

Critical Analysis on History of Kannada Cinema

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Abstract

Kannada film industry is indeed an extension of Kannada theatre. The early film personalities had been actively involved in Kannada theatre world. The Kannada film industry had to struggle during 1929 – 1934. Early Kannada films had to struggle against western culture. The film theatres were not equipped well to exhibit silent and talkie films to the audience. The Kannada film industry had recovered from certain setbacks after 1941. About 24 films were made in Kannada after independence. In 1950s, Kannada film industry had not gained any identity from the point of view of production of commercial and art films. During 1971 – 1980 several art films and new wave films were made in Kannada. About 138 Kannada films were produced during the decade of 1970s. The decade of 1980s witnessed the production of a large number of commercial Kannada films. There were remarkable economic changes and modifications during 1991 – 2000 in the entire world. Most of the Kannada films were commercial films based on the technique of re-make. In the new millennium, Kannada film industry has grown remarkably. About 80 to 100 films were made every year in Kannada. Kannada film industry has carved a niche for itself in the national and international film avenues.

Kannada film industry has also incorporated advanced film production technologies and strategies in terms of recording, background music, film song, film editing, special effects, DTS, digital development, use of advanced cameras and so on. The latest Kannada films have also excelled in technological applications.

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Introduction

Kannada film industry is indeed an extension of Kannada theatre. The early film personalities had been actively involved in Kannada theatre world. Kannada films can be classified broadly into commercial films and new wave films. Most of the Kannada films are commercial films which are meant for entertainment and profit making. The new wave films are less in number but they have enriched the Kannada film industry through qualitative and creative contributions. The early Kannada films were based on folklore. The Kannada film industry has grown remarkably during different stages.

Early Kannada Films

Gubbi Veeranna laid solid foundation for the development of Kannada film industry. He had established 'Karnataka Film Studio' in 1928. This organization had produced 'Hari Maya' in 1928 under the direction of Y.V.Rao. Haribhai Desai had established 'Surya Film Company' in 1929 and produced about 38 films since 1933. Gubbi Veeranna had produced films such as

‘Song of Life’ (1930) and ‘His Love Affair’ (1931) under the banner of his company. During 1930s Bangalore had become a prominent film making centre in the state.

In 1931, about 40 silent films were produced by the ‘Surya Film Company’. Mohan Bhavani had produced ‘Vasantha Sena’ in 1931 under the inspiration of T.P.Kailasam, an eminent dramatist. Noted literary personality Shivarama Karanth had directed ‘Bhoota Rajya’ and ‘Domingo’. Haribhai Desai and Bogola D.Dave had established film studio and prepared grounds for the production of Kannada films in the state. Y.V.Rao, Himamshu Shastri, Gubbi Veeranna, J.D.Pawar, M.V.Subbaiah Naidu, H.L.N.Simha, Rajamma, Parvatamma, G.Sundaramma, B.Jayamma, Lalitapawar and others were the popular film stars of Kannada cinema in the early stage.

Seetaramaiah (1984:07) observes: “In the beginning, Kannada people were not interested in the development of Kannada cinema. The people had to get entertainment through South Indian Films. Madras had become a prominent film making centre with basic infrastructural facilities and film making opportunities. Several films were made in Madras. Kannada film makers and film stars had to live in Madras for making films without adequate capital resources and other facilities”.

The Kannada film industry had to struggle during 1929 – 1934. The active involvement of Kannada theatre personalities, efforts of film makers, involvement of Kannada writers and encouragement by local audience were primarily responsible for the growth of Kannada film industry. Gubbi Veeranna single handedly promoted Kannada theatre and cinema. He constructed film theatres in Bangalore, Tumkur and Tiptur for exhibition of Kannada films. He also encouraged G.V.Iyer, Rajkumar, Balakrishna, Narasimharaj, B.V.Karant and many other talented actors. B.V.Karant had received professional training in Mumbai and produced two silent films in Kannada. About 175 Kannada silent films were made by 1934 according to Modaliyar (1998:02).

Kannada Talki Films

‘Sati Sulochana’ was the first Kannada talki film produced by Chamanlal Dungaji under the guidance of Y.V.Rao. This film was able to make profit through exhibitions in Bangalore.

