

Major Shift On Screen: Historical Significance Of New Wave Movies In Malayalam

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Abstract

The new wave Malayalam films played an important role in Indian film history and it introduced realistic social criticism and artistic experimentation in Malayalam movies. Directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan G Aravindan ,K G George etc express to Kerala society in a more realistic manner and through their films they portrayed caste, class, gender and other social evils in more realistic manner. It is very relevant today to analyse how films can be used as historical sources. Films like 'Swayamvaram', 'Elippathayam', 'Uttarayanam', 'Kumari' captured Kerala's complex socio political and cultural complexities. It also examines how Malayalam new wave movement influenced films of other Indian languages. Change in the representation of women in Malayalam movies, change in narrative structure, response of society about the social transformation in Kerala, and how new wave Malayalam movies were accepted globally and screened in film festivals were analysed. A new wave movies were entirely different from commercial movies. It challenged mainstream narratives and introduced realistic and complex themes. To analyse Kerala's shift from traditional society to modern, new wave Malayalam movies served as a historical document. This paper examines how new wave Malayalam movies reshaped India's film narration, and how much a new wave Malayalam movie can be used as a powerful historical source.

Key words: Malayalam films, New wave, social transformation, historical source

Introduction

In the Western world, neorealism in Italy and new wave cinema in France were promoted after World War II. Similarities can be seen in the literary world. The same problems that confront the works of Thomson, Proust, Sartre, Camu, and Kafka are faced by neorealists such as Rossellini, Desica, Fellini, and Pasolini, as well as Truffaut and Godard, in their writings. The problems of contemporary Latin American literary works can also be seen in the writings of people such as Gouberroche, Miklós Janszko, and Ista van Sambo. During 1970s the drastic change witnessed in Malayalam films also. Existentialism, identity crisis, alienation, death orientation, and the absurdity of life were the central themes of our artistic and cultural life. These were very different from the themes that art had dealt with until then. It is very relevant to understand why did these themes emerge in the seventies. Until the early sixties, the central themes in art were the capitalist-worker relationship, the rise of the underdog, social transformation, self-reliance, and optimism about the future. Thakazhi, Pottakad, Kesavadev, Ponkunnam Varkey, Basheer, Changampuzha, G. Shankarakurup, O.N.V., Vayalar, Thoppil Bhasi, K.T. Mohammed, N. Krishna Pillai and others all dealt with such themes. Cinema is the best art form of this era. Malayalam cinema, which was born with the talkie film 'Balan' in 1949, slowly began to advance with the entry of Udaya productions in 1949. Parikutty was the producer and P. Bhaskaran and Ramukariat were the directors of the famous movie 'Neelakkuyil'. From this point Malayalam film started to grow. Malayalam new wave movies was a groundbreaking movement in Indian and Kerala film history. More than an art, new wave Malayalam films gave some historical importance to movies. Realistic depiction of social, economic and political matters helped audience to easily relate the movie, and it was one of the main reasons for the acceptance of the movies. Through understanding the untold facts within the film, it would become a powerful tool which can be used in history. There are several criticisms about historical relevance of movies. According to them as film was created through a director's lens, reflecting their own perspective, biases and interpretations. But on the other side, untold facts created by the directors were not purposeful but influenced by his own experiences.

Background of the study

New wave Malayalam movies emerge in post independent India played an important role in understanding social political economic and the cultural factors of Kerala. Through a critical analysis of the movies we can understand the evaluation of Kerala's political and social condition after independence. Decline of feudalism, growth of communist ideologies, transformation from rigid caste system, etc is clearly visible in these movies. New wave movies were emerged in the backdrop of transformation from traditional society to modern one. Complexities in human characters can also found in these movies. Directors like Adoor Gopalkrishnan, G Aravindan and K G George liberated themselves from commercial film making and introduced realistic movies to Malayalam film industry.

Significance of the study

It is very relevant to understand the importance of Malayalam cinema as a source in Malayalam movies, especially New wave Malayalam movies represent past in more realistic manner. Exaggerations and subjectivity is common in every movies. It is also common in historical documents too. Historical documents, especially secondary sources, were also created by human beings and so there is a possibility of exaggerations and subjectivity. So past can be reconstructed by critical analysis of sources. Through movies, we can also recreate clothings, Architecture, life styles etc. It also help to understand social norms, values and tensions in a society. Malayalam new wave movies can be used as source in history through critical analysis of that movies.

Research Questions

1. How do new wave Malayalam movies can be used as a Historical source?
2. How New wave Malayalam movies represent Socio cultural factors of Kerala society?
3. How do New wave Malayalam movies represent the Cultural transition of Kerala?
4. How New Wave Malayalam movies portray gender roles?
5. How do the New wave movies represent the transition of Kerala from traditional to modernity?

Objectives of the study

- Analyse how New wave Malayalam movies represent Transition of Kerala society from traditional to Modern.
- Understand how the New wave movies record Kerala's past
- Evaluate the impact of New wave Malayalam movies in other regional language movies in India.
- Examine the representation of marginalised group in Kerala through movies
- Compare commercial films with new wave malayalam movies.

Review of literature

New wave malayalam movies movement was one of the influential movement in 1970s. It has been extensively studied due to its impact in portraying Kerala society and politics. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's 'Cinemanubhavam' help to study a deep understanding of New wave Malayalam movies. Sajil Sreedhar's 'Adoor Sarvajaneenathayude Dreshyethihasom' also gave information about Adoor Gopalkrishnan and his contribution in New wave movement. K Velappan's Cinemayum Samoohavum made an intensive study on the relationship between film and Society. It was 'Kannadakalum Kazchakalum' by P N Sreekumar intensively study about New wave movement in the world, India and Kerala too. 'Suvarnachalachithrangal' by Anil Kumar K S and Rasmi G analyse many new wave movies critically.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, relying primarily on secondary data. Sources include selected films, Scripts of movies, journals related to new wave Malayalam movies, biographical works of directors etc were used. Textual analysis is used to analyse movies' themes, narrative techniques and socio political comparative analysis is also used to compare Director's perspective and to compare Malayalam movies with Other regional movies.

Content

The new cinema of India, like the new cinema of the world, is making the same declaration of independence, that is freedom from tradition, convention and mediocrity. It seeks to examine and explore the human condition in ways that have been tried before; it presents the viewer with new colors, sounds, forms and styles. It is natural for the limited sensitivity of the average viewer to respond to them with indifference or outrage. It is worth examining the extent to which the new cinema has influenced the flow of popular or commercial cinema. Such a close examination is relevant in view of the extensive use of formal experiments and innovations commonly seen in the approach of

“underground” and “new wave” films. The films of producers who have witnessed the undeniable influence of the new cinema on the public are often seen as unadulterated imitations or as attempts to surpass the originals. This investigation leads us to the situation of our audience, who are ruthlessly excluded from new cinema. The fact that production values, i.e., big budgets and overall color palette, play a decisive role in satisfying the audience in general, serves the interests of the big film industry. The industry is ruthlessly opposed to new types of films that are made on the lowest budget, without top stars and dazzling sets. They fear that if they become popular, it will lead to the collapse of the establishment. Here it lies the secret of why new cinema does not make a significant impact on our audience or on cinema. New wave movies have its influence from Neo realism emerged in Italy. France adopted neorealistic methods in its film making. The waves of the New Wave also reached the socialist countries. In 1965, Istvan Szabo, who was only twenty-seven years old in Hungary, made his first film, *The Age of Daydreams*, a creative response to the entrenched academic ideas of Central Europe. The idea of 'new wave films' sought further development opportunities in third world countries.

The human condition that was the key to the creation of ultra modern literature in Kerala and it gave birth to the new cinema. The philosophical crises that served as the undercurrent of ultra-modern literature, its habits, and writing styles, can be seen directly and indirectly in new wave cinema. This can be understood when you read the works of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan, M.T., John Abraham and others carefully. The unsatisfying mood, the concerns about freedom, the sense of alienation, the helplessness of not being able to influence the system, the unexplained anxiety, and the lack of faith all become evident. No one had the answers to the problems. Neither did Thoppil Bhasi's '*Ashwadha*' or '*Tulabaharam*' point the finger at a bright future. But New wave movies like '*Swayamvaram*', or '*Nirmalayam*' never ended in a bright future. But the realities of life can be seen there. Adoor Gopalakrishnan started new wave malayalam movies in 1972. 'The central characters in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's films are labeled as mad men because they quarrelled with the community conscience. Vishwam in '*Swayamvaram*', Shankarankutty in '*Kodiyettam*', Unnikunju in '*Elippattayam*', Ajayan in '*Anantharam*', Sridharan in '*Mukhamukham*', Basheer in '*Mathilukal*', Thommi in '*Vidheyam*' are all mad men who wander in the outer reaches of society. They have said goodbye to the way of life regulated by the community conscience. Those who are completely different are madmen in a way. Madness is judged by society. In Western countries, they are sent to psychiatric hospitals. There, with a record of good conduct from the authorities, they can return to the mainstream. In our society, unspoken rules should be followed. We have a way of purifying and accepting people by sprinkling them with virtue. There are those who have accepted death, imprisonment or confinement in mental hospitals. Shankarankutty in '*Kodiyettam*' is among those who have changed their minds and have been purified and accepted. Basheer in *Mathilukal* and Kunjunni in *Kathapurush* are with Shankarankutty. Vishwa and Sita in *Swayamvaram*, Sreedharan in *Mukhamukham*, and Unnikunju in '*Elippathayam*' chose the second path. But the content of all of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's works is glorified by the path chosen by Shankarankutty in '*Kodiyettam*'. This bias is what makes Adoor Gopalakrishnan a political filmmaker who has taken a strict decision.

