

Gulabi Talkies and Antardhawani

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Combining psychoanalytic melodrama and so-ciological expose, Girish Kasarvalli's "Gulabi Talkies" (Kannada, 122 mins, colour) begins with images of rivers, boats and boatmen, changing sky and waves on the sea shore. Gulabi (Umashree), a middle aged woman deserted by her husband, buys prawns from roadside vendors. Returning home, she fries the prawns; and next day gifts the prawns to her little step son, Addu, on his birthday. Addu's mother slaps him, as the old Gulabi could even poison the foodstuff. Addu's father fires Gulabi with a stricture not to step into their house, and returns the cooked prawns. Gulabi returns home, where she lives alone, while a cat smells the prawns. Three young men visit Gulabi's house, when she is not there. She is fond of cinema, and is watching a film at the village cinema hall, where the women sit separate from the men. As Kalyani's daughter is with labour pains, the men search out Gulabi, who is the village midwife in Kuduru. Gulabi refuses to leave, once the film has started, but the three men physically lift Gulabi and put her on a boat, and oar to Kalyani's house.

Even though Gulabi sees a film everyday, she refuses to step out of the boat, Kalyani promises a TV set, and Gulabi takes care of the child delivery. Gulabi lives on an island where there are no cable TV connections. Children run to a boat in excitement, as a dish antenna is unloaded. The village women rush to Gulabi's house to watch TV. Netru whose husband works in Dubai, is instructed by her mother-in-law to stay at home, and do the household chores. A dish antenna is fixed on the sand shore, and colour TV flashes. While Gulabi presses the remote for different channels, there is a power cut. When Tunga asks her fish merchant husband for a colour TV, the husband promises one after a big catch. The island villagers watch colour TV at Gulabi's hut. Gulabi's ex-husband, Musa (Krishna Murthy) is assistant to fisherman master Suleiman, and pleads on the fish folk to join Suleiman's association. Gulf money flows, and Suleiman owns boats and fishermen, Vasanna distributes Rs 50 to each fisherman, for staying with his union. Sheen drives away women watching TV at Gulabi's hut, and beats his wife. Soap operas on young wives and mother-in-laws are enjoyed by the village women, but the TV news is switched off. There is a close up of fishermen of loading nets from a boat. The men relate that wives have become less nagging with TV viewing. With Kargil War of May, 1999, communal tensions reach the village, and Hindu families frown on women visiting Muslim Gulabi's residence for TV.

Money has no caste or creed. Gulabi does the daily washing and chores for a woman who has just delivered a baby. She describes the marvelous soap operas on TV. While cycling, she picks up a film poster from a roadside wall, and pastes the poster on the outer walls of her hut. Village women watch in surprise. When Addu, Gulabi's step son peeps from a window, Gulabi invites him to watch TV, but he relates that her mother has instructed him not to visit her. The camera pans over Musa's boat plunging through the seas. As Netru (Pallavi) crosses on a small boat, Gulabi invites her to watch TV. There is boisterous laughter among the women, as they watch violent films.

One evening, Musa spends time with estranged wife, Gulabi, and Gulabi prepares fish and flavored rice. A little later Musa's second wife also drops in,

with son Addu. Trade and communal rivalries, develop amongst the fish merchants. Vasanna's men and Suleiman's men gather with sticks and axes. Armed men of Vasanna prevent Suleiman's boats to pass through shallow waters. Gulabi is fuddled with TV images. The fisherwomen discuss strange noises heard at night, but Gulabi has not heard anything. Musa asks the fishermen to sell fish at the market auction. The camera pans over fish on boat. Fishing society officials plead that everybody has same fishing rights. Musa is assaulted by goons, and Gulabi applies herbal balms on Musa's injured body. Damu and his men lead the assaults. The communal divide widens, and after the Kargil war, Muslims are looked on with suspicions. School boys collect donations for Kargil war fund, but Gulabi does not offer. Hindu Netra elopes with Musa, and the Muslim community is at risk. Police search for Musa, and he is accused of stealing one thousand of rupees from the local factory. Hindu fishermen, in order to weaken Suleiman's hold, fan police complaints. Locals stop a bus, seize Netru, and bring her back to the island.