The film had attractive conversation, song, dance, war situations and other elements. M.V.Subbaiah Naidu, R.Nagendra Rao, Lakshmi bhai and Tripuramba had attracted the audience through their talent and capacity.

Parshwanath Altaker had directed another film namely 'Bhakta Druva' by actively involving G.Nagesh Rao, M.G.Marirao, T.Dwarakanath, Devudu Narasimha Shastri, Lakshamma, P.Kanaka Lakshamma, V.Sunandamma and other theatre personalities. Rao (1996:06) recalls: "During 1950, Kannada film industry did not have a strong business foundation. All the films were made in Madras. About 28 talkie films were made during 1934-1950 in Madras. Limited numbers of Kannada films were made due to lack of capital, manpower and other facilities".

Early Kannada films had to struggle against western culture. The film theatres were not equipped well to exhibit silent and talkie films to the audience. The film personalities had to struggle to adjust with the new talkie films. In 1935, Gubbi Veeranna had produced 'Sadarama' which was a popular play in Kannada. Murarachar, Gubbi Veeranna, Aswathamma, Adimurthy, B.Jayamma and B.Sundramma were the prominent film personalities. The film makers had to struggle to exhibit their films in the absence of suitable theatres.

In 1936, H.L.N.Simha directed 'Samsara Nouke' under the producership of Rajagopala Chettiyar brothers of Salem. The film had won over the audience through the cinematic excellence of B.R.Panthulu, M.S.Madhavarao, Dikki Madhavarao, M.V.Rajamma, S.K.Padmavati and V.Sarojamma. This film fetched dividends to the producers in South India. In 1936, 'Mysore Sound Studio' was established by a prominent businessman in transportation sector. The company had produced 'Rajasuyayaga' with the involvement of K.R.Seetaram, Dwarakanath, B.Jayamma, Basavaraja brothers and others.

In 1937, three films 'Chiranjivi', 'Purandaradasa' and 'Rajasuyayaga' were produced in Kannada. There was a vacuum in Kannada film making due to the impact of World War II. The ruler of Mysore state had visited Germany and produced couple of documentaries on environment and health subjects, writes Vruttantha Patrike (1937). The Kannada film industry had experienced certain problems during this period.

The Kannada film industry had recovered from certain setbacks after 1941. Subbaiah Naidu, R.Nagendrarao and Meyappa Chettiyar had produced 'Vasanta Sena' which was popular. Gubbi Veeranna had produced 'Subadhra' under the direction of Pullayya. He had involved Honnappa Bhagavatar, Vasudeva, Girimayi, B.Jayamma and other talented personalities. The film had brought name and fame to B.Jayamma. R.Nagendrarao had made another film 'Vasanthasena' in 1941 which had gained prominence through literature, music, dance and acting elements.

Gubbi Veeranna's 'Jeevana Nataka' (1942), K.Subramanya's 'Bhakta Prahlada' (1942), A.D.Krishnaswamy's 'Harishchandra' (1942), K.Subramanya's 'Krishna Sudhama' (1943), K.Hirannaiah's 'Radharamana' (1943), Gubbi Veeranna's 'Mahabhakte Hemareddy Mallamma' (1945), B.Vittalacharya's 'Krishnaleela' (1946) and R.Nagendrarao's 'Mahatma Kabir' (1947) were the prominent films of 1940s. During this period, Kemparaj Urs, Shanta Heblikar, M.G.Marirao, B.Jayamma, K.V.Achyutharao, A.N.Sheshachar, M.V.Rajamma, Chandramma, M.V.Subbaiah Naidu, Lakshmibhai, G.V.Iyer, R.Nagendrarao, T.N.Balakrishna, K.Hirannaiah, Vaidyanath Bhagavatar and Hunsur Krishnamurthy were the prominent film personalities. Kannada film industry had produced about 16 talkie films during this period.

