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Shibu.B



NEW GENERATION MALAYALAM CINEMA AND THE CRISIS OF THEORY



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to identify the particular cultural practices realized in the specific cultural context of Kerala with reference to the larger socio political scenario emerged in the post liberal, post capital ,post cyber world. I attempt to identify the potential of cinema, as a cultural product, to reflect and engage this ever changing, turbulent socio political situation in the context of New Generation Malayalam Movies. In addition to the above, I would like to highlight the inefficiency of the existing theories to effectively explain the current situation and the need to formulate new theories to engage the much complicated cultural context.

KEYWORDS :Organic Social, fabricated Social, Public Sphere, Depoliticise, Dehistoricise.

INTRODUCTION--

Our society is identified largely as a consumer society. High rate of literacy, rise of middle class as a pressure group, increasing number of expatriate Malayalis working abroad, the intensive intervention of media in the privatest aspect of our lives are all factors contributing to the aggressive consumerism that grows to violent proportions. The sprouting up of free floating economic zones irrespective of urban rural divide, proximity to global market due to easy access to mass media and internet and emergence of technocratic community as a powerful labor force induces our propensity for aggressive consumption. Exposure to global practices of consumption due to constant interaction with different cultures across the globe redefined our quotidian experience of being alive.

Mass media and smart phone revolutions have further fragmented the already fragmented self of keralite. Television channels had already erased the idea of the public by situating individuals in the realm of his/her family. The experience of being wired throughout in the post 3G smart phone scenario has further redefined the idea of the family as a broken peace occasionally glued together. As a result the traditional function of the individual, either within the family or within the society, is disrupted and he/she is no more capable of producing meanings traditionally attached to them.

Critical absence of the public sphere alienates man from his/her immediate society. An organic link between the individual and the society disappears and individuals cut off from society and history try to substitute their lack by organizing fabricated social gatherings like residence associations, get togethers, tours and trips etc. Those are attempts to negotiate the internal feeling of emptiness by means of external experience of festivity. Such gatherings emanate superficial experiences of celebration and festivity beneath which we see soulless Epicureans searching for meanings in an essentially dissonant and incoherent social space. Beneath the veneer of this monotonous peripherality we all carry within us an urge to become socially embedded.

Desperate attempt to situate oneself in a meaningful context is manifested in our ambivalent approach towards religion and institutionalized politics. On the one hand we realized the inefficiency of the metanarratives in according meanings to our existence. But on the other hand we still believe in miracles and superhuman powers. This is evident in the increasing voter turnouts we have in each elections and the increasing number of devotees seeking solace in religious practices. The contradiction is that we are politically conscious on the one hand and ideologically servile on the other. In the above paragraphs I tried to map out some of the essential features and tendencies visible in the socio-cultural realm of Kerala. We are situated in a transition age. The dynamics of cultural practices performed in this juncture will ultimately decide our future. Such a situation is not adequately documented in literature of our time. Cinema, which has the capacity to assimilate each nuance of popular experience, remains as an effective tool for understanding the tumultuous site of our socio-cultural existence.

Films, as cultural products, usually unveil the politico-economic situation of their production. Like all other cultural texts film can also be considered as the product of its context. It encapsulates within its structure and texture the turbulent dynamics of cultural forces engaged in its creations. As the term suggests the so called New Generation Movies in Malayalam categorically convey some of the emerging tendencies lying latent within the cultural domain of contemporary Kerala society. The ideological vacuum created by the waning of the leftist positions, the challenges being confronted by the idea of the social, the inability to operate memory as a means for effective political resistance are all manifested in different forms in the context of New Generation Malayalam Cinema. Let's see how such movies bring in to central stage some tendencies visible in the social body of our state.

FROM ORGANIC SOCIAL TO FABRICATED SOCIAL

Human beings are not only mere bodies and their desires. They move along positions accorded to them in the social life. Identity is socially constructed. When the idea of the social acquires the quality of a myth individuals embedded in society will suffer identity crisis. Disappearance of the public sphere as a "discursive place in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment" (Hauser, Gerald) has rendered the individual deeply frustrated. The unified identity of the individual is fragmented due to the emergence of "mediated public sphere", as indicated by John Thompson, which is de-spatialized and

non-dialogical. Ever widening social network systems provide a new way of experiencing the public where body becomes totally irrelevant. The elimination of the divide between the public and the private made the idea of the social obsolete. So, irresistible longing for the absent social is one of the characteristic features of New Generation Malayalam movies.

A society that had plenty of opportunities in the past for public gatherings and mutual sharing is seen nostalgically remembering that golden past. The social has become an object of desire or an enchanting distant dream for the protagonists who inhabit the hostile terrain of these films. Movies of the past are rich with scenes of collective labour and bodily interaction set under the backdrop of agriculture labour or industrial labour. Absence of this organic social frustrates the inward looking, politically and socially disengaged protagonists who try to substitute this lack by means of a fabricated social. Organizing get-together of old pals, (Idukki Gold, Classmates), undertaking long trips (Idukki Gold, Neelakasam Pachakkadal, Chuvanna bhoomi, North 24 Katham) are all symptomatic of the earnest desire of the frustrated individuals to become socially situated. The seemingly proactive protagonists of these films experience emptiness amidst superficial festivity. In both Neelaaksam, Pachakkadal Chuvanna Bhoomi and North 24 Katham journey has become a metaphor for political socialization whereas in Idukki Gold it is associated with pleasure of the body.

