film is that his real friend Kumaran (SivaKarthikeyan) stands with him all through the psychological struggling of Ram.

ADHD: MEMU (2016):

Directed by Pandiraj, the film, the Tamil film, “Pasanga 2” was dubbed into Telugu, revolves around lives of Navin and Naina, two hyper-active kids who become a huge burden to their respective parents because of their aggressive behaviours. Their parents are compelled to join them in a boarding school. Same situation continues there also as both the kids create huge problems and run away from the hostel. This is the time their parents are forced to meet Dr.Ramanathan, a Child Psychiatrist (Suriya) who in turn decides to treat them. His wife (AmalaPaul) is a Primary School Teacher who encourages to improve the unlocked potential of children. The highlight of the film is that for the first time, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) has been tackled with a lighter touch and a mature treatment by the Director. Suriya is very good as the psychiatrist and the way he deals with the problems and explains things through his doctor’s role has been showcased well. The movie aptly highlights the fact that when the child is in the womb, the way mother takes care about her physical and mental health plays a vital role in deciding the behaviour of the child.

NARCOLEPSY: INDRUDU (2014):

The Director Thiru's "Indrudu", the Telugu dubbed version of Tamil film 'Naan Sigappu Manithan' scores an ace for treating narcolepsy the way it is supposed to be portrayed on screen. By taking care of these trivial details, the makers have earned some respect from the audience. Indra (Vishal) suffers from a rare sleeping disorder called **Narcolepsy**(a sleep disorder that forces him to fall asleep whenever he experiences extreme emotion) since birth. Because of this disorder, he falls asleep for any emotional situations like happiness, anger, shock etc. He depends totally on his mother (Saranya) and he cannot go out single. No company offers him job knowing his disorder. One fine day, he accidentally meets a rich girl Meera (Lakshmi Menon). She helps him fulfill his desires which he had from his childhood. During the course of this time, they both develop love for each other. The way, Indra, an unusual disordered person faces the challenges and win over them forms the conclusion of the story.

ANTI-SOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER: RAKSHASUDU (2019):

Rakshashudu, a remake of Tamil flick *Ratsasan*, is a thriller in the true sense and the film revolves around Arun (Bellamkonda Sreenivas), who sets out in pursuit of a mysterious serial killer who targets young girls and murders them. After a series of murders, Arun confirms that it's being done by a psychopath with an Anti-Social

Personality Disorder. The killer continues his spree, but Arun is no mood to stop his pursuit. The story lines around the real life situation of a Magician who suffers many assaults since his childhood due to his abnormal appearance. The societal situations turn this soft natured boy into a Psycho Killer. The film definitely meets the standards of a person with Anti-Social behaviours.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

Based on the above 11 Psychological disorders depicted in 15 films, it can be concluded that the Telugu Cinema doesnot fall short of directors who can show case the genre of psychological disorders. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSM-5) clearly sets the standards of symptoms for every psychological disorder. Since Cinema cannot eliminate the element of Fantasy, some movies could not meet the scientific standards. In the process of this study, it was my pleasure to interview prominent Psychiatrist, Sri.Dr.Indla RamaSubbaReddy, the Director of Vijayawada Institute of Mental and Health Sciences,Vijayawada. When asked him about the scientific parity of these movies, he analysed that some movies succeeded to portray the disorder symptoms in a comprehensive manner. Thus, the following results and discussions can be analysed in this context:

1. The first film, Chivaraku Migiledi(1960) is the best example that how a strong minded person can turn up into a mentally retarded person, in times of acute stress conditions.
2. Equally Sarada also reveals how defense mechanism converts a person's state of mind into an unconscious state and after becoming conscious, the brain loses its ability to accept the hard faced realities, may also lead to the state of death of a person.
3. According to Dr.RamaSubbaReddy, the film "Vasantha Kokila", attempts to show Sridevi as a mentally challenged woman with a childish mentality again regains her previous life is not convincing. Because, 100percent recovery of memory is not possible in case of a brain damage in an accident.
4. Another interesting fact is that, in 2005, two movies relating to Dissociative Identity disorders(Chandramukhi and Aparichithudu) and one movie relating to Reterograde Amnesia(Ghajini) was released in Telugu Cinema, that were dubbed from Tamil. But all the three films were successful in portraying the Disorders as per DSM standards.

5. The film, “Awe” was the best example for a Multiple Personality Disorder. While interviewing the Psychologists, they told that, the incidents that disturbed the life of a person since childhood would have a profound impact on subconscious brain and hence, the abnormalities.
6. Although, the films, “One- Nenokkadine” and “Spyder” tried to project on Hallucination and Sadistic Personality Disorder respectively, it can be analysed that the disorders are portrayed along with a higher scale of commerciality.
7. Films like “Anjali” and “Memu” were successful in creating awareness about the Psychological disorders relating to children and the role of parents in handling the children and challenges faced by the families.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY:

Finally, on the basis of this analysis and based on the interview with the renowned Psychiatrist, Dr. Indla Rama Subba Reddy, and other Psychologists, the following valuable suggestions can be opened for the better projection of Mental illness in movies:

1. Since the way mental illness is projected in the narrative of the film is decided by the current state of the society, films should consider this arena of situations which are prevalent at that point of time in the society. (As in the case of Chivaraku Migiledi).
2. Before initiating such movies, Directors need to conduct comprehensive deliberations and consultations with renowned Psychiatrists in order to portray the problem as per the DSM standards.
3. Since films have the ability to captivate and influence the audience, focus of the movie need to be not only on such Genre but also the possible preventive measures to minimise the impact of the same on audience. Training audiences to be more critical and thoughtful after leaving the movie theatre could potentially prevent the public from being so deeply influenced in the future.
4. The analysis of above films reveals that, much more efforts are needed to expand the scope of such films to reduce the stigma prevailing among public about “Mental Health”. This necessitates the need for an authentic script writer and Director.
5. In this volatile pressurised environment, many psychological problems are on the rise, the Telugu Cinema Directors need to research more on such problems like Alcoholism, Drug

- abuse, and Suicide prevention and create an awareness about the negative impact of the same.
6. These movies can be utilised for teaching Psychiatry to Medical students to prepare them for practical exposure of their profession and deal with the psychiatric problems in a sensitised manner. Even all sections of the audience should review these movies in the light of rising mental health issues.
 7. Psychiatric students can also form “Core Groups” to conduct seminars and workshops on these movies to analyse the pros and cons of such movies and create awareness to all sections of the society about the same.
 8. The Censor board should establish a separate Regulatory Framework and body consisting of prominent Psychiatrists, Psychologists and Doctors in clearing the permission to such movies and concluding the authenticity of such movies.
 9. In a study, it was revealed that all mentally ill characters were depicted in a negative and peculiar manner. Instead of focusing on inaccurate and negative attitudes towards mental illness, it would be better to educate people about the power of movies and how they can affect perception.

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