

POPULAR SHADES OF 'COLOURISM': AN ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR AND BODY POLITICS IN KERALA'S VISUAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Indian cinema in general and Malayalam cinema in specific, with its unique beginnings in the realistic idealism of the black-and-white era and its gradual shift in the 80's to the imaginary male-centric spaces, is well critiqued upon as a shedding of social responsibility. Contemporary Malayalam cinema however, is praised for its 'new generation cinema' wave, which has apparently shed both its fetish over rustic settings, anti-political undertones and patriarchal violence, to embrace an urban, post-political life of the supposed 'new generation' Malayalees. Such cinemas however, continue to remain within the monochrome panorama of the old generation which refused to acknowledge the social other and continued to position the dark-skinned, short statured, plump bodies as a site of violence and humour where the physical body plays a part in the politics of subaltern subjugation. The indirect implication of course being that such bodies are not suited for a civil society, who remain incongruent with the realities of the modern spaces by either being violent and antagonistic or comic and out of place. The paper aims to broadly define and delineate the practices of casteism and visual untouchability being practiced in Malayalam visual media. It also tries to establish that the Malayali psyche remains receptive to humour rooted in blatant racism and casteism in Kerala's modern cultural artifacts such as cinema and television productions. The primary texts of this study will be films of the present decade as well as a selection of comedy sketches from Malayalam television.

KEYWORDS: *Humour, Visual Culture, Caste, Popular Cinema, Malayalam, Dalit Representations, Body Humour*