

Editorial

Has the Fear of Law Disappeared?

The growing number of crimes is not the only concern for society today. What is even more alarming is the steady erosion of fear of the law and respect for the justice system. Recent incidents suggest that anger, ego, and the confidence of having political backing have become stronger than the authority of the law. A dangerous mindset is taking root—one that believes anything can be done and the consequences can always be avoided.

There are two major reasons behind this disturbing trend. The first is political interference in policing. When influential individuals believe they can use political connections to influence investigations, the credibility of law enforcement suffers. The second is the prolonged delay in the judicial process. When criminal cases remain pending for years, the certainty of punishment weakens, encouraging offenders rather than deterring them.

The recent incident in Guntur, where a woman was allegedly stripped in public, and the Krishna Lanka episode are examples that raise serious questions about the rule of law. Such acts do not occur merely because of individual arrogance. They often reflect a belief that political patronage can protect the accused from legal consequences. Many now appear convinced that the police can be managed through political influence and that court proceedings can be prolonged indefinitely with legal manoeuvres. Such perceptions embolden criminals and weaken public confidence in the justice system.

The conduct of prominent political leaders also sends an unfortunate message. When leaders repeatedly exploit legal loopholes, seek endless adjournments, or delay judicial proceedings, they create the impression that the law is negotiable. If those in positions of power appear capable of escaping accountability, ordinary citizens inevitably begin to lose respect for the legal system.

Restoring public confidence requires decisive reforms. Police investigations must be free from political interference, and the judiciary must be strengthened to ensure the timely disposal of cases. The rule of law can prevail only when justice is swift, impartial, and certain. A society respects the law not because it is severe, but because it is enforced equally and without delay.

Editor

The Story Is the Heart and Soul of Cinema

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In recent years, films have been directed by celebrated filmmakers, headlined by legendary actors, produced under prestigious banners, and backed by colossal budgets. They are promoted with unprecedented intensity and marketed as grand cinematic events. Yet, despite all this, many of them fail to achieve even the modest success of a genuinely entertaining popular film.

Neither cutting-edge technology nor dazzling visual effects can rescue certain productions. So-called “game changers” are fading away. Epic spectacles are collapsing under their own weight. Films projected as massive successes are often ending in disappointment. This is not a phenomenon confined to Telugu cinema alone; it is increasingly visible across many languages. Governments may permit special shows and allow higher ticket prices, but somewhere the connection with audiences is breaking down.

The primary reason is simple: many of these films lack a compelling story.

When hundreds of crores are spent merely on formulas, star power, and mass appeal, such outcomes are inevitable. The objective of many contemporary films is no longer to tell a meaningful story. Instead, it is to generate hype, assemble a constellation of stars, build gigantic sets, and insert a “highlight” every five minutes to keep viewers distracted and dazzled.

After watching several such films, one question continued to haunt me: How long will we remain immersed in these repetitive cinematic projects? How long will this capital-driven game, sustained by manufactured nostalgia

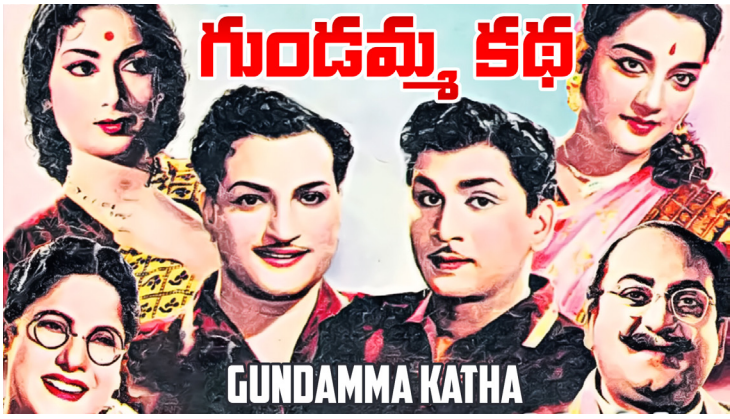
and illusion, continue? It will end only when good stories and fresh narratives once again become the true capital of cinema.

Cinema is not merely an assortment of moving images, thunderous sounds, glamorous dances, and formulaic performances. It becomes cinema only when all these elements merge into an experience that touches the heart and stirs the mind. That moment is the moment when a story comes alive.