Kannada Films after Independence

About 24 films were made in Kannada after independence. This period is known as the growth period of Kannada film industry. Mahathma Pictures, R.N.R Pictures, Pampa Pictures and other studios were established in the state. C.V.Raju's Krishnaleela (1947), Kemparaj Urs and R.M.Veerabhadraiah's 'Geetanjali' and Bhakta Ramadasa' (1948), D.Irani's 'Bhaktakumbara' (1949) and M.A.N.Iyengar's 'Sati Tulasi' (1950) were the popular films during this period. Prominent film personalities include-Kemparaja Urs, Marirao, Lalita, Usha, Rathnamala, Honnappa Bhagavatar, B.Raghavendrarao, Lakshmibhai, Pandaribhai, Jayanti, Mahabalarao, M.S.Subbanna, B.Jayasri and others. There were limited number of Kannada films made by the leading producers and directors. These films had not achieved commendable success in the box office economics.

In 1950s, Kannada film industry had not gained any identity from the point of view of production of commercial and art films. B.M.S.Film Ltd and Brindavan Film Ltd companies were established in Karnataka during this period. The Kannada film industry was able to produce about 75 Kannada films during this period. 'Shani Mahathme' (1951), 'Srinivasa Kalyana' (1952), 'Soubhagya Lakshmi' (1953), 'Gunasagari' (1953), 'Devakannika' (1954), 'Kanyadana' (1954), 'Adarsha Sati' (1955), 'Kalidasa' (1955), 'Bhagyodaya', 'Bhakta Vijaya' and 'Haridasa' (1956), 'School Master', 'Bhoo Kailasa' and 'Premada Putri' (1958), 'Jagajyoti Basaveswara', 'Dharma Vijaya' and 'Mahisasura Mardhini' (1959), 'Ranadhira Kantirava', 'Bhakta Kanakadasa' and 'Makkala Rajya' (1960) were the prominent Kannada films of this decade. Kalyan Kumar, Udayakumar, Rajkumar, Mynavati, Leelavati, B.S.Ranga and others emerged as the popular film personalities during this time. The decade also witnessed the growth and development of Hunsur Krishnamurthy, R.Nagendrarao, H.L.N.Simha, N.Lakshminarayan, Aroor Pattabhi, K.Shankar Singh and Y.R.Swamy as prominent directors.

Rao (1996:06) notes: "About 75 Kannada films were made in 1950s. A new generation of talented directors and film personalities were born during this period. A large number of moviegoers also cropped up over a period of time. This was the crucial stage of consolidation of Kannada film industry". Another eminent film journalist Modaliyar (2009:04) writes: "Early Kannada films were based on folklore, mythologies and historical themes and subjects. About 125 Kannada films were made during 1954 – 1964 on the basis of technological developments and talented film personalities. The Kannada films had gained national recognition through qualitative contributions. Prominent award winning films such as 'Nandi', 'Bedara Kannappa', 'Bhakta Vijaya', 'Bhakta Kanakadasa', 'Mahakavi Kalidasa', 'Premada Putri' and 'School Master' brought reputation to Kannada film industry. Rajkumar had acted in about 55 films as the lead actor and consolidated the cinematic foundations of Kannada film industry".

In 1960s, Kannada film industry was supported by the prominent writers and organizers like A.N.Krishnarao and Vatal Nagaraj. The progressive writers, Kannada activists and cultural personalities prevailed upon the government to develop Kannada film industry through infrastructural development, healthy film subsidy, and other progressive measures.

The prominent films of 1960s include – ‘Kittur Chennamma’ (1961), ‘Vijayanagara Veeraputra’ (1961), ‘Gali Gopura’ (1962), ‘Swarna Gowri’ (1962), ‘Kulavadhu’ (1963), ‘Veerakesari’ (1963), ‘Veera Sankalpa’ (1964), ‘Amarashilpi Jakanachari’ (1964), ‘Bettada Huli’ (1965), ‘Miss Leelavati’ (1965), ‘Toogudeepa’ (1966), ‘Emme Tammanna’ (1966), ‘Belli Moda’ (1967), ‘Gange Gowri’ (1967), ‘Jedara Bale’ (1968), ‘Mannina Maga’ (1968), ‘Mallamma Pavada’ (1969), ‘Uyyale’ (1969), ‘Gejje Puje’ (1970), ‘Karulina Kare’ (1970), ‘Samskara’ (1970) and so on. B.R.Panthulu, Hunsur Krishnamurthy, Geetapriya, Puttanna Kanagal, Pattabhi Ramareddi and N.Lakshmi Narayan enriched the foundations of Kannada films through award winning films. Rajkumar, Udaykumar, Kalyankumar, Rajesh, Toogudeepa Srinivas, Kalpana, Jayanti, Bharati and other stars made the decade of 1960s as the ‘Golden age of Kannada film industry’. The Government of Karnataka also promoted Kannada film industry through subsidy, awards, construction of studio and other measures.

