

*Chidananda Dasgupta Memorial Competition on Film Criticism 2020*

Certificate of Merit

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## **Busting the Myths of Socio-Cultural Representation in Sarkari Hi. Pra. Shaale, Kasaragodu, Koduge: Ramanna Rai**



When *Sarkari Hi. Pra. Shaale, Kasaragodu, Koduge: Ramanna Rai* hits the theatres in 24 August 2018, it was mile stone in the history of Sandalwood Industry. It was first of its kind in Kannada Language, which depicted the lives of Kannadiga People beyond the boundaries of Karnataka. It was primarily a socio-political comedy film centered on children. The movie was directed and produced by the Rishab Shetty and distributed through Jayanna films. Starring veteran Sandal wood actors like Anant Nag and new faces like Ranjan, Sampath, Pramod Shetty, Saptha Pavour, Mahendra, Sohan Shetty, Prakash Thuminad, Manish Heroor etc. the film won a wide appreciation and won the 66<sup>th</sup> National Film Award for the Best Children's film in 2019.

The film is contextualized in Kasargod District of Kerala. The plot of the movie is the closure of the Kannada language medium schools in Kasaragod District. Kasaragod is diverse region with a confluence of various tongues and cultures. As it is

the northern frontier district of Kerala bordering Karnataka, there are several services like Education that had been provided in the Kannada Language. The movie is thematized in one such Kannada medium school, which faces the threats of shutting down due to shortage of students.

The movie was widely accepted as catalyst in boosting linguistic pride and education rights of the children in mother tongue. The entire movie is built up on a context of language hostility between Malayalam and Kannada speakers. However, the movie did not shed any direct negative light on Malayalies. Beyond the theme of language hostilities, the socio-cultural representation in the movie plays a major role. The analysis of the socio-cultural representation in the film provides us with a major share of critical observation. There are different cultural traits that can be subjected to observation.

The movie depicts the characters and plot of Kasaragod with an overwhelmingly Kannadiga

cultural background. The Comparison of the General perseverance and film depiction can be met with many contrasting facts. There is also a requirement of relying on different facts. The film depiction of the plot includes mainly a cultural domination of Malayalies. Especially through the characters of Balakrishna Panicker, the government official who sought to shut down the school. There are also other instances, which the cultural domination element is tried to pop out. The character of the Mathematics teacher is one such that trying to impose the Malayalam supremacy over the Kannadiga students. The element of cultural domination is manifested through such characters and some instances.

There is conversation between two students over the subsidies provided in schools. A student who newly joined the Malayalam medium school is asking Praveen and others that when are they going to join him so that they can get free uniforms and bicycles. These are attempts to depict the negligence of the Kannada medium schools and patronizing of Malayalam Medium schools by the officials. There are depictions of direct conflict between the both linguistic identities especially with the character of Santharama Upadhyaya who uses the means of violence.

The depiction of the conflict in cultural domination and general perseverance of the actual situation has to be taken in to consideration. The historical and linguistic facts suggests that Kasaragod district was an integral part of the Historical Tulunadu region. The Tulunadu region is where the Tulu, one of the five primary Dravidian languages are spoken. Kasaragod is the confluence of both Tuluva and Malayali Culture, which have similar customs and traditions. The Kannadiga population are normally viewed as the people above the Ghats.

There are numeral historical evidences to suggest that Tulunadu area, especially the Kasaragod and was never a part of a particular Kannadiga identity sphere. The synonym for Kasaragod is Sapha Bhasha Sangama Bhoomi or the land of the confluence of seven languages. The languages spoken here include Malayalam, Tulu, Beary, Konkani, Marathi, Kannada and Urdu. The major native tongues being Malayalam, Tulu and the Beary, which was a product of both the languages and spoken by the Muslims of Tulunadu. The Marathi, Konkani and Kannada speaking populations were actually migrants to Tulunadu and later got settled. This region does not

have any cultural identifications with Kannadiga population above the Ghats. The Kannada speakers of Kasaragod comprises only below 3%. Most of them are migrated communities and still using only Kannada in their households.

The big irony within the film was the absence of any Tulu cultural identity. There is a deliberate attempt to over shadow the Tuluva identity in to the Kannadiga umbrella. Any words are uttered in neither Tulu nor any reference to the language. This suggest that this mere cultural over run is devoid of the general perseverance or the actual environment has been employed in the movie and suggesting a fiction build upon another fiction.

There has been a wide spread criticism from Tulu activists and cultural organizations upon the release of the film due to the absence of Tulu cultural identity. There was stiff opposition in associating Kasaragod as land only consist of Kannadiga as the films suggests. The entire plot was consecrated as a Kannadiga setup-facing threats from a comparatively alien culture. It can be said that there is no other paradox than coinciding Kasaragod into a mere Kannadiga Cultural domain ignoring the speakers of the other six major languages. The Kannadiga culture is entirely alien In Kasaragod on the cultural and ritualistic lines.

Tuluva culture and Malayali culture share the same traits like Bootharadhane and Theyyam, Matrilineal system etc. One such custom is alien to the Kannadiga cultural domain and its show how irrelevant is to create such a domain in Kasaragod through the movie. Ugadi is never celebrated in the cultural sphere of Kasaragod. Tuluvas and Malayalies both observe Vishu as the new year, The myth of Mahabali binds both the traditions but its alien in Kannadiga cultural domain.

The error in the depiction of the cultural composition of Kasaragod is one of major points to be noted. The character of Mammooty is one such example. Mammooty, his father and his mother are depicted in the movie. Their tongue is contrasting to the present cultural compositions of Kasaragod. The character Mammooty is indeed a Muslim. There are not any Muslims Community in Tulunadu region or Kasaragod in special uses Kannada as their mother tongue. The native Muslims of the Tulunadu speaks Byari as their mother tongue. In the case of Kasaragod, Muslims does not have the need to employ Kannada in their day to day life as suggested

in the film. Its indeed is uncommon and very minimum chances.

Multilingualism is common in Kasaragod, where people are at least fluent in four languages. A Tuluva can understand Malayalam even though he is not fluent in Malayalam. The linguistic proximity is an important factor. Even the Kannada spoken by the tiny minority itself was highly influenced by Malayalam and Tulu. The movie portrays a total unintelligibility of the language and that is very absurd when it comes to the case of Kasaragod. There is a scene where the Malayalam speaking mathematics teacher commences the class in Malayalam but children are acting as complete unintelligible to the classes which is fake construction in the film. The barrier is only standard version of Malayalam that has been used but the conversation level is high. The

students can suggest that they are feeling difficult with the Malayalam as medium of the instruction. However, the children are depicted as monolinguals perhaps who even cannot understand Malayalam. In the actual scenario, this might be an absurd moment.

*Sarkari Hi. Pra. Shaale, Kasaragodu, Koduge: Ramanna Rai* depicts the general phenomenon regarding language and education. However, the socio-cultural context that has been employed is no more than factious. The film is only employing the base of the theme, the crisis. However, the socio-cultural atmosphere evolved around are indeed artificial and Rishab Shetty has indeed failed in actual cultural depiction of the land. The movie is also glorifying linguistic hostilities, which is no more a major issue in any circumstances.

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