



Cultural Nationalism and ‘Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane’

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Abstract:

Cultural nationalism has worldwide influence today. The role of culture in uniting society is significant. But unfortunately, culture is working as if it is focussing more on the project of ‘othering’ some specific groups of the society rather than focussing on uniting the society. In view of this, a sensible citizen of the country can notice that the ruling and some other powers are directing it in a very systematic manner.

It is unfortunate that in a country like India having thousands of languages and castes, the ideologies which are flaring up in the name of ‘nationalism’ are creating ‘otherness’ among such different languages and groups of people instead of spreading uniqueness of India. It is a very serious problem today that this concept of cultural nationalism is getting used as a tool in the process of dividing and not uniting. The present article looks at how ‘cultural nationalism’ is making its impact on the erudite creative art like literature and on a very effective medium like cinema, taking for discussion both the novel and film *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane*ⁱ

I. INTRODUCTION

Several decades have passed since cinema has been transformed as a cultural industry. Though entertainment and commercialism are the principle and preliminary qualities of the cinema medium, beyond that it has social responsibility and concerns. This has been showcased in all the art mediums beginning with cinema. The ‘art of cinema’ which incorporates several other art forms and technologies in it has developed making its impact at a huge level on the audience regarding the social, cultural and political issues with the special potential which it possesses. At the same time, it plays a major role in constructing the concept “nationalism”. If the history of Indian Cinema is observed, initially the mythological, devotional movies emerged i.e., during 1940s-50s. In the later decade (1950s) the field of cinema took a turn to socially oriented films. Class and caste conflicts, feudal system etc., became the subject of cinema. IPTAⁱⁱ showed interest towards cinema during 1950-60 itself and consequently the intellectual movies emerged which brought international acclaim for Indian cinema. *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946), *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Mother India* (1957) are some of the examples.

1960’s revealed that the challenges India needed to solve were not merely internal. They sometime needed a military response. Goa Liberation War (1961), Chinese Invasion (1962), Indo Pak War (1971) made us conscious about the valour, patriotism and spirit of sacrifice in the armed forces.

A string of military films like, *Haqeeqat* (1964), *Hamsaya* (1968), *Lalkar* (1972) etc., and the partition related films like *Chhalia* (1960), *Garam Hawa* (1974) *Chinnamul* (1950) etc.,

Thus, when the history of Indian cinema is observed closely, the medium of cinema has strived hard at dealing with the concept of ‘nationalism’ through social, economic, cultural, political and all other points of views also. So, it can be claimed that most of the Indian nationalist sentiments were created by films. In the present article, it is attempted to look at the film *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane* which came out under the direction of Girish Karnad and which is based on the novel written by S.L. Bhyrappaⁱⁱⁱ against the backdrop of the concept cultural nationalism.

Key words: Nationalism, Cultural nationalism, Film language, Parallel cinema, Intelligentsia, Othering

Nationalism:

Nationalism is an ideology and movement characterized by the promotion of the interests of a particular nation. [Smith and James, (1996)2010, PP.9, 25-30]

'Nation' and 'Nationalism' are the major concepts which got established vehemently in the colonial countries. This concept occupies significant position for itself currently than never before in most of the countries of the modern world which were modernized through colonial rule. Apart from this, this concept has undergone the process of re-thinking and re-narrating in several ways in the colonized countries and by that means the phenomena of establishing these concepts are taking place. In view of this, cultural nationalism stands unique among the several faces related to nationalism.

Cultural Nationalism:

"Cultural nationalism is a form of nationalism in which the nation is defined by a shared culture. It is an intermediate position between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism."

[Nielson, (1999). pp.119-130]

Watson finds the political rule of a nation as its surface and the internal cultural signs/symbols of a nation as its inside. Thus for him, a nation has inter connection politically and culturally with each other. [Hugs Seton and Watson, 1977. p. 3-4]

Most importantly, cultural nationalism upheld the language, culture, history heroic stories of forefathers, puranas^{iv}, literature, life style, customs and rituals, traditions.

