

A Cinematic View of Kantara: An Indigenous Tale

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India's sacred heartland glimmers with series of Adivasis, its indigenous people. Preserved in the reason of time, their tradition and mythology have remained in our subconscious like primordial memories (Singh). The history of Indian cinema has less frequently depicted native cultures, only a small number of movies explicitly identify indigenous material. Films such as *Newton*, a critical satire about an electoral employee (2017), *Testimony of Anna*, atrocities of Society upon a Woman (2020), *JaiBhim*, about the Justice of poor Adivasi man (2021), *Kantara*, a representation of cultural ceremonies with various themes (2022), *Dhabari Kuruvi*, a girl's convention to refuse the rules of society (2022) are top five films about Adivasi culture, custom and rituals over the past five years.

The actor, director, and writer of *Kantara* –Rishab Shetty strongly believes in his theory that cinema will be more universal if its content is regional and trust is reposed in regionalism (Khanjane). Rishab Shetty, the filmmaker, has succeeded in his goal of bringing important concerns affecting the indigenous people to light as opposed to the elite class.

Kantara in the Kannada language is 'mysterious forest', another interpretation of it is '*mayavijungle*', a location where people can unite with divine forces and nature. The title is quite pertinent as the woodland is the focal point of the entire narrative. *Kantara* narrates the tale of the struggles between the elite class and forest residents, man and environment, and between urban and rural using cultural, traditional, and ritualistic elements of the coastal area. It could be referred to as "willing suspension of disbelief", somewhere explained by Coleridge.

Kantara is an Indigenous tale with ubiquitous bystander that illustrates how unique the indigenous culture is. Infact, here is an opinion about how Indian cinema has been losing touch with its roots and not finding original stories from this heartland which is very diverse and vast, a treasure trove of stories (Chalapathi 2). The Kantara episode heavily incorporates native culture and native mysteries and themes of tribalism, folklore, eco-feminism, and other similar concepts as feudalism and corruption. It is a cohesive synthesis of consumerist politics' schematics and consciousness although adhering to indigenous principles.

Globalization has not considerably added to the flow of indigenous narratives into the popular media and its various manifestations like news and magazine articles, literary texts, radio broadcasts, web series, television series, and more. The popular media space became accessible to indigenous people only after they were identified as scheduled tribes. (Basu and Tripathi 2)

A symbol of indigenous culture is presented by Kantara that has carried previously unnoticed efforts of promoting native culture including unknown tales about regional traditions to a global audience. The writer and director Rishab Shetty Prevails in the quest to bring substantial issues affecting the tribal people to the spotlight. The movie makes an effort to grab the audience's interest by introducing folklore and the initial stages where the local deities called 'Daiva' according to tradition is said to live in the mystical Forest of the title who protects and provides for the inhabitants and local populace. A king once made an agreement with the locals to give them half of the forest area where he arrived in pursuit of tranquility and quiet, considering that 'Daiva' can grant him serenity. However, the king's heir attempts to violate his promises further disrespecting the local deities and their customs. Next, the action that the forest inhabitants take in response forms the center of the entire plot.

Rishab Shetty, who self-identifies as a member of the group, was the one who had the idea for Kantara, employed incredibly down-to-earth narration and symbolism. Anupama Chopra talks about his roots in the town where the movie is set, his ancestry, and how the whole thing is a

reflection of his pride in his heritage and his connection to the place. The entire crew, he continued, stayed in the area for more than a few months while filming the movie. When questioned about the work's relevance, Shetty responded, "**The more local, the more global**" (Film Companion).

A wonderful fusion of man and nature is seen with optimism and gratitude for supernatural events when Shiva acquires the stripe between the people and the king's lineage. Early in the movie while strolling, his parentstell -

'But we are here to serve Panjurli. Where can we go forsaking our Gods? Son, you know where we humansgo wrong? We assume that we own everything around us. But we forget the true owner of it all. Once we learn the ultimate truth we can live peacefully'(Basu and Tripathi 8).

The narrative starts in 1847 when a monarch travels to the local deity/Demi-GodPanjurli in pursuit of peace on being asked for something in exchange he provides his land as an investment, with the assurance that the land will never be demanded by his fore fathers in return.Ifthey do, they would be subjected to the curse of *GulingaDaiva* with distraught results. As the years went by, descendrs began to make attempts to reclaim the territory dismissed by BhootaKola performer being Daiva Panjurli's mouthpiece. Then came the successor's inapplicable death persuaded by the disappearance of the BhootaKola performer in 1970 who disappeared after running into the forest.Next, the life of Shiva, son of a kola performer, servesas the basis of the entire plot who was a witness to all the occurrences with some additional subplots. Shiva's clashes with the current king's successor, devotion to the people,the contribution of his cousin Guruva, and his quest for reconciliation through the ritual of the Bhootakola are described in the remaining portion of the movie with the interference of government forest officer's orders to preserve the forest in 1990.

