

6th Chidananda Dasgupta Memorial Competition 2025: Certificate of Merit

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Kantara: A Legend



Resurgence of the “*Daivik*” Power for bringing balance between Good and Evil: Rishab Shetty’s Indigenous Cinematic Folktale of Human Development, Kantara: A Legend, Establishes Prakriti Vs Sanskriti Discourse Through Tribal Retelling

Rishab Shetty directed film, Kantara: A Legend Chapter 1 is a cinematic treat for the cinema lovers. The very essence of “*Daiva*” (God) connected with the Indian folktale of Karnataka was presented for the first time to the cine audience through the first part of Kantara. The first part showcased the story of the status quo of princely states in the modern independent Indian system and the forest rights of the tribals. The film told the story of tribal people led by Shiva protecting the forest against the greedy local *zamindar* coming

from the princely tutelage to establish a balance between tradition and modernity which later got awarded the National Award. The prequel, ‘Kantara, A Legend Chapter 1’ begins from the same place where it ended in the first part. The place where Panjurli disappeared in the last part, at the same place the son of the Panjurli questioned about the disappearance of his father. Replying to him, the elderly of that village narrates the mythological tales associated with the place of disappearance and how that place is sacred

to them as their gods and ancestors reside there. With this particular question and its answer, the film begins and continues with a story from the past. The story begins in ancient times with a king and a young tribal girl. The king and his son went into the dense forest in search of "God's Supreme Forest" (*Ishwar ka Madhuvan*) where all the nature's gift were in abundance. There, they encounter the '*Daiva*' (deity) of the forest and the king dies while his son runs away. Meanwhile, the young tribal girl, Vaidehi, finds a unique fine stone with a mark of a trident in the river which the tribals enshrined as a *Daiva* (deity). The king's young son, who survived the forest, grew up to distance himself from the Kantara forest. Later he got two children: a son, Kulbhushan, and a daughter, Kanakavati who grew up into their youth. The king appoints his son, Kulbhushan, as the ruler of the kingdom and use to take care of the kingdom from behind. On the other hand, Vaidehi, the young tribal girl grew up and finds a child in the circular well of Kantara who was being protected by a tiger, a divine form of God. The child grew up to become their leader, Berme. He breaks the forest law of his ancestors and goes beyond the forest limits to see the kingdom of Bangara King, Kulbhushan, in response to latter's intrusion into the forest. In his quest, Berme and his friends gets imprisoned in the kingdom to find the greatest innovator of that kingdom, who was jailed. After a funny encounter with the soldiers they came out of jail and learned agriculture and ways of business based on barter system. The innovator helped them to start farming in the forest and conducting business in Bangara with the help of the man responsible for the same. In this process,

Berme becomes close to the princess, Kanakvati. Meanwhile, King Kulbhushan's friends instigate him, claiming that the princess is coming close to Berme and that they want to seize power. In response to this, Kulbhushan attacks the forest and kills Berme's mother, who called their '*Daiva*' for the protection. Listening to the prayers, *Guliga* appears within Berme in his *Rudra* (fierce) form, killing Kulbhushan and his entire army. Thus, the kingdom got disturbed with the killing of the King and rift appeared between the two communities.

Seeking truce, Princess Kanakvati proposes peace by establishing Kantara's *Daiva* (deity) alongside her own, which they accept. With the *Daiva* (deity) and *Shivalinga* consecrated, peace is established, but only for a short time. Because some evil *tantric* tribal groups from the dense forest took the *Daiva* (deity) of Kantara as the hostage, due to which the children of the village starts falling ill. Seeing this, a war breaks out between the tribal group of Kantara protected by the *Daiva* (deity) and the evil *tantric* groups that have taken the deity hostage. The old King and princess Kanakvati took help of the evil *tantric* groups to wage war against the tribals of Kantara. In response to this, how does *Adi Daivaa* (Primal Deity) come to Berme's rescue and whether or not he frees the tribal *Daiva* (deity) is the entire notion of this film. The whole film is worth watching. The film is a unique audio-visual offering, with a beautiful blend of graphics and VFX which heightens the thrill. The graphics are used brilliantly to showcase the divine powers. In Indian cinema, after Tumbbad and Mahavatar Narsimha, it is a really powerful presentation of the legend of India. The cinematic

visualization with the amalgamation of the vfx and graphics has made the legend and its story quite intriguing and connecting the audience with the visual spectacle. Besides, this is a pleasant breeze of mythological narrative with the tribal discourse of Karnataka amidst the recent only violence-filled South Indian films. The film does not gets weak at any point, be it the acting, music and sound design, visualization or the screenplay woven with humour, satire, romance and action, all attributes keeps the audience engaged till the end. The songs and dialogues are kept in their original language through the words and singing style used for prayers and invocations along with Hindi subtitles which gave the film its spiritual essence and soul. The film is based on the conflict arising from human evolution and a man's courage to maintain a balance between the good and the evil and divine intervention in it.