New Wave Kannada Films

During 1971 – 1980 several art films and new wave films were made in Kannada. The films were commercially viable and artistically excellent according to film analysts. The popular films of the decade include – Kasturi Nivasa (1971), Mukti (1971), Vamsha Vruksha (1972), Bangarada Manushya (1972), Nagarahavu (1972), Gandhada Gudi (1973), Abachurina Post Office (1973), Kadu (1974), Upasane (1974), Katha Sangama (1975), Hamsa Geete (1975), Premada Kanike (1976), Bayalu Dari (1976), Ghata Shraddha (1977), Babruvahana (1977), Paduvaralli Pandavaru (1978), Ondanondu Kaladalli (1978), Kadu Kudure (1979), Dharma Sere (1979), Auto Raja (1980) and Kalla Kulla (1980).

About 138 Kannada films were produced during the decade of 1970s. Puttanna Kanagal, Pattabhi Ramareddi, B.V.Karant, Girish Karnad, Girish Kasaravalli, G.V.Iyer, T.S.Nagabharana, M.S.Saty, P.Lankesh and N.Lakshminarayana were the great directors who directed national award winning films. Rajkumar, Vishnuvardhan, Lokesh, Shankarnag, Ananthnag, Kalpana, L.V.Sharada, Revati, Jayanti, Bharati, Arati, Manjula and others were the most popular and talented film personalities. Puttanna Kanagal was honored in Madras as ‘Director of the Directors’ for his yeoman cinematic contributions. This was indeed the age of

new wave films which added new dimension to progressive Kannada film production. The films were also exhibited in national and international film festivals. There was highly visible qualitative improvement in Kannada film industry, writes Modaliyar (2009:03).

The decade of 1980s witnessed the production of a large number of commercial Kannada films. The technological developments also enriched the quality of Kannada films. Prominent films of the decade include – Ranganayaki (1981), Grahana (1981), Halu Jenu (1982), Manasa Sarovara (1982), Bandhana (1983), Accident (1983), Bettada Hoovu (1985), Jwalamukhi (1985), Pushpaka Vimana (1986), Premaloka (1986), Malaya Maruta (1987), Surya (1987), Tabarana Kathe (1988), Sangliyana (1988), Nanjundi Kalyana (1989), Samsara Nouke (1989), Muttina Hara (1990), Ganeshana Maduve (1990) and so on. During this decade, Kannada film industry suffered a serious setback on account of the death of Puttanna Kanagal, Shankarnag and Udaykumar. The films of M.S.Saty, Prema Karanth, T.S.Nagabharana, S.V.Rajendrasing Babu, N.Lakshminarayana, Girish Kasaravalli, Suresh Heblikar and Singeetham Srinivasarao received awards at regional and national levels for cinematic excellence. The Kannada movement led by Rajkumar brought about the renaissance of Kannada film industry. The television also gave a tough fight to Kannada film. Rajkumar, Vishnuvardhan, Ananthnag, Lokesh, Sridhar, Shivarajkumar, Ravichandran, Jayanti, Padmavasanti, Geeta, Usha, Sudharani, Malasri were the prominent film personalities who enriched the Kannada film industry in 1980s.

Prakash and Puttaswamy (1995:05) comment: “Gokak movement had paved the way for the remarkable expansion of Kannada film industry. The entry of Rajkumar and other film personalities into Kannada movement had strengthened the Kannada, culture and film sectors notably. Kannada film industry also attracted huge investment because of the new consciousness of the people”.