According to the famous film maker Aravindan, his films embody distinct social perspectives, while eschewing simplistic or didactic approaches to addressing societal concerns. He advocates for a more nuanced exploration of the underlying social dynamics and value systems that precipitate these issues, thereby imbuing his cinematic representations of humanity with a tangible, contextually grounded quality. Many critics believe that after *Uttarayana*, Aravindan's interest in socially important issues ended and that his philosophical inquiry turned to other realms. In fact, Aravindan's own opinion, as mentioned earlier, indicates that his stance did not change. Such misunderstandings are caused by seeing works only in their superficial nature and expressing admiration. Since he adopted very diverse themes in their external nature, it is possible to misunderstand Aravindan's contents. To analyze a work, approaches must be studied along with themes. The theme and approach are the combination of the content of the work. When the content is analyzed in depth in this way, it can be understood that the intersection of the middle class consciousness in post-independence Kerala is woven into Aravindan's paintings. By comparing Aravindan's films of the 1970s and 1980s, we can study the subtle shifts in the consciousness of the Kerala middle class. The journey from social revolution to asceticism and love of nature is a journey of two decades for the Kerala mind.

The New Wave film movement, like any other movement, has had to go through three decades. An early period of activism and turmoil, a period of wisdom and maturity, and final stage of collapse. The early days of New Wave Cinema were one of intense activism and determinism. The apostles came forward and said that this is it, this is the only cinema. They put forward some conditions for cinema to be a good art. This is not a business. They were responsible artists. They argued that they alone did not need censorship. Most importantly, they said that cinema was the art of the director alone. They completely rejected the relevance of the actor. The second phase of the development of the New Wave cinema, a fierce ideological conflict began between the staunch believers in the theory of authorship and the New Left thinkers. A similar ideological conflict took place in ultramodern literature. The influences of

postmodernism/supermodernism began to be evident in the 1980s. The scope of postmodernism was very limited. There was no flow of creative writings like modernism during this period. Rather, postmodernism emerged as a critique of modernism/supermodernism. It rethought many of the theories that modernism had created. Postmodernism was a theoretical rethinking of modernity itself. Grand theories like Marxism failed, and the almost complete collapse of socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was complete. Its impact on thought was fatal. It even reached the point of the death of history. Barthes predicted the death of God. The validity of these new slogans is not to be questioned now. Rather, the aim here is only to indicate the deep decline that has entered contemporary thought. In the late eighties and early nineties, the distinction between high art and low art began to fade. This also affected the film industry. Indeed, New Left critics chose a new approach. They went beyond the aesthetic conventions of high art and low art and began to read the ideology in the writing. The use of the mainstream or alternative dichotomy was also questioned.

Although the new wave cinema adopted some of the ideas of modernity, it often failed to change old habits and styles. Let's take Aravindan's films. Of course, in the later Aravindan films there have been attempts to change the approach. 'Chidambaram' is the story of the passion a woman feels for a man, the helplessness and emotionality of that woman to overcome the boredom of loneliness, and the exploitation of that man by using his power. But at the end of the film, the camera keeps its eyes fixed on the top of the gopuram of the Chidambaram temple. The same approach can be seen in the later Aravindan films as well. The good films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan and John Abraham are human documents of Kerala life. But it cannot be said that all of them are completely politically correct. The New Wave Malayalam cinema's claim to objectivity in representing history is rooted in its nuanced, multi-layered narratives that eschew simplistic or propagandist approaches. Directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and K.G. George achieved this through authentic storytelling, often drawing from real-life experiences and marginalized voices. However, one could argue that their films, while grounded in reality, still reflect the directors' own perspectives and biases, thus questioning the extent of 'objectivity'. Ultimately, these films offer valuable, if subjective, interpretations of Kerala's socio-political history. The body movements of women, who move quickly and efficiently while doing various tasks in a systematic manner, are most visible in the kitchen. The controlled mobility of the female characters in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Elipathayam*, which depicts the disintegration of the feudal upper caste society in Kerala, is very vividly captured. Unni is a middle-aged man who symbolizes the decay of the feudal system. Like a mouse burrowing into a hole, he retreats into his house and takes refuge from the challenges of the outside world. Unni has three sisters. The elder sister, Janamma, is married, and two younger sisters, Rajamma and Sridevi, are unmarried. Rajamma is a devoted sister. She spends her life taking care of Unni. Women in these films were often portrayed with complexity and depth, breaking away from traditional stereotypes. Directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and K.G. George depicted women as multidimensional characters navigating societal constraints.

Conclusion

New Wave Malayalam cinema's representation of history offers a complex, multifaceted portrayal of Kerala's socio-political landscape. Through authentic storytelling and complex characters, directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and K.G. George have left an indelible mark on Indian cinema, providing valuable insights into the region's history and Malayalam new wave movies offers a unique perspective to understand Kerala's history and society. They represent past society, marginalised groups, gender disparity, cultural changes, etc in a clear manner. This explanation may be absent in traditional historical records. Film can help to fill the gaps which can't be filled by secondary sources. Even though we can understand objective historical elements from New wave Malayalam movies, there were some kind of Subjective elements in it. Directors's perspective may be affected by some kind of subjectivity. Their objectivity lies in presenting multifaceted narratives but the inherent biases and beliefs would sustain. This would reflect in their movies.

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