India and Cultural Nationalism:

A new social educated class had emerged in the colonial India as a result of the modern education introduced in colonial India by Macaulay. Importantly, it is the Brahmin community which enjoyed the first fruits of the modern English education introduced because of colonialism and reforms taken up by the British rule in India. Upon obtaining modern English education, this class accepted the western intellectual norms in the later years. It emerged accepting its traditional Vedic values and incorporating them with the western rationalism.

As Dr. Shivaram Padikkal observes, this English educated class got separated from India as it had assimilated an unnatural alliance between the Indian traditional values and western nationalism. But it does not mean that this class got accepted by the western culture. Thus, they ended up in the situation of becoming an 'aliens' in their own land along with going through a kind of dilemma in the colonial India of 19th century. This 'alienation' made these educated people to feel inferior. On the one hand they could not identify themselves with the native culture as they had assimilated the western rationalism and on the other hand they could not identify themselves with the western culture. This unstable situation made this intelligentsia to strive and search for its identity. It is this intelligentsia class with its alienated situation and a struggle for its identity which became active in the political, social, cultural arenas of India of the 19th century and strived hard to construct its social identity. This struggle was expressed differently in the social, political and cultural spheres.

While colonialism entrenched its hold in the colonized India, a stress and ambiguity could be seen in the relationship between east - west. This educated category awakens about its cultural consciousness. In the words of Shivaram Padikkal, the 'Unhappy consciousness' of these educated people depended strongly on the tradition and the anxiety about their culture and rejected the colonial rule. In this historical upsurge, the concept of 'nation', 'nationality' took shape in the second half of the 19th C. in the minds of these English educated people. 'tradition', 'modernity', 'history', 'progress' and such all other concepts get debated in one or the other way in the concept of 'nation' and 'nationality' of India.

The cultural nationalism which took shape in this way spearheaded its impact from time to time on several arenas like social, national, political etc., Now a days we can observe how the states are using this concept of cultural nationalism for achieving their self-interests. Some ideologies and misconceptions which are the yielding of such exercises of the states have made their own contributions. If we are to look at such misconceptions, they are as follows:

An orientalist and Indologist like William Jones came to the conclusion that Indian culture means 'Hindu Culture' and Indian language means 'Sanskrit'. The need of collecting, searching and translating the several events/affairs of ancient Hindus who have disappeared and declined is seen more today than ever before.

While discussing how such studies end up with simplified conclusions based on text oriented surface level experiences. Tejaswini Niranjana who takes up a special discussion of the translation exercises of the orientalist ideologists who made studies with regard to the culture and history in the colonial India during the 18th and 19th century, identifies the contributions of William Jones in the context of the mighty narrative of Hindu'. [Niranjana, 1992. p.12-15]

In the next part of the article, it is attempted to discern how such simplified takes on the cultural nationalism are spreading in the society through the powerful medias by analysing the film *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane* by Girish Karnad.

Analysis of 'Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane':

The film *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane* which came out under the direction of B.V. Karanth and Girish Karnad based on the novel written by S.L. Bhyrappa deals with the plot of a complex conflict between the educated-western -modern-capitalism and the uneducated-Indian-ancient-socialism. The film begins with the song 'Govinahadu'. In the first scene, Kalingajja offers 'Punyakoti'^{vi} temple to the village. In the novel Kalingajja builds a whole new temple whereas in the film the old temple is renovated. Behind this little change made in the film it seems that the director tries to indicate certain elements. The renovation of the temple might involve the thought of attempting to renovate the religious faiths. It might be the input of the director. Such small modifications brought over in the film prompts one to look at the plot analytically and this is the distinction of the cinema.

Bhyrappa has explained the context of the novel in his autobiographical piece that *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane* novel is the outcome of his visit to Amul milk dairy in the town Anand in Gujarat where he saw the artificial insemination on the cows and the methods used to milk the cows. The novel upholds the distinct and respectful place given to the cows in India. And, it is an endeavour to show the conflict between the western and ancient culture and faiths.

