



MUFFLED VOICES: SUBALTERN EXISTENCE IN THE MOVIE 'KANTARA'

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Abstract : Films are a widely consumed form of media that hold significant influence in shaping societal ideologies and reflecting its realities. The text emphasizes the social responsibilities of cinema and its role as a medium of social communication. Due to its extensive reach, it is crucial for films to shed light on the struggles faced by marginalized groups who are often silenced by those in power. This study delves into the representation of subalterns in the Kannada film Kantara, directed by Rishabh Shetty, in an effort to highlight the ongoing issues faced by these groups in our society. The film serves as a platform to showcase the challenges faced by subalterns and the need for their voices to be heard. In postcolonial literature, the term "subaltern" is widely used to describe the marginalized and silenced native peoples who were subjected to ruthless measures by colonial powers and imperialism. This concept highlights the power dynamics at play during the colonial era and the ways in which the dominant groups sought to maintain their control over the subjugated populations. It highlights the importance of viewing films not only for entertainment but also as a reflection of society. The given film, "Kantara," depicts the lives of marginalized individuals and explores the subaltern perspective, shedding light on issues of power, oppression, and societal marginalization. The study aims to critically analyze the portrayal of these individuals and the effectiveness of dominant power in perpetuating control.

Keywords: *Oppression , subalternity, discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

Cinema serves a purpose beyond mere entertainment, as it carries social responsibilities towards its audience. It functions as a medium of social communication, shedding light on both our conscious and unconscious awareness of social situations. Consequently, it is crucial that we do not perceive films solely as a source of pleasure, but also as a reflection of the society in which they are created. Since the early 20th century, movies have been addressing social concerns such as gender inequality, caste discrimination, and other societal injustices. This boldness in giving voice to the voiceless endows the media with significant power. By adopting this perspective, we are able to critically analyze the movies we watch and gain insight into issues that may be unfamiliar to us, yet still persist in society.

Kantara, a 2022 Kannada language film directed by Rishabh Shetty, depicts the lives of a marginalized group residing in a village under the authoritative rule of their landlord. The landlord's ancestors, who once held the position of king, relinquished ownership of the land to the villagers in exchange for inner peace, as demanded by the Demigod. However, as time passed, the descendants of the landlord decided to reclaim the land from the villagers. This reinstated the oppressive practices of the past, albeit discreetly, without the villagers' awareness. Consequently, the villagers were subjected to inferior treatment and were segregated from mainstream societal functions, confined within their own boundaries. From the outset, the landlord endeavored to present himself as a trustworthy individual to both the villagers and the audience. Nevertheless, his malevolent thoughts eventually became evident to everyone except the villagers.

The Subaltern perspective will be employed to analyze the movie, with particular emphasis on select dialogues, characterizations, and incidents. The term 'Subaltern' was coined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, derived from the Latin word 'sub' meaning 'of lower status' and 'alternus' meaning 'every other'. Gramsci used this term to refer to a group of individuals who are deemed inferior in rank based on factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender. The subaltern class comprises of tribes and marginalized individuals whose rights are denied by those in power. In the South Asian context, they are a group of people who are silenced and disregarded by dominant groups who consider themselves culturally superior.

This study, entitled "Muffled Voices: Subaltern Existence in The Movie 'Kantara'", aims to critically analyze the portrayal of marginalized individuals in the film 'Kantara' from a subaltern perspective. The research delves into the lives of the characters depicted in the movie, who are subjected to societal marginalization by the aristocracy through the deliberate deprivation of their rights and access to resources. Furthermore, the study explores the effectiveness of the dominant power in perpetuating its control within the system while remaining inconspicuous.

ANALYSIS OF KANTARA.

The distribution of resources on Earth is inherently equal, yet human actions have made it impossible to maintain this balance. Those in positions of power often seize control of resources and manipulate others under the guise of proper system functioning. This false perception has enabled them to take resources away from their rightful owners. The issue at hand is not that marginalized individuals are unwilling to reject the practices of their ancestors, but rather that they are made to feel as though justice is not even being denied to them.

The movie primarily explores the issue of subaltern existence and the resulting marginalization caused by the culturally dominant class. A specific group of individuals are confined and deprived of opportunities to interact with the outside world. The ruling dominant class has established boundaries that are concealed from the rest of the country. The powerful ruling group has created a false impression that the subalterns are receiving everything they are entitled to, while in reality, their oppressors are withholding their rights. The subalterns are unaware of their rights, and the oppressors are manipulating them into believing that they are being granted some of their wishes out of kindness, when in fact, they are being denied their basic rights.

From the very outset, the film endeavors to provide subtle indications of the corrupt system within which society operates. During the Kambala festival, a buffalo race is organized, and the victors are duly rewarded. Following the protagonist's (Shiva) remarkable performance in the race, the landlord approaches one of the organizers and inquires, "Will our buffalo win this time?" Upon receiving assurance from the organizer that their buffaloes will indeed surpass all previous records, the landlord nonchalantly remarks, "It doesn't matter who wins. They are our people after all." This portrayal of an honest and selfless landlord is presented before the audience. Subsequently, the landlord departs without even waiting for the results. Similar to the villagers, the audience too perceives the landlord as a benign figure, working towards the betterment of the village inhabitants. In the subsequent scene, an elderly man engages in conversation with Shiva while they smoke, stating, "The buffaloes are exerting all their might. However, ironically, it is the owner who ends up receiving the medal." This particular scene encapsulates the essence of the movie and the underlying concept being conveyed. It highlights the notion that even if an individual possesses the capability to emerge victorious, a powerful force will intervene and snatch it away, convincing them that they are undeserving. The announcement of the results further elucidates this issue. Despite Shiva's buffaloes outperforming all others, the prize is awarded to the landlord's buffalo, in accordance with his desire. At this juncture, the audience may still perceive the landlord as innocent, believing he has no involvement in this nefarious game. However, Shiva voices his discontent with the injustice, leading to a subsequent altercation. The landlord eventually intervenes in the dispute, urging Shiva not to create a scene as it tarnishes his reputation. Once again, the audience is left impressed by the landlord's demeanor. The awareness of oppression is only possible for the oppressed when it is made visible to them. In this particular scenario, the oppressor is not directly involved in addressing any of the issues at hand. Rather, they manipulate the situation to their advantage by enlisting others to engage in deceitful tactics on their behalf.