Kannada Film in the Age of Globalization

There were remarkable economic changes and modifications during 1991 – 2000 in the entire world. The process of globalization had impacted all walks of human life including the film and other media. The policy of economic liberalization also paved the way for Foreign Direct Investment in the various sectors of economy including the media. The new media had

also emerged as powerful participatory communication and development media. The prominent films of this decade include – Bhujangayyana Dashavatara (1991), Ramachari (1991), Chaitrada Premanjali (1992), Jeevana Chaitra (1992), Akasmika (1993), Ba Nalle Madhu Chandrake (1993), Prajashakti (1994), Hrudaya Raga (1994), Om (1995), Apareshan Anta (1995), Janumada Jodi (1996), Gulabi (1996), Amrutha Varshini (1997), Nagamandala (1997), Tayi Saheba (1998), Hoo Male (1998), Janumadata (1999), Upendra (1999), Sparsha (2000) and Munnudi (2000).

In the age of globalization, about 58 Kannada films were made. A good number of films also received national and regional awards for cinematic excellence. Modaliyar (2009:04) states: “The Kannada film industry had shined during the age of globalization. Many talented and young personalities like Shivarajkumar, Ravichandran, Jaggesh, Devraj, Ramesh, Kashinath, Kumar Bangarappa, Shashikumar, Ramkumar, Kumar Govind, Raghavendra Rajkumar, Sridhar, Vinodraj, Abhijit, Saikumar, Malasri, Sudharani, Shruti, Tara, Bhavya and others established identity for Kannada film industry through their talent and capacity. The film literature, music, photography, acting and other inputs also provided a creative touch to the film making in Kannada. About 700 films were produced during this period. Kannada film industry gained national and international recognition during this period”.

Most of the Kannada films were commercial films based on the technique of re-make. The Government of Karnataka constituted an expert committee under the Chairmanship of V.N.Subbarao to look into the problems of Kannada film industry. The committee submitted the report in 1994 and suggested series of progressive measures for the development of Kannada film industry. The Karnataka Chamber of Film Commerce also fought against the culture of re-make. The Government of Karnataka also imposed 100% entertainment tax. The period witnessed the remarkable development of Kannada film industry. Ravichandran, Sridhar, Lokesh, Devraj, Vishnuvardhan, Prabhakar, Ambarish, Sunil, Ananthnag, Jaggesh, Ramesh, Saikumar, Kumar Bangarappa, Raghavendra Rajkumar, Shivarajkumar, Upendra, Shashikumar, Malasri, Pallavijoshi, Khushbu, Vinayaprasad, Bhavya, Sudharani, Tara, Shruti, Supriya, Jayamala, Umasri and others contributed significantly toward the development of Kannada film industry.

Kannada Film Industry in the New Millennium

In the new millennium, Kannada film industry has grown remarkably. About 80 to 100 films were made every year in Kannada. A new generation of talented film personalities has entered the Kannada film industry and provided a new dimension to Kannada film making. Prominent films of the new millennium include – Diggajaru (2001), Kanasugara (2001), Majestic (2002), Dweepa (2002), Pyaris Pranaya (2003), Singaravva (2003), Malla (2004), Aptamitra (2004), Jogi (2005), Nenapirali (2005), Keraf Footpath (2006), Mungaru Male (2006), Duniya (2007), Cheluvina Chittara (2007), Gaja (2008), Avva (2008), Yodha (2009), Ambari (2009), Rasarushi Kuvempu (2010), Magiya Kala (2011), Koormavatara (2011), Bharath Stores (2012), Tallana (2012), December-1 (2013), Harivu (2014), Shivam (2015) and Siddhartha (2015).