Netru's mother-in-law does not accept her back. Vasanna's wife offers shelter to Netru on their house varandah. Netru feels guilty, but Gulabi has lost trust on the villagers. TV news is full of the Kargil war, and soldiers march to 'bande mataram'. Netru sits on the rocks by the shore, with the roar of waves and hoot of fishing vessels. There are processions proclaiming "Down with Suleiman", "Ocean is ours" and "Stop deep sea fishing". Government has allowed fishing licenses to other countries and local catch is affected. Fishermen complain to Vasanna about outsiders at Gulabi's house and Vasanna's son protests Gulabi's harassment. There are demands for buying fishing nets from local craftsmen. Young men direct Gulabi to leave the village. They take out her belongings from the hut, and smash up the abode. Gulabi sits cross legged with a forlorn look. She is bodily lifted, and put on a boat, with some of her belongings. The boat cuts through creeks for another island. Life goes on for midwife Gulabi, so long as women get pregnant. Old women watch TV on the set left behind by Gulabi, in the village.

Kasaravalli avoids improvised realism, and juxtaposes forces of humanity and exploitation amongst the fishing community, along the sea coast of Karnataka. Depictions of sociopolitical situations focus on cruel reality and jest. Stylistic and elegant, "Gulabi Talkies" allows a symmetry between the images and the daily speech of the fishing community. S Ramachandra Aithal's mobile camera maintains the aesthetic essence of the gazes of the sea fishing folk and the visual rhymes of the sea waves and fishing trawlers. Umashree as Gulabi is convincing, as she assembles a life in the face of cruelty and exploitation.

ANTARDHWANI

Jabbar Patel's "Antardhwani—The Inner Sound" (Hindi, 60 mins, colour) analyses the music of santoor maestro Shiv Kumar Sharma, through a series of talk interviews. Sharma, who was left handed and belonged to Jammu and Kashmir, learnt music from his father. Initiation to the tabla and classical songs led to solo tabla recitals on children's radio programs. Measurements of musical notes and rhythms were inculcated steadily. With age, influences of Ravi Shankar, Siddeshwari Devi and Begum Akhtar followed, along with deeper understanding of thumri, dadra and ghazal. Still photos of singers with accompaniment of songs recall musicians of Yore Sharma's father was the music supervisor of Radio Jammu. Classical music rendition on the tabla, two

string instruments, and the santoor are panned along Srinagar's Dal Lake. Sharma was too absorbed in music; and for college and university education, he took help from class and library notes from the best students in his class.

Hari Das Pandit taught Sharma classical music. Soon Sharma began composing music for B Shantaram's films. An overhead shot of roof tops in Jammu, is enveloped by music of santoor, violin, mouth organ, and an accordion. Sharma declined job offers from Radio Jammu and moved to Mumbai. There are overhead shots of Mumbai's rooftops. Vasant Desai encouraged Sharma for music direction in films. The background score of "Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje" emanated from a contract with HMV Company. This background score was released as an extended record, Sharma provided the santoor background score in Dev Anand's "Hum Dono". Ties with musicians like Jasraj, S D Barman, Kaajal and Ravi Maheshwari strengthened Sharma's association with the film world. Sharma plays the tabla in "Guide" on a song, to which Waheeda Rehman dances. Wife Manorama adapted to life in Mumbai. The old santoor had 100 strings and four sets of 25 bridges, Steel strings were on the right side and brass strings on the left. Sharma modified the santoor to steel strings on both sides of the instrument, which led to a crescendo of chromatic sound and notes. Staccato notes emerged from the santoor, with two wooden strikers. Still photos of similar instruments glide by.

Along with musician Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Sharma recorded "Call of the valley music" in Sweden. On screen Sharma speaks directly to the viewer, and plays solo instruments. There was close association with Ravi Shankar and George Harrison. The images record Sharma on lead with santoor, accompanied by tabla, esraj and strings, interspersed with the snow mountains of Kashmir and cultivation of crops. Sharma's father plays the tabla, and Sharma creates specially divine music on the santoor, leading to classical fusion. The duet in Yash Chopra's "Silsila", sung by Rekha and Amitabh Bacchan on screen, is accompanied by Sharma's santoor. Sharma was nine years old in 1947, and observes that "If there was a musician in every family, there world have been no partition". He played with Allah Rakha in Los Angeles, in 1968. Fame and accolades have been profuse in Shiv Shankar Sharma's music career. Patel builds up his film on interviews, discussions, polemics, music and environment in photography. Sharma's ardent devotion to music is linked to context, and the santoor music serves as a reintroduction and rediscovery. Faroukh Mistry's camera provides graphic physical evidence.

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