

Critique

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Naticharami: A Change in Wind for Kannada Cinema



Mansore decided to push the boundaries of an entire film industry that did not affirm to him its readiness for content beyond its traditional penchant when he made *Naticharami*. Kannada film industry has had its rigid preferences when it came to entertainment and it has always been a blind leap of faith to try anything new beyond the realms of mass appeasement here. Some of them have attempted – most of whom have found consolation in being ‘accepted’ and then pushed back outside the sphere of limelight. Hardly any of even the boldest had attempted to centre a movie around sex (other than Puttanna Kanagal back in his time), much less on infidelity. *Naticharami* is one of its kind in the Kannada film industry – one that is slow to hit the ball out of the park; but incites questions and debates on the rickety framework of what can be called a fundamental aspect of life.

Empowered women stumble upon the littlest of things when a necessity collides with a dearly held regulation. ‘Modern’ men aspire to be accepting of a bold advancement from the opposite sex but sometimes simply cannot. And from an act that the moral police would deject with all their might, clarity of thought and action arises. *Naticharami* conveys these messages, and for the first ever time in Kannada industry, picks up an issue based on sexual intimacy and delivers a non-penalizing, liberated ending. In the context of taking a leap of faith, *Naticharami* is a revolutionary film in the Kannada setup. It touches upon an uncomfortable, moral ramshackle of a ground and carves scope for some extreme discussions and opinions.

At the outset in *Naticharami*, Gowri leads a life that any modern-day woman can ask for. She has

a career, a social circle, she's beautiful and she's independent. But there was a man she married without the consent of her or his parents because they were healthily in love, who died in an accident three years ago and she still cannot as much as bear the thought of letting him go. Her coping mechanisms lead her to a frenzied state of being where little things like the placement of an ashtray or a pillow on the couch makes all the difference. Everything must be exactly like her husband liked it to be. Every day, she must bring his pictures fresh flowers and preserve his wardrobe. She's loyal to him despite his striking absence – a notion that has conventionally been associated with an 'ideal female' image. It was important for Mansore to project her character so; for it then becomes easier to imply the severity of mental conflict when she inevitably has one.

Lingering somewhere on the other end of the spectrum of extremities is Suresh, a civil engineer with great ambitions but meagre means. Terribly unhappy in his marriage, Suresh is that well written image of a typical Indian man who projects himself to be modern but is an embodiment of patriarchal clichés. He detests his wife because apparently she's too hillbilly for his standards. The two protagonists meet at a park and bond over an unconditional predicament that Gowri housed in her mind after a floodgate was opened, thanks to a psychiatrist she was forced to consult. This psychiatrist, Carvalho, is the means to the end Mansore had in mind. He's the centrepiece with the best dialogues and imagery offering some insights that might be arguable for a part of the audience. He dives unflinchingly into Gowri's sex life when she claims to be lost in her mechanical lifestyle and concludes that an active sex life could be the answer to her problems. Sexual intimacy is a fundamental necessity after all, and Gowri had packaged it away from the periphery of her conscience since her husband died. Turmoil of emotions follows for Gowri who cannot come to terms with having to choose between betraying her (dead) husband and continue living her life with a fundamental instinct unfulfilled.

A man unhappy in his marriage and a widow now seeking physical intimacy make for an interesting, but perhaps morally questionable

storyline which has worked well for *Naticharami* with Sandhya Rani's writing. A few elements such as the protagonists' careers, the equally unhappy but still hopeful wife (of Suresh), Gowri's ex-husband's family, Gowri's parents who aspire for her to re-marry, a friendly workspace for both, a funny wingman for Suresh and a harassing superior at work for Gowri are added to lead the story to a simple conclusion, and alongside address a few social aspects that would be expected from a modern-day movie.