Technological brilliance, innovative camerawork, and visual effects undoubtedly enhance a film's appeal. But what ultimately remains in the viewer's heart, what leaves an imprint that time cannot erase, is the story. A good story knocks gently on the door of the audience's emotions. It awakens a range of feelings and creates a pathway through which viewers can connect with the characters and immerse themselves in their journey. Once this emotional bridge is established, the bond endures long after the film has ended.

A strong story possesses a clear structure: a beginning, a conflict, and a resolution. Symbols and motifs enrich it with subtle layers of meaning. Regardless of genre, it is the protagonist's journey, the challenges encountered, and the eventual triumph or transformation that make a film cohesive and memorable.

Camera angles, sound design, and cinematography bring stories to life. Their purpose is to serve the narrative and strengthen it. Films that rely solely on visual grandeur or special effects rarely withstand the test of time. Earlier films often conveyed values and ethical insights through their stories. Today, in the overwhelming flood of so-called “con-



tent,” many films are swept away and forgotten. Yet, under any circumstance and in any era, it is only a good story that possesses the power to move human hearts.

That is why the story is rightly regarded as the heart and soul of cinema.



The story forms the foundational pillar of a film. It encompasses narrative structure, plot development, and themes that engage audiences. Through events and conflicts, it generates emotional impact. Most films follow a three-act structure: the beginning, the middle marked by conflict, and the ending. Conflict drives the narrative forward. It may arise between characters, within a character, or between individuals and society. Themes such as redemption, sacrifice, identity, and self-discovery pro-

vide depth and resonance. Equally important is the perspective of the storyteller—the director's vision—which shapes how audiences connect with the film.

Pacing and tone regulate the rhythm and emotional texture of a movie, balancing action, dialogue, and moments of silence. Characters form the emotional core of the story. Their choices and actions propel the narrative. The protagonist is the central figure driven by a clear goal or desire. The antagonist creates obstacles and generates tension. Supporting characters enrich the story, add nuance, and often provide moments of humour or reflection. Dialogue, character interactions, background details, and relationships all contribute to storytelling. On the visual level, costumes, makeup, production design, and the maturity of performances capture the audience's attention and deepen their engagement. Thus, in the architecture of cinema, story occupies the central place. The moment a story loses touch with reality and drifts aimlessly away from its

roots, the film begins its descent. However commercial cinema may be, if it abandons society and retreats entirely into fantasy, it eventually disappears from the audience's consciousness as well.

The films of an earlier era portrayed love, family bonds, and human relationships in ways that felt fresh and emotionally authentic. That is why classics such as Gundamma Katha, Missamma, and Mooga Manasulu remain immortal in the collective memory. Today, however, romance is often reduced to superficial spectacle; comedy is increasingly dependent on double entendres and crude jokes; songs become exercises in noise rather than melody; and music is measured by how much it can shake a theatre hall. If one faction-based film set in Rayalaseema succeeds, dozens of imitations immediately follow. Similarly, under the banner of “Pan-Indian cinema,” actors from different language industries are assembled, stories are stitched together like a cinematic khichdi, and the result is thrust upon audiences. How long can viewers be expected to embrace such offerings? That is why a good story remains the foremost requirement for a film's success. Audiences have already embraced films like Court, proving that strong storytelling still matters. The question is: when will our filmmakers truly understand this lesson and awaken to its importance? The future of cinema does not lie in bigger budgets, louder spectacles, or grander promotions. It lies where it has always lain—in the power of a well-told story.



Beyond Questionnaires: The Human Limits of Survey Data

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The quality standards demanded of data are rising, with international household survey standards rooted in the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) conceptualized by the World Bank. While such methodologies rely on multi-topic and longitudinal surveys, India's statistical architecture remains compartmentalized. Indicators remain spread across different surveys—labour in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, health in the National Family Health Survey and expenditure in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey. It hugely relies on the arduous journey behind these numbers: the realities of field surveys and primary data collection.

The Political Economy of Survey Data

India's survey-driven policy architecture has broken the social contract of information. By turning data collection into a diagnostic of policy performance, neutral inquiry has become negotiation. Policy architecture has incentivized mutual deception. When a single data point determines who gets a house or a toilet, honesty becomes a liability for the respondent. When surveys become marksheets, toilet construction can mask actual usage in declaring open defecation-free status. The respondent responds with strategic underreporting to safeguard welfare eligibility, while the overextended surveyor is forced to manufacture consent.

