

Legendary K B Tilak, a forgotten footprint!

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- *A review of Jwala Narasimha Rao's Telugu book on Tilak*

The legendary Tilak died a decade ago. But his story has been brought live by Jwala Narasimharao in a just released book. Hailing from a village, as a freedom fighter and a social activist, Balagangadhar Tilak (K. B. Tilak) had unleashed power of cinema (1956-82). He had left behind an inspiring untold story of a colossal, a dynamo who moved and mobilised people against Ingrained socio-economic conflicts and socio cultural explorations at the grassroots. The most striking messages that come out of many of his films are relevant even today, fifty years after. Similar causes and challenges are all around today to take on creatively and provocatively. I miss him and the enthusiasm he used to inspire in my visits to Hyderabad.

Art is not for the sake of art

I was inspired by Tilak decades ago. I have been arguing that where the governments have not succeeded over seventy years in accomplishing the cherished goals of Independence, films could accomplish in five years if only the directors are concerned about the problems of people and also pursue sincerely and strategically as KB Tilak had done. I did not know until I read in this Jwala's book that Russian revolutionary Lenin had said that he could change the face of the world if only the Hollywood film Industry is put under his control. Even Chinese leader Mao was referred to making some such claim using visual media. Such a belief is evident in most of K.B. Tilak's thirty films. He went further with belief that art is not for the sake of art, but for the sake of people and their cause. By being an example himself with his minimalist life style, he demonstrated what he said. I feel that today, January 14, being his 93 birth anniversary, is the time to remember Tilak.

Cinema has more impact than TV

Television has much higher reach and far more intensity than cinema. But far more of those associated with cinema are recalled and remembered than those engaged in television channels. TV has, of course, made some dent on the cinema viewership, but the influence of cinema has not been dented despite proliferation of channels for more than 25 years now, My book of 1995, "Social Impact of Mass Media", had

brought out that despite more time spent in front of TV, it has not made as much difference as cinema makes in general and specifically as in the case of films of the genre that KB Tilak had pioneered more than four decades ago. While cinema has inculcated societal concerns and discretionary sensitivities, TV channels have been source of indiscriminate consumerism, copycatting and promoting deviant behaviours among young and the vulnerable. Besides being viewed as an entertainer, cinema has more influence on institutions and minds where as television has on lifestyles of individuals. Land reforms, social exploitation, rich-poor conflict, environment-development conflict and the themes like these were effectively documented by Tilak. Even ideas for political symbolism, that we find today all around, were effectively used in Tilak's films.

Extraordinary visionary

Tilak was an extraordinary visionary. He foresaw the emerging political scenario and domination of markets and consumerism the same way that Mahatma Gandhi did about political parties. He used cinema as a medium to reflect grass root socio-political and cultural realities far more comprehensively than Satyajit Ray. Tilak was a far more humanist and rationalist all through his life. He was a true secularist. Each of his films brought out his sharp sensitivity of human behaviour. No one individual had introduced so many new faces to the cream of the Telugu film world as Tilak. . This includes not only heroes and heroins but technicians , singers and artists like Bapu-Ramana and writers like Sri Sri. The way songs were composed and used in each of his films, recalled even now, prompt and provoke people is amazing. Even the way folk art like Dappu and Burrakatha by certain communities were used effectively.

Must read in schools of journalism, communication

Jwala Narasimharao's book on Tilak should be a must read in schools of journalism, media and communication. This book is a good source for workshops. Half of Tilak's films stand out even today as case examples for how cinema could play a stellar role in changing outlooks. They depict the story of socio political transformation and transition of India. I would say that this freedom fighter-film producer-director was for many film veterans what Balagangadhar Tilak was more than hundred years earlier for many leaders of freedom movement, including Mahatma Gandhi. What Tilak demonstrated four decades ago is what the course many US universities have introduced last decade, Entertainment-Education, is all about.

Shyam Benagal honoured Tilak

I regret I could not hold a week long Tilak Retrospective in New Delhi. I have some satisfaction that I honoured KB Tilak at CMS news channel awards function and made another unique film veteran director Shyam Benagal to do the honours. Also, I took K.B. Tilak to Vijayawada to inaugurate a building of freedom fighters which I was responsible for its coming up in honour of my father, freedom fighter Nagulapalli Seetaramaiah, as a centre for citizen activism.

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