"Kantara is raw, Kantara is wild, Kantara is unapologetically local" (Bhattacharjee and Chakraborty). Symbols played a crucial role to

create the environment of tribalism. The first and most important is 'Bhootakola', an emblem of Demi-God Panjurli, who is believed to embrace the kola performer while doing the performance. The entire idea is centered on the ritual that is considered to have brought about redemption for both Shiva and his father. The second, screaming is ideally considered the presence of Daiva Panjurli. Daiva demanded the monarch to grant tribal people, access to the land up to the edge of his screams. Following this, the rest of the kola performances showcase a series of yelps from the performer. In the climax sequence where the spirit of Gulinga Daiva comes to life to avenge the death of the tribal people, a series of different yelps surface. Every Yelp reflects different emotions' (Basu and Tripathi 8). Third, nightmares/visions of Shiva stimulate him more and more to take action. His childhood memories of his father's vanishing into the forest, his brother's death cry, a boar harming him, and eventually, a vision of the light in the forest all played significant roles. Fourth, the forest serves as a character and a witness to the entire narrative. The fifth, Kambala, a buffalo race performed annually in particular Tulu Nadu region of Karnataka most specifically performed by farmers of coastal areas. Others are Yakshana (folk dance), Paddana (Tulu folk song), Devardhane (worship of guardian spirits), Nagardhane (snake worship), and so on. . . . The 1990s era is vividly portrayed by the widespread use of magazines and telephones for updates and data.

"The movie presents the account of human-to-human conflict at a greater extent. The film subtly offers an insight into the fabric of caste politics in these tribes. The binaries of the Brahminic and the non-Brahminic, the upper and the lower castes, become tangible" (Basu and Tripathi 2022). Issues between the top and poor classes, the authorities and indigenous people are put forward in Kantara. In contrast to the elites, the Adivasi frequently eat while seated on the ground. Another is following his visit with Shiva, the King inheritor Devender Suttooru (Achyuth Kumar) washes his hands since he thinks Shiva an inferior being. King's attempts to seize the wood properties allotted to locals is a major concern.

Forest residents and government forest authorities are engaged in an additional battle over forest rights. The disputes between Shiva and Muralidhar, the forest officer, are another instance. As being an elite class, he has a wary eye towards the villagers and does not believe in local superstitious tales.

Shiva – How dare you speak wrong about our Daiva? Do you know the story of our God? Should I narrate the story to you?

Muralidhar – Somebody narrated it to your father, and he narrated it to you. You have been roaming like a vagabond narrating this story to everyone. (Shetty)

But in the final chapter, everyone joins forces to combat the hierarchy's conspiracy.

Centricity of toxic masculinity and the role of women is another thing to consider. *Kantara* is incredibly inspirational in many spheres with the exception of the role of women. Compared to male characters, women's screen time is severely limited even for the heroine. The way Shiva is portrayed is a clear exaltation of all the traits that the wider Indian psyche considered to be masculine such as incapable to tolerate wrongdoing, a compassionate and courageous fighter, protector of the weak, and eager to defend the vulnerable, his activities are the main focus of the plot. His arrival at Kambala, a buffalo ride, should be noted as well as his exact retribution for the elimination of his father. He is portrayed as stereotypically muscular such as being obstinate, uncaring, and contemptuous of even his heroine. But despite everything, the girl is still completely devoted to him and always obeys his orders. We often don't see a girl's arrival as riding on buffalo which is a symbol of masculinity.

It is impossible to ignore the overt misogyny and patriarchal undertones in the film. The most offensive action in the film as well as a major disrespect to the female character, including pinching the heroine on her waist, hitting her, and tugging her hair in order to gain attention and to present affection. Despite all these bizarre actions, he is still regarded as the manly one.

However, there are very few women who are actively involved. Leela (Sapthami Gowda), the alleged heroine, is viewed from a masculine point of view or a victim of the male gaze. Her only behavior is to follow the protagonist and hover around him being a faithful partner despite having few dialogue scenes. When we see Leela working as a forest ranger and riding a bike, there are some illusions of women's emancipation. However, the ride only took place once while the hero was in custody, typically she took a seat behind him. On the other side, she consistently loiters around Shiva rather than carrying out her role as a forest guard, when Muralidhar reprimands her for serving Shiva while receiving government pay for doing so. Another woman character is Kamala (Manasi Sudhir), Shiva's mother, portrayed as someone with little acumen and taken significantly as a frustrated irritable elderly woman. Appears as a subservient woman.

However, Rishab Shetty later said that he posed Shiva in this way to demonstrate his carefree and light-hearted attitude towards life, which is completely at odds with Bhoota kola or traditional belief. (Film companion).

Ultimately, One of the strongest indigenous blockbusters of the year Kantara is, which has made its way to the top. Films strike to reveal localized stories to global view ship that are obscure or undiscovered to other Civilizations. Since artistic qualities can convey more than a simple storyline, it is accurate in portraying tribal or indigenous life which might be taken up as a partially appreciated mirror contemplation of a feudal community that has not been previously exposed. Kantara is unmistakably populist and incredibly artistic. The role of Shiva played by Rishab Shetty, the writer and director, with horrific and mesmerizing plot elements and the captivating masculinity of Shiva recreated with his lived experiences. The film does a good job exploring local religion and superstitions regarding *Daiva Panjurli*, the pet boar of Goddess Parvati, killed by lord Shiva and again taken back to life was made the protector of people on earth. Secondly, *Gulinga Daiva*, the Kshaterapala of that particular reign of Tulu Nadu, Thirdly, the idea of execution of *Bhoota Kola* is seamless. Poor and poorly-treated depiction of women may be

regarded as a detriment and its focus on men undermines it and makes unsatisfying. But ultimately, Kantara, a regional story, touches on important cultural political, and economic issues and is a success on the big screen. The aspect of the native way of life is effectively depicted in the film.

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