But these distortions do not begin on spreadsheets; they begin in the field. **Field Realities and Ethical**



Constraints

Surveyors navigate physical distances, social hierarchies and cultural barriers to reach respondents. Even after completing legal and institutional formalities, they must convince respondents at every step. As one field investigator put it, “Why should anyone spend an hour answering a long questionnaire when there is nothing in it for them?” As the National Sample Survey's pre-testing report on Household Income Survey highlights, a detailed schedule takes 100 minutes per household.

While building trust, especially with vulnerable communities, surveyors often become

silent observers of the very suffering they are tasked with quantifying. Despite rigid non-interference protocols, the researcher's conscience is often tested when a respondent perceives them as a saviour.

Fieldwork is also shaped by security concerns, privacy issues and suspicion. Surveyors often enter unfamiliar localities and repeatedly establish their identity and legitimacy amid apprehensions about data misuse or exploitation. Surveyors often exercise professional distance while navigating the social landscape of the field, defined by deep-seated identity-based sensitivities and local hierarchies. Any perceived alignment could com-

promise data objectivity and jeopardize personal safety and that of vulnerable minorities they are documenting. Consequently, maintaining calculated neutrality becomes an essential safeguard.

These challenges become even more layered when social norms shape who gets to speak.

Gender, Welfare, and Response Bias

Gender dynamics further complicate data collection. A surveyor noted that despite having permissions at every level, “the family refused to allow us to interview the woman,” forcing the team to immediately arrange for a female

surveyor. In another instance, a surveyor recounted how a husband denied permission to interview his wife and insisted, “I will answer on her behalf.” Such interventions limit women's voices and distort survey responses.

Gender-specific vulnerabilities extend to surveyors themselves. A study by IDInsight among their own surveyors reveals that female enumerators encounter disproportionate vulnerability, reporting a 5.96% higher incidence of gender-based bias and an 8.69% higher frequency of sexual harassment compared to their male colleagues in the field.

In India, household survey responses are shaped by welfare-linked expectations. Households that are not selected often confront survey teams, fearing exclusion from government schemes. In one instance, a respondent insisted, “My daughter-in-law is out of town,

can you write her name as well?”. Further, the public notion of state benefits from survey exercises comes at the cost of underreporting of assets and consumer durables by respondents, as they fear exclusion from BPL status or other benefits.

Evidence from the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis at Ashoka University posits a toilet gap in the Swachh Bharat Mission. The Government's administrative data report 85% toilet usage in rural households, whereas the National Family Health Survey reports only 65% use. Researchers attribute this divergence to underreporting by respondents seeking continued access to government schemes.

More concerning are ethical lapses within certain survey agencies, where fieldworkers reportedly secure participation through misrepresentation. By offering spurious assurances of monetary incentives or preferential access to government schemes, these practices compromise the sanctity of respondents' consent. In the case of student surveys, respondents are occasionally promised “employment prospects” that have no basis in reality. As reported in the pre-test of the Household Income Survey, 62% of respondents understood the purpose of the survey only partially, while around 13% reported little to no understanding at all.

When respondents are uninterested, fearful or misled, and surveyors are underpaid and overworked, credibility inevitably suffers. But flawed responses do not remain confined to datasets.

From Response Bias to Policy Misfire

A field investigator observed that during a before-after survey on sales and household finances under a scheme promoting women's entrepreneurship through di-

rect cash transfers, beneficiaries underreported their incomes, believing higher earnings might exclude them from future benefits. As a result, survey data suggested little change in revenue.

Similarly, another investigator noted that in surveys assessing financial and digital literacy, many women overstated their familiarity with technical terms related to banking applications and digital platforms, assuming such responses could improve their chances of employment or training. However, the stated objective was assessing the need for capacity-building rather than screening.

These responses can have downstream consequences: schemes that are effective on the ground may appear unsuccessful in official assessments, potentially affecting continuation decisions and wasting public resources. Likewise, when financial literacy gaps are mismeasured, NGO interventions may be misdirected, and marginalized women entrepreneurs may fail to receive appropriate support.

Why Policy Cannot Afford to Ignore the Field

As research and policy drafting increasingly rely on empirical methods and secondary data, greater emphasis must be placed on researchers' familiarity with field realities. Researchers should engage with on-the-ground contexts and understand how data are generated before relying on survey-based evidence—particularly when the data are not from their own primary collection. Such engagement helps identify gaps and inconsistencies across data sources and mitigates the risk of misinterpretation. Over time, closer interaction with field conditions can also strengthen the credibility and effective use of survey data in policy analysis.

(Views are the authors' personal)