Kalingajja feels proud because the cow 'Punyakoti' which is revered like God was in the cow-pen which belonged to his household and its breed is still there in his cow-pen. He worships the cow as Goddess. Milk is not sold for money in their house though the cow-pen is full of flogging cows. All the milk of cow is for its calves and the only the remaining milk after the calf is fed is taken by them. When the Gowda of the village follows this tradition, the whole village was also living with the same beliefs. Krishna who is the only son of Kalingajja of such a family sacrifices his life while saving a cow of punyakoti breed from a Kuruba. Krishna's son is Kalinga and the protagonist of the novel/film. He has been to America for higher studies in agriculture and dairy -farming and comes for the funeral rites when Kalingajja passes away. As soon as he steps in there, he questions whether there is a necessity of shaving his head to conduct the funeral rites of Kalingajja and he does not get ready to do so as he does not believe in it. This leads to a conflict between beliefs of educated modernity and tradition. This behaviour of his meets with denial from the villagers including even the mother of Kalinga. Apart from this, Kalinga has got married to an American girl who was his fellow student in America. And she also comes to Kalenahalli.

The issues of Kalinga's white wife's colour, language, short dresses and the fact that she eats beef is a matter of curiosity and apprehension and at the same time a matter of disgust in the village. But, she is sympathetic towards these people as she had come there trusting her love. She is amazed by the customs and traditions of people here. The faith of these people in venerating the cows and in using only the remaining milk after the calves are fed to the full though the cow-pen is full of cows and in turning the hundreds of acres of land into a pasture land in this era of valuing everything in terms of money, make her look at all this with amazement.

The tradition and customs and the consideration of these. Village people appear as meaningless to Lidiya and Kalinga who have received higher education in America in the subject of agriculture and dairy farming. Kalinga fixes a pump set to the water in Pushkarani^{vii} of temple and pumps water to his land. When Venkataramana questions this saying it is the holy water of God and it is not proper to use it, he says it was just getting wasted.

This behaviour of Kalinga and Lidiya, very soon makes the village people witness the entry of tractor for cultivating land, Milk milching machine in the village. In this way, the education, western culture, modernity and technology confront the Indian ancient culture.

Whereas in the film, the ancient culture, beliefs, traditions and customs are faced by Lidiya through the character of Venkataramana Joyisa. Venkataramana Joyisa is the childhood friend of Kalinga. He is working as priest of temple. At the same time he has great reverence for his faith and traditions, he also has hold on English language. And, it is for these reasons that he becomes a good friend to Lidiya also. But, the differences between the two do not let them to become real friends. In one of the scenes, Lidiya questions him why do they revere the cow? Venkataramana says a cow is not an animal for them, but it is equal to mother and equal to God. He explains that there are 33 crore Gods in cow. When Lidiya asks why only the cow and why not the other animals like dog, pig? He gets angry. He gets fiercely angry once he comes to know that Kalinga and Linda have sold the old cows to the slaughters. He curses their family to remain heirless and even the western educated Lidiya is shattered on hearing the curse. Though she does not believe in any of these beliefs, she feels that it is inhuman to wish for the death of an unborn baby. (The same inhuman words can heard as uttered by Venkataramana when Kalinga comes seeking the milk of Punyakoti for their child. It seems that this inhuman behaviour is not accidental but intentional and horrible). It makes Lidiya look at this aspect challengingly. She decides to kill Punyakoti and gets it done. But, she does not feel like eating it. When the whole village comes to know about this, it adds to the suspicions the village people had about her and they attack the house enraged as they are by their acts. Kalinga admits their in-discretionary act and pays the penalty. But, the village people are not pacified with this and put a fence between the house of Kalinga and the village. Greatly affected by this, Kalinga decides to leave the village. Though this decision of Kalinga looks natural, several questions also arise here.

After his return from America, he gets a building constructed on the hill outside the village inspite of having a house already in the village and his mother living in it. And, he has decided to keep away from the village as he is living with his wife there. Being a native but an American educated one, it is difficult for him to live among such uneducated people who follow the outmoded beliefs. He also thinks it would be far more difficult for his American wife and decides to construct a house outside the village. But now, when village people erect a fence between his house and the village, he feels pain and insult. (In the scene previous to this, he erects a fence around his house to protect themselves from the villagers) Kalinga cannot bear the fact that he is kept away from the village. He keeps the village away from his house, but when the villagers do the same, he cannot bear it.

