

## Girish Kasaravalli's *Ghatashraddha* to play at Venice Film Festival

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Time was when many Indian filmmakers made socially relevant dramas, an ideology they picked up from the Nehruvian era. Girish Kasaravalli was one, and he helmed many movies that critiqued some of the country's demeaning social ills.

*Ghatashraddha* or *The Ritual* that came from Kasaravalli's oeuvre has been chosen to play at the Classics Section of the upcoming Venice Film Festival (28 August – 7 September).

Kasaravalli was merely 26 when the film opened in 1977. Based on a story also titled *Ghatashraddha* by U.R. Ananthamurthy, it was a brutal look at social hypocrisy and malaise centred on a young widow, essayed with admiral restraint by Meena Kuttappa (as Yamuna).

Her only friend is a boy, Nani (Ajith Kumar), and as the plot revolves around a Brahmin Vedic school in a remote Karnataka village, we see how a deep bond develops between the two. Nani, bullied by older boys, finds comfort in the widow's company – who lives with her father. Yamuna is shunned by the village folk, and lonely as she is, she falls for a young teacher's romantic seduction. Soon she discovers she is pregnant with his child. He tries in vain to convince her for an abortion that she refuses for a while, but later relents. In no time, village gossip spirals into malice and hatred for the poor woman. She is ostracised, termed immoral and ceremonially forced out of the village.

Kasaravalli helms his work into a canvas of brilliance, and some scenes still remain fresh in my memory. Yamuna's hush-hush abortion, Nani's turnaround, the excom-



munication conducted with pomp and, finally, the encounter with the cobra that calls the bluff.

*Ghatashraddha* is also very emotional. Watch the scene in which Yamuna with her head tonsured is being led out of the village and she bursts into tears when she sees Nani. In the end, we see her sitting under a banyan tree, the only shelter she would know thereafter. How poignant Kasaravalli turns these scenes into! The horrible isolation of a widow tells us of rank bad social evil.

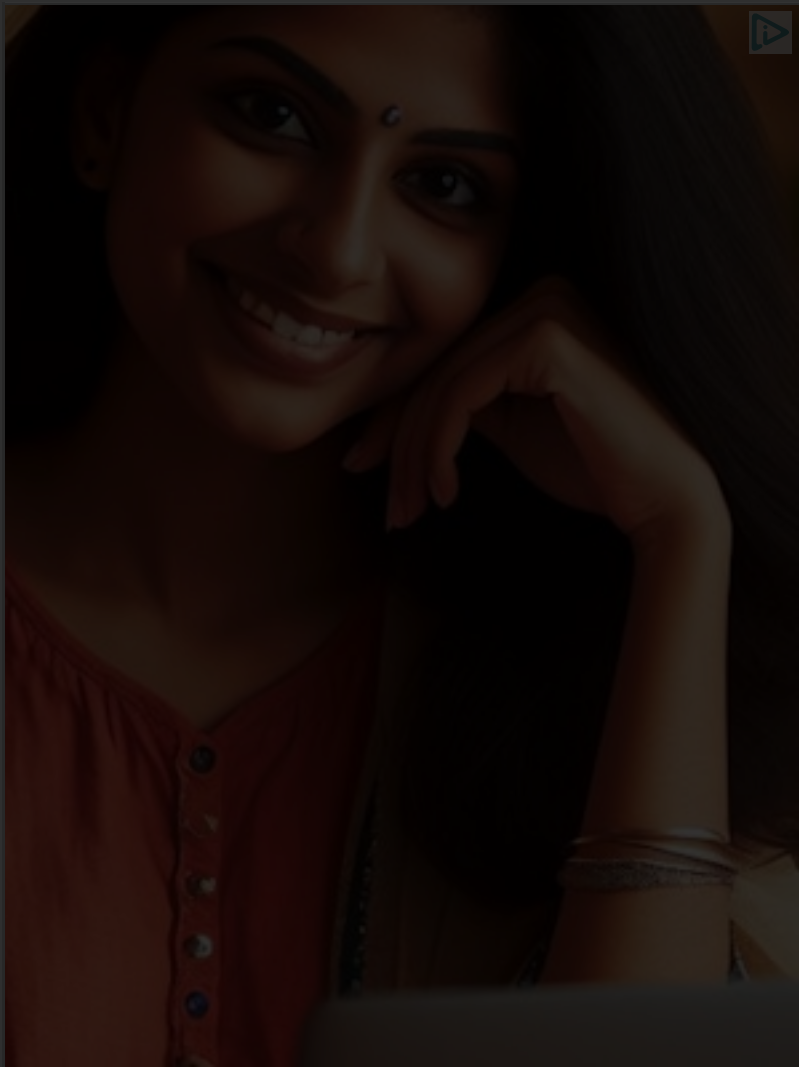
What is more, Kasaravalli underlines not just societal hypocrisy but also how it defeats the very purpose of a community's welfare. Nani's school has to close down because of the social scandal, and the boy has no school to attend!

Beautifully shot in black and white by Ramachandra, Kasaravalli's work is a bold illumination of how a village behaves towards what it considers, in its own selfish way, wrong and sinful. What then is right? Banishing the widow? Closing the school down?

One writer says that *Ghatashraddha* – which won three National Film Awards in 1977, including one for Best Feature -- is the greatest debut after Ray's masterpiece, *Pather Panchali*. I couldn't agree more with him. What is more, it signalled Kannada cinema's emergence as part of the New Indian Wave.

Watch the work today, and you would see how contemporary it still seems.

The writer is a senior film critic and author



### Discover additional potential income with Amazon

No previous experience needed

Sponsored by: Bdup Dates

SIGN UP

0 comments Sort by Oldest

Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin