



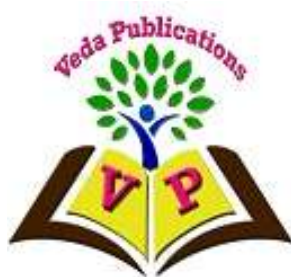
PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN CULTURE AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN K.VISWANATH'S FILMS

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ABSTRACT



Films act as crucible for social values and realities. Cinema unlike any other art, widens and enhances our living experience. The relationship between films and culture is dynamic. The films influence mass culture and are also in turn a product of the mass culture. Thus, films have a unique responsibility to represent the ever changing culture and yet be able to relate to the core values of the society.

Keywords: *Films- Indian Culture- Tradition- Telugu films of K.Viswanath- Music.*



Cinema acts a mirror to the society, representing the trends and changes that occur in the society through stories. Movies serve as records of the trends, attitudes, beliefs and perspectives of a particular era as they portray contemporary social issues. Movies become successful when they can capture the social and cultural tensions of the era. However, there is no guarantee that this formula will always work in the film industry. Success largely depends on the amount of audience it appeals to.

Movies work as agents of socialization to the younger generations. They reinforce the values that are taught in the family and experienced in the society. Mass Media moulds our attitudes towards life. The present generation spends more time with movies and TV than with other agents of socialization like peer groups or books. Hence they tend to learn aspects like love and violence through mass media. Most movies attempt to glamorize anti social actions and values like gambling, drinking and adultery to attract masses. As a result, they are often seen against the traditional agents of socialization and culture.

Indian film industry is a vast amalgamation of such stories, perspectives and narratives. It differs from other film industries in many aspects. Telugu film industry is no different. It takes up many social and cultural issues and portrays them embedded in creative narratives. Though many times, it is accused of making film that paint a derogatory picture of society and traditions, film remains to be the biggest and most widespread vehicle for spreading awareness, beliefs and changes in culture.

For Indians, film is not merely a narrative, but a kaleidoscopic art form filled with art and music. In a way, it still retains the old musical qualities of drama into modern times. Good music and dance sometimes determine the success of the film.

Kasinadhuni Viswanath is one such Telugu director who exploits this aspect of the film to portray his narratives through art, music and dance. Most of his films are narratives about art – mainly music and dance and their role in a post modern society. Films like Sankarabharanam (1980) and Sagara Sangamam (1983) address how the reception of music and dance has changed in the society. He explains the tragic

consequences of this change with a hopeful note in the end.

However, it must not be mistaken that K.Viswanath films only dealt with art forms. He addressed key social issues like caste and class, inter-caste love, widow remarriage and other such sensitive issues in a creative and innovative manner. K. Viswanath who had 'progressive ideas' struggled against the current, making tasteful, purposeful and at times commercially successful films

If film making is considered as 'sculpting in time' as defined by renowned Russian film maker Tarkovsky, then K. Viswanadh's films transcend the time itself. They find their relevance decades after their release. This quality can be attributed to the profound humanism that the films depict.

For instance, Saptapadi (1981) is a film that upheld the purity and chastity of true love against tradition and custom. The movie depicts they psychological struggle Hema faces and how she is left to renounce her love for tradition against a backdrop of inter-caste relations and arranged marriage. The movie melds this social issue with the lives of musicians and classical dancers.

Saptapadi is also not just a love story. It is a journey of transformation of Yajulu – a man who believes in traditional values and norms. The film depicts how he slowly unlearns and relearns the true human values which are vastly different from the customs and rules laid down by the religion. The film ends with Yajulu's self-realization of the futility of caste.

In Swati Mutyam (1985), K.Viswanath took to explore the love between a man with autism and a widow. It is a commentary on the issues of widow remarriage and the social stigma associated with mental illnesses. Shivaiah, an autistic orphan marries Lalitha a widow in an impulse. The film depicts not only the social consequences of such a marriage which is considered a sin but also portrays transformation of Shivaiah into a responsible husband and father. It is a story of hope and love, released during times when winds were changing towards widow remarriage.

In Sankarabharanam (1980), K. Viswanath's most popular film, a Carnatic music legend is scorned when he brings home a destitute dancer. This act,



along with the growing popularity of Western music is seen as key factor in the decline of the protagonist's popularity. Sensing this, the dancer leaves only to send her son to learn under him several years later as a protégé. The film is a treatise on the lives of Carnatic musicians in the changing times. It established the permanency of Indian traditional music. Apart from its captivating narrative and performances, the story is an example of how life should be dedicated to art. The protagonist Sankasastry is a prime example of this dedication. The film also depicts the chasm between Western music and Carnatic music. It upholds the spiritual and purifying nature of Carnatic music over Western music. The winner of several National Film Awards, Sankarabharanam remains to be an epic in Telugu film industry.

K.Viswanath's films are therefore not mere depictions of Indian culture and tradition. They question and comment on various social values, norms and beliefs that exist in the present Indian society. They are discourses on changes in culture and customs. Viswanath knows and understands that audiences seek a rich experience from the film and delivers it in ways that seem deliberately natural and relatable. So, his films and narratives seem outwardly simplistic yet are filled with profound symbolisms for those who seek.

His deep love for Indian art forms is never at cross with his progressive ideas. He dares to combine through his films, sensitive social issues and traditional art forms. His ideologies on Indian culture are inclusive and humanistic. Above all, he understands the role of the cinema in the society. He does not seem to agree with the fact that people watch movies to while away the time. He wants his audiences to leave the theatre with a richer understanding of Indian values, culture and a profound human experience.

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