

Critique

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Venkya: Tamaso Maa Jyotirgamay
The Fervent Mission



***Venkya* (Kannada, 2024) by Sagar Puranik**

No soul can ever experience light unless it breaks or is compelled to egress a claustrophobic abode of conditioned comfort—that's why maybe the law of nature has made a foetus grow initially inside the perennially darkest and the holiest cave and gradually get released to face the blended complexities of the universe to grow and develop. Men and their surrounding magnitude, physical or psychological, have been the nonpareil text to illuminate a person's vision of life that can never be theoretically taught or feasibly executed by any book.

Venkya, the Kannada language film directed by Sagar Puranik, is a civil screen text unfolding in a slow burn temperature. Its protagonist Venkya's (Sagar Puranik) mental transformation through his physical mission in search of his younger brother - Ganya, aka Ganesh; but a journey that had started with utter bitterness, compulsion, materialistic approaches and with no strings attached, eventually ended up with a note of unconditional love for his blood, where finances had a lesser role to play. While being sensed, the film feels like a well-prepared visual research paper on the country's

abundantly profound cultural heritage and rich geography. These legacies are not projected merely to fill the cinematic frames but as the controlling catalytic devices to transform a detached man's pneuma. The lush green bounties, the glaciers, the challenging terrains, the vintage architectures, the prayer ceremony by the holy river, the defiles, the lakes, the cities with all their beauty and tediousness- and all the human entities connected to all these physical existence have gradually started changing and shaping the protagonist Venkya, aka Venkatesh's perspective towards life and relationships. While the abruptly contradictory behavioural orders experienced in multiple associations in ways made him tremendously pained and troubled, parallelly compelled him to believe in goodness, too. The director is not preachy about situations or individuals, but the plot progresses spontaneously. Darkness and light are eternal co-existents, and Venkya's physical journey has turned out to be a pilgrimage, opening the windows of his soul for a better and stable life. *Venkya* is tailored documentation of the geo-social, geophysical, and geo-psychological gravity of the land associated with an individual's struggle to gratify his pilgrimage.

The protagonist, Venkya, is usually addressed as a hooligan dwelling in the scattered city of Hubballi. He owes a tough amount of seventy lakhs to his boss, a hoodlum- (Pawan Wodeyar). To pay the debt, he finds no way left except selling his ancestral property, but after his mother's demise and the younger brother's (Ganya) take off, his sick and aged father develops a kind of anguish towards him, as he firmly believed that bigoted Venkya was the key

reason behind Ganya's leaving home, as he was a calm and quiet guy- just a contrast to the elder one. He agreed to bring his property back to Venkya with the term of bringing Ganya back home, at least once before signing off on this life.



Taking another loan from the cranky boss, he starts his blind journey searching for Ganya, being in a state of “Cu fundal în două luntri”—having a foot in both camps. Here, his partner, Archana, helps him by posting about Ganya on social media. It turns out to be helpful, though, through some comic interludes. The triggering power of social media is a vital projection behind the spontaneity of the film.

The country's diverse geography is framed as the pristine *mise en scène* of *Venkya*. The organised mess, the topographical hurdles or serenity, and the regional temperament appear to be a unified force that ceaselessly pushes the protagonist towards his goal. If some reflect clear antagonism, some shock him through their compassionate humanity. But finances make

him so out of nerves that at frequent points of time, he can see nothing except money.

It is not easy to film twelve different states in a single movie; it needs clear coordination and technical patience. Let it be the serene, shining Himalayan range or the architecturally smart Udaipur, extremely cold Manali, the zigzag Sikkim, busy Kolkata or Punjab, or the metallic train compartments—every single piece of place go on joining the dots. He meets people who rob him and throw him on the road and strangers who appear to be too empathetic in unexpected ways. There's no *deus ex machina* to solve the series of frustration he goes on consuming. Still, as he journeys through, the undaunted light of humanity starts purifying his inner algorithms, windows get exposed to luminance, and the moral axis of his brother pierces his prolonged nonchalance. People who had access to Ganya go on praising his unconditional humanity, his being an ardent biophile and the way he loved his family—though somewhat in a voluntary exile. He never used a cell phone, was attached to the NGOs for the holistic purpose of protecting the environment, led a detached life, wrote numerous letters to the family that were never posted, and one day, surrendered his life rescuing a child from a fatal flash flood in the mountain river of Sikkim.

The poster of the film, where the nucleus spreads his vague gaze from darkness towards light through the rusted iron bars, sustains the allegory of the narrative—the

massive troubles to be challenged in a universe of expanded light, emerging out of the comfort zone of a darker claustrophobic cocoon.

In iconic *'Ikiru'* (1952) by Akira Kurosawa, the protagonist Watanabe (Takashi Shimura) discovered the meaning of existence in the later part of his life through multiple human associations that he missed being a stern bureaucrat in his service life. His physical vulnerability opened his mental door to explore human characters and their true colours. In *Venkya*, the troubles and roadblocks made him realise the beauty of clean human relationships.

The director cum protagonist, Sagar Puranik, says, "*Venkya* showcases how India's reach cultural diversity can transform individuals, even criminals."

The serene wide-angle shots are designed well to capture nature's tapestry, transporting the audience to the topographical beauty of the lands featured and feeling the varied psychology of the people around them. The balanced blending of the location sound and the cosmetic ones complements enough to sustain the vitality of a film documenting natural geometry as an essential backdrop.

Venkya was officially selected in the Indian Panorama section of the 55th International Film Festival of India, 2024.

Venkya is a film about personal transformation through collective cultural and interpersonal interactions, a story of emergence from iniquity to effulgence.

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