The contemporary Kannada film industry has grown quantitatively and qualitatively because of the entry of young, talented and energetic film personalities. They include – Ganesh, Vijay, Prem, Puneeth Rajkumar, Vijaya Raghavendra, Sudeep, Darshan, Ramya, Poojagandhi, Haripriya, Indrita Rai, Shubha Punja, Sharmila, Amulya, Radhika Pandith, Nidhisubbaiah, Daisy Bopaiah, Nikhita and others. A new generation of talented directors like Prakash, Nagendra Prasad, Rathnaja, Dinakar, M.D.Sridhar, Yograj Bhat, Soori, Charitanya, Madesh, Mahesh, Kiran Govi, Devadatta, Amar, R.Chandru and others has contributed innovative ideas and efforts for the development of Kannada cinema in the new millennium. In the year 2009, Kannada film industry celebrated platinum jubilee in a grand scale. About 75 books were brought out by Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce on the cinematic contributions of eminent personalities under the editorship of Barguru Ramachandrappa. The Kannada language also received the classical language status on the eve of platinum jubilee celebrations indicates the prestige of Kannada people, remarked Yeddyurappa (2009:09).

The status of Kannada film industry was analyzed by Kannada Prabha (2009:01) a leading Kannada daily. It reads: “Kannada film industry has crossed 75 years confidently despite certain drawbacks and constraints. It has limited film marketing opportunities. All the healthy and progressive experiments that have taken place in the Indian film industry have also occurred in Kannada film industry. Kannada film industry has carved a niche for itself in the national and international film avenues. The future of Kannada film industry is bright”.

Modaliyar (2009:04) remarks: “The celebration of platinum jubilee of Kannada film industry is a matter of great pride. The Kannada films are watched by the audiences across the globe. Kannada film personalities also deserve to receive the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke award for their cinematic excellence and contributions. Kannada film industry is marching towards progress despite competition from other films, challenges of other film personalities, video piracy, dubbing of films, inadequate film theatres and other drawbacks. Kannada film industry is recognized at various levels for the rare accomplishments”.

The award winning Kannada films of the new millennium include – Girish Kasaravalli’s Dweepa (2001), T.S.Nagabharana’s Singaravva (2002), B.Suresh’s Artha (2002), Kavita Lankesh’s Preeti Prema Pranaya (2003), P.Sheshadri’s Beru (2004), Indrajit Lankesh’s Monalisa (2004), Girish Kasaravalli’s Nayi Neralu (2005), Barguru Ramachandrappa’s Tayi (2005), B.S.Lingdevaru’s Kada Beladingalu (2006), Yograj Bhat’s Mungaru Male (2006), Girish Kasaravalli’s Gulabi Talkies and Vimukti (2008), Girish Kasaravalli’s Kanasembo Kudureyanneri (2009), Rutwik Simha’s Rasarushi Kuvempu (2010), K.Shivarudraiah’s Magiya Kala (2011), Girish Kasaravalli’s Koormavathara (2011), P.Sheshadri’s Bharat Stores (2012), N.Sudarshan’s Tallana (2012), P.Sheshadri’s December-1 (2013) and Manjunatha Somashekara Reddy’s Harivu (2014) and Santhosh Anandram’s Mr. and Mrs. Ramachari (2015).

Siddaramaiah, the Chief Minister of Karnataka (2014:08) emphasized the need for production of creative Kannada films thus: “Film is a powerful medium of communication in modern society. It has the capacity to reach out to plenty of people with multi-faceted messages. The art films and parallel films are entirely different from commercial film. The film should transform the lives of the people who are at the cross roads in the age of commercialization. The value based new wave films command respect from the people rather than commercial films which are made for making money by the market forces”.

Conclusion

Kannada film industry has come a long way. It has several feathers on its cap. Several talented and dedicated personalities have enriched the Kannada film industry. There are several success stories and role models who can inspire the next generation of film makers, directors and

creative work force. Kannada film industry has also seen several advantages and disadvantages. Kannada film industry has also incorporated advanced film production technologies and strategies in terms of recording, background music, film song, film editing, special effects, DTS, digital development, use of advanced cameras and so on. The latest Kannada films have also excelled in technological applications. Kannada film industry is blessed with highly talented, committed and competent film personalities. The era of commercial cinema is coming to an end. The new Kannada films are known for their good taste, creativity and constructive messages. Kannada film industry has also attracted huge investment. The television channels have come forward to buy Kannada films. Kannada film industry has grown as a million dollar industry. It has grown confidently both in terms of number and quality. It has the capacity for the attainment of greater progress in future. The stakeholders of Kannada film industry are required to work together for the realization of the goal of integrated development of Kannada film industry.

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