The film promotes the fundamental principle of India's spiritual and religious consciousness as put in Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta, that the gods come (incarnate) to protect *Dharma* and all the spiritual and divine power support a person when he stands up for what is right. The film also re-establishes the idea of the first part, of taking humanity forward by making proper and balanced use of nature and its resources. This film is a must watch for connecting with the many roots of Indian wisdom and spirituality. The film concludes again with a question about that circle of *Daiva* (deity), the answer to which will be found in the next film. All the characters are significantly portrayed with all the actors and actresses leaving their mark, prominent among them being Rishab Shetty,

Jayaraj and Rukmini Vasanth playing the role of Kanakavati. Rukmini Vasanth provides a strong foundation for the story and takes it to the climax. Gulshan Devaiah also makes his mark as the pleasure and throne seeking king. The film is a modern presentation of the tribal narrative of the appearance of God and Great Gods on earth and how they protected their children mostly tribals who lived in the Kantara forest (God's Supreme Forest). The Shiva-Shakti concept of Indian mythology along with the Boar god (Varaha) form of Vishnu are the ancient gods related to the people of Kantara. The presentation of Shiva and Shakti from the concept of the tribal lineage is an interesting note for the audience and the academic discourse. The protector of the forest and the gods, the tribal groups of the Kantara, who are decent and respects the balance of the Nature; they even share their food in three parts: one for themselves, one for the deity and one for the fierce forms living in the forest but protecting them. The film has some reference of playfulness of Indiana Jones and Captain Jack Sparrow (Pirates of the Caribbean) in the main character Berme during the market encounters with the soldiers. Also the film presents a powerful presentation of the revered *Bhuta Kola* on the cinematic screen with the epitome of the acting prowess shown by Rishab Shetty. It serves to revive the Indian folktale traditions with the advanced cinematic tools and graphics to enthrall the audience. The film doesn't just confine to the mythological story but actually putting the story of human development, how people from different communities encountered each other and in the process what course the humanity took. While the Kingdom of

Bangara was connected with sea route and people from all over the world were flocking with their treasures for business purpose and in return took the spices and other condiments from the deep forests of India which was offered by the Bangara, a modern city of those times. On the other hand, the tribals of Kantara were forest dwellers but decent people respecting the forest and its *Daiva* (deity) for the balance and believed in humanity. The third community was from the deeper part of the forest, the evil tribe of the forest, who controlled animals, spirits, ancestors and deities for their own benefit. They were shown to be demonic (*tamasic*) with the *tantric* attributes. Thus, the film is basically the interaction between all the communities and the outcome of which is the community which believes in the righteousness and keeping the balance of the nature actually establishes their just kingdom (*Dharma*) with the support of the divine beings and ancestors. Thus, it re-establishes the *shloka* (verse) of Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta, that whenever the righteousness and dharma would be removed, the god would incarnate to establish the dharma if the people with right intention move forward. The maker of the film takes advantage of the popular cultural discourses which is rampant now around the past and religion of India particularly the Hindu (*Sanatan Dharma*). The *Sanatan* (ancient one from the origin) concept is taken back to the roots where it connects with the forest dwellers who were actually civilized people of the forest keeping the balance of Nature. The film also takes into account the totem and omens for making it more interesting for the audience. Like in the film, 10000 BC, where the hero encountered

ancient tiger, here also in this film, Berme is protected by a tiger, which is also a totem used among the tribal groups at present. In the same film, there was an old lady who would speak to the ancestors, here also Berme was connected with the dead ancestors and spirits. Also one can take some reference of the film *Black Panther*, where one community blessed with the spirit of the Panther (one form of African big cat family) was leading the order of the Nature. In the same film, there was another community taking the totem of the monkey, same reference can be found in this film where the evil tribal group was connected by the lemurs. Thus, the film can be reviewed from the tribal perspective and discourse building around the notion of human development with a retelling of Indian mythology from the ancient folktale traditions. The film forces the audience to see and evaluate the Indian mythology from many different perspectives were the oral narratives from different parts of India may also be taken into account. Many scholars have put that there are 300 different versions of Ramayana available in India as well as in the world accounting to the different written, oral and performative traditions. Within the same purview, this film locates the story of incarnation of God, Vishnu in the form of *Varaha* (Boar), who is the protector of the forest, Kantara and the appearance of the great deity, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, for the protection of its true devotees which in this case are the forest dwellers, a tribal group. The folktale tradition comes from the *Bhuta Kola* tradition of Karnataka. The film can be reviewed from the multifaceted perspective but the prominent idea which takes the fore is the balance between the good and the evil or

Living with the Nature and Extracting the Nature, the very old fight of *Prakriti* and *Sanskriti*. The epitome of the discourse put forward by the film is the tribal cosmovision connected with the age old Indian concept of *Purush* and *Prakriti* (*Shiva-Shakti* or Man and the Nature).

References/Acknowledgement

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