FROM SOCIAL TO CORPOREAL

Cut off from the monotony of the superficial festivity the New Generation protagonist feels existential vacuum. When the idea of the social is getting more and more mythified, he turns towards his own body. Body, then, becomes a space for activity for the hero in North 24 Katham. His obsession to keep his body clean can be contrasted with the desire of the old heroes who wanted to keep society free of all evils. In Da Thadiya the entire narrative is woven around the body of the protagonist. His obese body has become an object of ridicule to a society that has certain values attached to body. Body, according to Foucault, is also directly involved in a political field. Here the hegemony of the white, tall, fit body marginalizes short and obese ones. The protagonist becomes part of a resistance politics when he declares that he was fighting for the rights of all marginalized groups. His idea of the politics accommodates the discourses of the marginalized. A call for the politics of the multitude that articulates agency for the marginalized is made in this movie.

FROM POLITICS TO PLEASURE

When talking about the trajectory of the current theoretical positions Terry Eagleton remarked: "There is a keen interest in coupling bodies, but not in labouring ones" (2). By this he indicates a shift from politics to pleasure that is evident in the intellectual activity of the current academic practices. New Generation Malayalam Movies are preoccupied with the discourse on pleasure and sexuality. The extensive use of ante language with sexual connotations, conversations marked by overtly sexual implications and a desire for the obscene without inhibition are all marks of New Generation Movies (Honey Bee, Trivandrum Lodge, Vedi Vazhipadu, 22 Female kottayam). This may be suggestive of the fact that sexuality has become an all pervading and all permeating discourse especially in the post cyber world. An attempt to correlate pleasure with sexuality is evident in most of the New Generation Movies. It is the female body which is getting more and more objectified. Jean Baudrillard regards seduction as feminine and sex as a masculine mode. So pleasure of the male is preserved in such discourses. Female body is stripped off all its political implications and becomes a topic for intersubjective communications. Rare attempts to demolish the actor/acted duality can be

seen in some movies (22 Female Kottayam, Trivandrum Lodge). The active engagement of the female characters in such discussions actually trivializes the whole idea of gender politics as a mere discourse on sexuality. Such representations do not bring about any paradigm shift in the traditional gender role performed by women. On the other hand female characters in movies like 1983, Diamond Necklace are situated in the space traditionally reserved for them. A comprehensive awareness of the issue of women is critically absent in such films. Contrary to Lyotardian conceptualization, here we witness an increasing amount of incredulity towards micro politics.

FROM HISTORY TO CRICKET PITCH

Memory plays a key role in most of the New Generation Movies.. Memory narratives like 1983, Da Thadiya, Idukki Gold etc. strategically try to organize memory around family and individual cutting it off from the larger political context. These films are marked by the absence of memories of collective and effective political actions. Memory has lost most of its political connotations and becomes highly personal. In 1983 we see history woven around the game of cricket without letting other political events polluting its sanctity. In Da Thadiya, the narrator of the story recollects major events in the life of the protagonist in the backdrop of Sachin's innings. Antipathy towards the hegemonic structures of history is the characteristic feature of post modern cinema. Here a playfulness laying latent in its treatment of the past dehistoricises memory by disengaging it from politics. This can be contrasted with the movies of T.V. Chandran and Adoor who used memory as a political weapon. In their films like Ormakal Undayirikkanam (T V Chandran), Mukhamukham (Adoor Gopalakrishnan) individual memory reconstructs history in all its plurality.

CONCLUSION

Being aggressively consumerist in nature Kerala society is open to the turbulent politico-economic environment characterized by the post globalised, post cyber world. Loss of faith in theoretical positions, antipathy towards metanarratives, and disengagement with social and political discourses are all symptomatic of this cultural schizophrenia unleashed by the post capital political imbroglio. Those symptoms are regularly found their expressions in the New Generations movies produced recently. Ours is a society that has bypassed some of the essential phases of human development. We haven't undergone intensive industrialization and the consequent urbanization. But at the same time we have access to the latest possibilities available in cyber space. So a comprehensive theoretical position, that is indigenously developed, is needed to effectively decipher the complicated dynamics of power operating in the socio cultural context of Kerala. A political ideology capable of articulating discourses on body and capable of explaining the experience of being virtually public should be formulated. The emerging idea of the politics of the multitude may be properly addressed. The contradictions, conflicts, and crisis being erupted within contemporary capitalist societies after the smart phone revolution should also be negotiated. As Douglass Keller has pointed out "...the changes in class stratification, the labor process, new technologies, the media, and politics should all be a part of our theorization. There should be attempt to politicize it, to connect it with new social movements and existing political struggles" (31). In this context, New Generation Malayalam Cinema can be considered as an arena for effective intellectual activity to identify those lacunae unexplored by academicians.

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