There's no denying that there is something missing and *Naticharami* is not an entertainment blockbuster. But it has taken a leap and changed the direction that Kannada movies head in when it comes to concluding a morally difficult plot. Claim-ably for the first time, *Naticharami* does not penalize its characters for prioritising instinctive necessities over social expectations or drive them to social rejection or suicide. It isn't romanticized either. Mansore has kept it real in many ways - it is a problematic plot carried by problematic protagonists who, on the surface project righteousness but really just are primitive creatures driven by fundamental needs who can be inconsiderate towards others along the path of their fulfilment. For all the resistance Gowri presents to the idea of 'betraying' her dead husband by being with another man, she doesn't as much as spare a moment of thought about Suresh's wife who was clearly being betrayed by her approaches to him. Suresh desperately projects a modern and sophisticated outlook with ambitions to make it large in life but cannot accept it when Gowri takes the first step to physical intimacy. When she presents to him a monologue about a woman's right to claim things that she wants, he responds with respect but it is the complete opposite when his wife says something similar. The protagonists are exceptionally written with all the flaws and ignorance of the self-presented unfiltered.

Mansore, however, did not make claims of answering morally difficult questions in black and white. A suburban setup that houses thousands of fluctuating thought processes has its Gowris, Sureshs and their families and friends who are collateral damage to their loved ones' unbalanced mental states.

Mansore picked two streamlines of thoughts and the ripples they cause. He brought them together and gave them some form of closure through a morally arguable act of intimacy. The characters had their answers, even perhaps if the audience might have issues with them. And he has presented the characters whose lives collide with the protagonists - some presented beautifully like Gowri's associates who are easily understanding and caring. Her superior who attempts to take advantage of her but is put to his place, thereby addressing the harassment situations at workplaces and how women must be dealing with them. Suresh's wife Suma – she's an empowered voice but isolated from the opportunities of the outside world and confined to the ambition of pleasing her sore husband. She ends up emerging a triumphant character anyway, finding fulfilment in not just her marriage at the end but on her own in life in general. Gowri's maid Jayamma: a free-spirited woman with more clarity of thought than Gowri. A date that Gowri initially brings home but scares away thanks to her obsessive behaviour. These characters shoulder the pace of the movie and prevent it from becoming too sombre.

Some characters on the other hand went a tad haywire in the attempt to add elements to the otherwise simple story such as Gowri's parents who're just a little too conventional and easily triggered by pretty much anything Gowri says. Suresh's friend: a conventional chap who rubs off the sandalwood marks on his forehead before gulping down whiskey; a desperate comical attempt.

A fine balance between a character going completely wrong and being a defining one for the movie is Carvalho, the psychologist Gowri consults. He's the playground for imagery and some of the

triggers for motifs. Every time Gowri comes to him with a predicament; he not only has the precise words to say but is also performing an act that symbolizes his solutions, like walking a dog and freeing it, repairing a scooter, cross breeding a plant or almost burning a curry. He puts forth ideas and explanations that are convincing in the context of the movie but might go radically questioned in the outside world. Through him, however, Mansore has set the ball rolling in the Kannada film industry for exploration of never before touched upon topics.

'Naticharami' means wedding vows. Two extreme forms of adherence to wedding vows is what the movie begins with – one of great devotion and another of frustrated apathy. Both of them stumble upon a pedestal of better clarity and *Naticharami* just grazes the surface of a twisted question and its very varied, arguable answers. Mansore has kept it simple but valid. He's casted the most natural actors for the roles who have done complete justice to their parts. What attracts special attention is Bindhu Malini's music adding an altogether new layer to the cinematography. '*Kaamavu naane, kaavalu naane*' lines towards the end sum up the entire plot perfectly. 'I am the instinct of lust, and I am the defence against it.' Nothing that the characters go through is forced; it all happens as a result of their own realizations. With it, Mansore has projected an idea that it is acceptable for popular culture to not penalize characters that push the boundaries of acquired taste. Primarily for the reason that Mansore and Sandhya Rani created a brilliant movie setting the stage for bolder films in Kannada, and for it being one of Sanchari Vijay's final best performances before his tragic passing; *Naticharami* deserves a place in the elite list.

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