The film develops naturally until the point Kalinga decides to leave the village. On comparing the film with the novel, the plot has been taken out of the clutches of traditional frames and the director has attempted to make it a contemplative film which is laudable. Through bringing slight changes in the lead roles of the novel the film has come out more sensibly. Venkataramana Joyisa who represents the ancient religion, beliefs and customs behaves more inhumanly in the film. His role has been turned villainish as he curses the lineage of Kalinga and wishes for the death of the still unborn child of Lidiya. He does not give milk to the crying child and utters harsh words saying that the death of that child might help the religion. His words are diabolical and cruel.

In the film we can see that the characters of Kalinga and his wife Lidiya represent the educated -western-modernism, project an intense reaction against the religion, culture, traditions and customs. But, in the film they bear with the harsh words of Venkataramana and the suspicious behaviour and insulting words of village people. They try to get along well with the village people as far as possible. As a result of this major change made in the film, the characters of Kalinga and Lidiya get the sympathy of the audience. And, negative shade has been added to Venkataramana's character. Because of all these changes the film has come out very different from the novel.

But, some sequences of the climax part of the film are extremely unnatural, unscientific and illogical. For instance, the child is made to starve for two days because the wet nurse's health is not good and they go in search of Punyakoti for its milk (villagers remember that Kalinga was fed by Punyakoti when Tayavva could not feed him). It does not stop here, Venkataramana says that Lidiya has got the cow killed and hence her son will slaughter hundreds of cows when he grows up. He behaves very inhumanly when he refuses to give milk to the child saying let the child die.

In the climax part of the film, Kalinga goes in search of the cows which he had sold to butcher and the film ends with his futile attempts to reconcile with things and in his helplessness. A few such scenes which are in the climax part make the film again lean towards idealization and the triumph of Indianness. The intelligent audience can observe the dilemma in the director's understandings.

Was it inevitable for the director to bring these sequences in the film? Did not the director get complete liberty from the original writer? Such questions arise in the minds of viewer. In the last scene of the film Venkataramana returns to Kalinga the cows given as gift by

Tayavva, the mother of Kalinga saying that whatever Kalinga's wife said was right. He worshipped the Gomate, but he could never learn the humanity which was in the cow and he says that he will go away from there and learn some humanity. After this he sets off alone leaving the 'Gomate', 'temple' and the 'village' and the 'villagers'. This scene has the potential to convey several meanings. In the film, we can see the delineation of Indianism, westernism, tradition-modernity, socialism-capitalism, conflict between tradition and modernity and the crisis, ambiguity and friction between these. At the same time there is a delineation of hatredness, friendship and humanity among people.

In the works of S.L. Bhyrappa, the ancient religion, beliefs and devotion are deeply rooted. *Vamshavriksha*, *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane*, *Nayineralu* are just some examples for it. But, the distinctiveness of these works is that inspite of the glorification of the religious customs and the patriarchal social system and inspite of having entrenched these systems, the audience show empathy for the victims. The characters like Katyayini of *Vamshavriksha*, Hilda of *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane*, Venku of *Nayineralu* are some examples. And, it is such characters which fascinate art film directors like Girish Karnad, Girish Kasaravalli^{viii} as we can see in their films.

It is one of the characteristics of art films to weave a story centering around the victims of the religious, social and cultural ideologies and policies. In view of this *Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane* is a one great attempt towards cultural nationalism.

End Notes:

ⁱ Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane Godhuli is a 1977 Indian drama film co-directed by Girish Karnad and B. V. Karanth

ⁱⁱ Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) is the oldest association of theatre-artists in India.

ⁱⁱⁱ S.L. Bhyrappa: Santeshivara Lingannaiah Bhyrappa is a Kannada novelist, whose work is popular in the state of Karnataka, India

^{iv} Puranas are the Hindu religious texts that are part of the Vedas.

^v Govina Haadu is a folk song in Karnataka which tells the story of a holy cow which believes truth is God.

^{vi} Punyakoti is a holy cow, believed that truth is God. The story of Punyakoti comes in a folk song called 'Govina Haadu'.

^{vii} Pushkarani is the well which contains the holy water.

^{viii} Girish Kasaravalli (born 3 December 1950) is an Indian film director, in the Kannada cinema, and one of the pioneers of the Parallel Cinema.

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