

**Name of the Candidate:** Krishna Sankar Kusuma  
**Name of the Supervisor:** Prof. Mohd.Mujtaba Khan  
**Name of the Co-supervisor:** Prof. B.Balaswamy  
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### ABSTRACT

Caste is a distinct feature of Indian society that has led to divisiveness in the social order off late its impact is felt on every sphere of socio-economic and political life in the country. Dalits categorised in the lowest echelons in the caste system and incidentally the largest untouchable lot in the Indian social order. Although the Indian constitution has envisaged for their protection and uplift yet even after six and half decades of independence, the plight of the dalits continues to be the worse.

Status of dalits in Andhra Pradesh has been worst in many respects in comparison to their counterparts in other states. In response to the growing dalit movements in the state of Andhra Pradesh there have been coveted efforts on the part of the upper caste dominant groups to come forward as the self style saviours of dalits.

Cinema has been the medium to capture political and business power and the upper caste people have used it to remain in power. While in the power they used cinema to reinforce the caste system through the projection of dalit images. In this context dalit image in Telugu cinema gained significance. The study is based on an analysis of a selected number of Telugu movies produced in independent India.

Telugu cinema industry is predominantly controlled by the upper caste. Incidentally cinema happens to be an important source of civility in the wake of growing education. Telugu cinema also acquired the reform role as such dalit issues have come to occupy a central place in some of the Telugu movies produced in the late sixties. Despite the fact that there is no dearth of talent, be it in the field of acting, music, direction or scriptwriting among Telugu dalits. Unfortunately there is hardly any dalit who has reached the upper ladder in the cine field.

What so ever reforms towards dalit welfare are projected in the Telugu cinema or by-and-large a vision of the upper caste producers and directors. In other words it is observed during the course of study that the upper caste has acquired a new role as self styled custodians of the dalit cause. The dalit mass in the state pour in their hard earnings as cine spectators hardly realising that whatever is depicted in the films in the direction of dalit welfare. The move is essentially an eyewash.