



Ethnography in Tulu Films: An analysis of the film 'Gaggara'

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ABSTRACT

Tulu film industry is considered as one of the major industry in south Indian regional cinema. It is also called *coastalwood*. Tulu industry got established in the year 1971. The first movie is *Enna Tangadi* directed by S.R. Rajan. *Gaggara* (Holy Ritual) is directed by Shivadhvaj and produced by Gurudatta and M Durgananda under the banner name D M Cine Creations, Bengaluru. This movie attempts to show the tradition and modernity in the backdrop of *bhootaradhane*, which is considered as holy ritual in Tulu region. It involves the observance of *nema* or kola which signifies both cultural practices and religious beliefs of the people. This film has served a major role in giving a prominent identity towards Tulu region. The main objective of this present study is to find out the ethnographic aspects in the film *Gaggara*.

KEYWORDS : Ethnography, Tulu, Cinema

Introduction

Indian cinema celebrated 100 years of its existence recently. Tulu film industry, also considered as one of the profound industry in Indian regional cinema; located in the west coast of Karnataka and Kerala states. It is also called *coastalwood*. Tulu industry got established in the year 1971. The first movie is *Enna Tangadi* directed by S.R. Rajan who hails from Bangalore. Next movie titled *Dhareda Budedi* released in the same year produced by K.N.Taylor and directed by Aroor Pattabhi. By the succession of these movies, Tulu film industry took gradual growth and several producers came forward enthusiastically to produce the movies. More than 68 movies were produced over 46 years.

According to Apursansar (n.d.) Ethnographic film is the dominant interest and practice among visual anthropologists. There is no standard agreed-upon definition of the genre, and the popular assumption is that it is a documentary about "exotic" people, thereby broadening the term "ethnographic" to stand for any statement about culture. Some scholars argue that all films are ethnographic. There are so many arguments made by several scholars regarding 'ethnographic film' as a film genre. May be, due to that, ethnographic film is still considered as an undefined genre (as cited in darshan, 2016).

Gaggara (Holy Ritual) is an Indian Tulu ethnographic film with English sub-titles. It is directed by Shivadhvaj and produced by Gurudatta and M.Durgananda. The film includes actors such as Suchendra Prasad, M.K.Mutt, Jayasheela, Naveen D. Padil, Sundara Rai Mandara, Vinnie Fernades, Bhaskar Manipal, Sandeep Udupi and others. *Gaggara* brings out the conflict between the tradition and modernity in the backdrop of *bhootaradhane*, a form of spirit worship, popular in Tulu region.

Literature Review

Mangaluru, Hemashree (2007) critically argued, there is no market for Tulu story, culture, environment. Many films couldn't recover the money that was invested. So, we cannot consider Tulu as fully grown film industry. Tulu films do not have proper layout for production, distribution, and exhibition. In many films, Tulu culture has been unnecessarily implemented. This is one of the main reasons for the failure of Tulu films. People don't want to see their own culture in Tulu films; they expect something new. Tulu film makers are repeatedly making same mistakes. Most of the producers and directors make films just to get subsidy from the government; if it continues Tulu film industry will not develop. There is so much possibility to produce good films in fewer budgets.

Lakshmana, Thamma (2015) documented the origin and development of Tulu cinema from 1971 to 2014. He explains the ups and downs of Tulu film industry. Lakshmana pictured fifty films in

Tulu, according to the chronological order and gives information about each film. His book *Tulu Bhasheya Suvarna Chitragalu* is considered as handbook of Tulu cinema and it is the only book related to Tulu cinema, which is available.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this present study is to find out the ethnographic aspects in the film *Gaggara*. Another objective is to analyse the ethnographic aspects in this film.

Qualitative research design is used in this study. To analyse the ethnographic aspects, qualitative content analysis of this film is performed. Related articles and reviews of this film is also considered in this research.

Findings and Analysis

Gaggara (Holy Ritual) is an Indian Tulu ethnographic film directed by Shivadhvaj and produced by Gurudatta and M Durgananda under the banner name D M Cine Creations, Bengaluru. This film comes with sub-titles to help other vernacular language film viewers to view the film. The main casts of the film are Suchendra Prasad, M.K.Mutt, Jayasheela, Naveen D. Padil, Sundara Rai Mandara, Vinnie Fernades, Bhaskar Manipal, Sandeep Udupi and many others. Soon after the 'U' certification granted by the censor board on 31st of December 2008, the film released in a grand manner in one of the well-known and popular Jyothi talkies on 4th of March 2011 in Mangaluru (lakshmana, 2015).

This movie attempts to show the conflicts between the tradition and modernity in the backdrop of *bhootaradhane*, a form of spirit worship which is popular in Tulu speaking folks and in the surrounding regions of Mangaluru (wiki, 2015). This theme was written and scripted well by the director and the shooting was completed in 9 days in the month of December 2007 in Palli, a village near Karkala in Udupi district. With no songs and only the use of Gurushree's folklore instrumental tracks, the film was overall completed with just INR 11 lakhs.

Gaggara has bagged National Film Award for the best regional movie in Tulu. It is also the first Tulu film to participate in an International Film Festival of India (IFFI) held in Goa during 2008-09. *Gaggara* also received INR 13 lakhs as a subsidy from the government of Karnataka.