All the time, the landlord endeavors to establish himself as the advocate for the welfare of the villagers, assuming the role of their representative, thereby cultivating a divine perception of himself within the minds of the villagers. The film transports us to the village as its inhabitants prepare for Bhootha Kola, a religious ceremony in which the deity communicates through the Kola performer. The landlord ensures that all necessary arrangements are in place for the ceremony and encourages the villagers to inform him if any additional requirements arise. Upon learning of this, Shiva shares the information with his uncle, who responds, "Has there ever been an occasion when he has not provided sufficiently?" This exchange exemplifies the impact of the landlord's influence on the villagers' perception. They firmly believe that the landlord, their savior, is the embodiment of God, perpetually safeguarding them from any misfortune. Content with whatever provisions the landlord bestows upon them, they remain indebted to him indefinitely and refrain from questioning him on any matter, as they are prohibited from seeking assistance from anyone other than the landlord.

The community faces significant challenges in accessing education, particularly for women. Leela is the sole female resident to secure a government job, while others resort to hunting, logging, and menial work within the village. This isolation from the outside world is evident, with the landlord serving as the only connection to educated professionals, including a lawyer. However, the landlord's influence can be detrimental to the villagers' well-being, as evidenced by their response to a notice from forest officials regarding land encroachment. Despite their illiteracy, the villagers rely on the landlord's advice not to respond, leading to legal action against them.

Shiva, in response to the forest officer's warning about the consequences of entering the forest without permission, articulates the profound significance of land and forest in the lives of tribal communities. These communities heavily rely on the forest for their sustenance, and it holds great importance in their religious and cultural practices. Moreover, they perceive themselves as the original inhabitants of the land, a sentiment that Shiva expresses in defiance of the officer's accusation of encroachment.

"We have been living here much before your government came into picture. In that case, you need our permission. Do you have it?"

Discrimination is a prominent characteristic of the marginalized existence, as depicted in the text. The movie portrays a distinct divide between the landlord and the villagers, with the latter being prohibited from sitting on chairs in the presence of the former. This serves as an indication of the landlord's perceived superiority over the subaltern villagers. Furthermore, one of the villagers experiences physical assault from the landlord's assistant for merely crossing the threshold of his opulent residence. The landlord maintains a sense of aloofness, reinforcing his belief in his own superiority. He adamantly refuses to enter any of the villagers' houses, except on the occasion of the death of the Bhootha Kola practitioner Guruva, which is revealed to be a deplorable scheme orchestrated by the landlord. Astonishingly, his assistants are taken aback when they witness him entering the house of an outcast, leaving his shoes outside. He requests water to cleanse his hands after being touched by Shiva, whom he derogatorily refers to as a 'rabid dog', thereby exposing his deep-seated animosity towards the villagers. Up until this point, the villagers remain oblivious to the landlord's deceitful machinations. However, once Shiva uncovers the truth, he confronts the landlord directly, joining him in his dining room and partaking in the food that has been prepared for him.

"well, you walked into my house. Why can't I? times have changed landlord. I can come."

The final confrontation between the hired militia of the landowner and the rural inhabitants serves as a stark illustration of the depths to which an individual can sink in their relentless pursuit of power. Assuming the role of a mere observer, the landowner takes pleasure in witnessing his subordinates ignite the homes of the villagers. He derives a perverse sense of satisfaction from indiscriminately taking lives through his arbitrary acts of violence. Even when confronted with the revelation that he has inadvertently killed one of his own men, he dismisses it callously with a retort, "who cares?" This inherent malevolence within him knows no bounds, as evidenced by his willingness to target even a young girl with his firearm, only to be met with resistance from his assistant.

"Landlord, that is a child"

"If it survives, tomorrow the child too will claim its share of land"

Despite his unwavering determination, he refused to allow anyone to rise from the ashes and demand their rights. He sought to acquire all the resources from the rightful owners, the villagers, and seize power to rule for years to come. However, in the end, the divine intervention of Gulika came to the aid of the villagers and put an end to his oppressive reign.

Conclusion

Kantara, a socially responsible film, effectively depicts the fundamental essence of indigenous values, rights, and authenticity. It accurately portrays the experiences of marginalized individuals without delving into the realm of alternative cinema. This delicate equilibrium between mainstream and alternative cinema contributes to the film's ability to garner both national and international recognition. Consequently, Kantara can be deemed successful in amplifying the voices of the voiceless subalterns, who are silenced by the dominant and privileged segments of society. The aim of the study was to analyze the portrayal of individuals and the effectiveness of dominant power in perpetuating control. Through this lens, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex legacies of imperialism and the ongoing struggles for social justice and equality in a Subaltern society.

REFERENCES

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