In this film, the concept of *bhootaradhane* has been brought out very vividly. It involves the observance of *nema* or kola which signifies both cultural practices and religious beliefs of the people. The holy ritual of *bhootaradhane* is called, *Gaggara*. This film has served a major role in giving a prominent identity towards Tulu Nadu and the neighbouring state Kerala.

Furthermore, it is the *nema* or *kola* that have been instrumental in safeguarding this cultural and religious belief - a tale of a small family of husband, wife, and a son. The film showcases the life of a person who dons the role of *bhootha* (Belongs to *nalke* community) in the traditional *bhootharadhane*, who has a decent work for five months of the year, the period in which he is also respected and revered as well as his trials and tribulations in the rest of the period, to make his ends meet.

Lalitha (2015) explains, the boy named Shankara has seen his father performing *kola* which is considered auspicious for the people in his village. During performance of *kola*, it was believed that *daiva* (Holy Spirit) comes in the body and guides people for a better life. He has grown up seeing his father begging throughout the year from the household of landlords and other rich families. His father persuaded him to learn and perform *kola*. He gets education and becomes a teacher with a salary of 10,000 INR per month. Meanwhile, his father meets with an accident and breaks his spine. As he was the only performing person in the entire village, there was no more *kola* performance. Being an annual ritual, landlords forced his father to ask his son to do *kola*. Shankara refuses initially, but some inner transformation provokes him to take it up and the dance was hereditary to him. He performs and blesses the village people accepting offerings and so on. When the event gets over, this young educated man requests seniors in the village to make some financial arrangements for all families spread in the area to conserve the *kola* art (*nalke* community people). He made them recall that none financially helped them when his father broke his spine and makes his point that being a teacher he doesn't need to perform *kola* for living. He was very firm to say that he won't perform in coming years. All elders in the village agree to his proposal.

The climax scenes are very emotional. He returns to his house and finds two *laddus* (a sweet) kept on a papaya leaf. It reminded him of his childhood, and finds his father is no more. He eats it cries uncontrollably. (Lalitha, 2015)

To dig on more about the whole concept of the *garraga seva* or *bhootharadhane*, this ritual enormously varies from village to village, as per the social structure of the society. The boundaries of present day district of South Canara in Karnataka roughly conform to the area of traditional 'Tulunadu', the land of the Tulu speakers. The region is a forty by twenty miles' rectangle bounded on the west by the Arabian sea and on the east by the precipitous slopes of the western Ghats. The northern and southern borders are rivers, which are transferable by foot during the dry season. (Peter J, Claus 1972 as cited in "udupi page", n.d.) There is a veritable pantheon of the *bhoothas*, which numbers about 350.

Bhootha worship has different types of folk music, to the tune of musician an impersonator dances and his foot step moves with heavy anklet called *gaggara* and in his hand *chaury* (Yak tail fan). An impersonator wears either metal mask or areca-leaf mask on his head ("udupi pages" n.d.). The make-up is attractive and dresses are made from simple tender coconut leaves. During the performance, musical instruments like *mouri* (wind pipe) *taase* (percussion) and *shruti* (wind pipe) are used. The performer dances to the tune of musical instruments and sometimes wears a mask. The ritual dance is very artistic and attracts all the spectators. *Bhootha* have their myths or epics sung during the performances. Some of the *bhootha* songs or epics are sung in the paddy plantation field by the women folk which are called *paaddana* in Tulu language. During the *bhootha* performance women render the songs with a small percussion instrument called *tembere* or *karande*. ("Udupi Pages", n.d.) This film exclusively reflects on these aspects.

According to director Shiwadhuj (2010), *Gaggara* movie has a social message which will help people understand the importance of preservation of Tulu ethnicity. His grandfather used to organize the *boothakola* ritual and hence this issue certainly is close to his heart. He directed the movie considering his personal experiences with the ritual. Also through this, he believes, that the government

and the locals can help this community in any way they can (as cited in Vishal Bhat, 2010). "I wrote the script based on my own experiences of watching people who were involved in the spiritual practice of *bhootharadhane*. Though this ritualistic folk dance is very popular in these districts, I have found that the practice is slowly dying down," says Shiwadhuj (as cited in Rajapur, 2010).

Gaggara will help in highlighting the problems of a dying folk culture of Tulu speaking people. The movie also displays the ill treatment meted out to the *bootha* kola performers who face seasonal unemployment and are looked down upon by the upper class.

Conclusion

Gaggara was a milestone film, appreciated and loved by the audience. More inspiring films as this, is the need of the hour; to revive Tulu Cinema and to rejuvenate the interest of common people in Tulu films. The film talks about a dying culture in Tulunadu called *bhootharadhane*, bringing about the emotions of people at the forefront. The film also helps in rebuilding the interest of movie-goers in Tulu Cinema. Good content, good direction, engaging screenplay and a well-rounded effort to bring-up quality driven cinema is the way to be followed, to sustain Tulu film industry and the interests of people in Tulu Cinema in order to graph the Tulu ethnographical aspects.

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