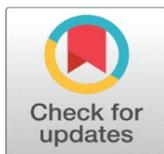
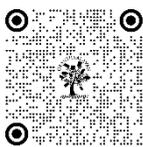


# CARNIVALISING THE SCREEN: BAKHTIN'S DIALOGISM AND THE EVOLUTION OF NEW-GEN MALAYALAM CINEMA

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## ABSTRACT

The Malayalam film industry has undergone a significant transformation since 2010, marked by the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers who have introduced innovative and disruptive elements into the cinematic landscape. This article explores the concept of "carnivalising the screen" and the dialogical nature of New-Gen Malayalam cinema, focusing on how these films have subverted traditional norms and embraced a more inclusive and diverse narrative approach.

**Keywords:** Malayalam Cinema, New-Gen Films, Mikhail Bakhtin, Chronotype, Canivalism and Dialogism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The new generation of Malayalam cinema, emerging in the early 2010s, has brought about a significant paradigm shift in the industry. Characterised by fresh and unusual themes, new narrative techniques, and a departure from traditional superstar-driven films, this movement has revitalized Malayalam cinema. New-gen Malayalam cinema has moved away from the conventional themes of the past, such as rural settings and invincible heroes. Instead, films like 'Kumbalangi Nights' and 'Salt and Pepper' feature ordinary men and women as lead characters, often depicting urban and middle-class life.

This article explores the carnivalesque and dialogical nature of new-gen Malayalam cinema, highlighting the significant changes in themes, narrative techniques, and character representation since 2010. Films such as 'Salt and Pepper', 'Kumbalangi Nights', 'Maheshinte Prathikaram' and 'Angamali Diaries' are analysed to demonstrate how these movies subvert traditional norms, celebrate the chaotic and the grotesque, and include diverse voices and perspectives. The article discusses the shift from conventional superstar-driven films to narratives rooted in reality, featuring ordinary men and women, and the use of local settings and dialects to enhance authenticity. It also addresses the representation of marginalized communities and the critical and commercial success of these films, underscoring their impact on the Malayalam film industry and global cinema. The new generation of Malayalam cinema, emerging in the early 2010s, has brought about a significant paradigm shift in the industry. Characterised by fresh and unusual themes, new narrative

techniques, and a departure from traditional superstar-driven films, New-Gen movement has revitalized Malayalam cinema. Cinemas of Malayalam industry were running through the very same track of Aristotelian hero concept a hero that of 'high places' and of 'high virtues' other than the tragic flaw (hamartia) that makes him fall and thus brings out the experience of catharsis in the audience. The stories revolved and unfolded around the life of the protagonist and all the settings and other characters existed only to enhance the protagonist's journey. All these hero-centric stories glorified the glorious past and represented the feudal lords or their successors of the previous centuries.

Thus, Malayalam cinema as a whole represented only a small section of society. These heroes were like demigods who could survive the tragedies of life and come back victorious even if they were hit by a meteorite, otherwise the film would fail commercially. Their philosophy was life in abundance, as well as didactic according to the abundant life skills they imparted. The institution of marriage and the objectification of the family, as well as the painful trials of domestic life, were the main motive. The "second sex" always remained inferior and was there to satisfy the "male gaze" as a filler character. The female characters were there to be taught or tamed by others as they were the people causing chaos everywhere.

## 2. THE SIGNIFICANT TRANSFORMATION

Life after 2010 has witnessed transformative changes across various aspects, driven primarily by rapid technological advancements, shifting social dynamics, and evolving global challenges. The technological advancements like smartphones and connectivity: social media booms especially TikTok, the streaming on line sources of entertainment the open economy's freedom and the influence of Korean wave or 'hallyu' has been brought forth changes in the commoners of Kerala. This state has been influenced by educated migratory youth and was discontented by the prevailing systems that have not changed for decades especially in this electronic era. This Zero Gen or the Alpha generation, the technophiles, embarked on filming and broadcasting the life around them. That reduced film to one of the entertainment and there a plethora of other entertainment channels online and can be availed through the mobile phones or the laptops. These live streaming channels including the various social media platforms like whatsapp Face book tiktok you tube reels etc. with the outbreak of electronic revolution everyone became a content creator. This made a change in the perception of the film making in the hearts of the participants. They were opinionated about the whole structure of the film and making the plot structure and even the camera positioning. The Zero gen as they were techies and were easily adaptable to this flood of contents.

The invention in the new technologies made the film making process affordable to the common folk who can disseminate the knowledge through the help of the handy equipment available to them. Film making became cost affordable to the middle class. They set the films in to their own life surroundings and found the ordinary beings. The smartphone revolution became ubiquitous, with devices like iPhones and Androids integrating seamlessly into daily life. Apps reshaped communication, commerce, and entertainment. The influx of content on the internet has revolutionized entertainment and film, democratizing creation and distribution and introducing new challenges. As the industry adapts to this new paradigm, the focus remains on balancing creativity with audience expectations to ensure that quality storytelling continues to thrive in the digital age. An analysis of these films and their narration and the presentation comes out as a stark contrast to the film narration an present prevalent before this era.

## 3. DIALOGISM AND CARNIVALISM

These films follow a democratic pattern and celebrate life as a phenomena and the revelry and the subversion of the hierarchical structure of the film reflects the society that which it thrives. Films of the previous generations were remained as a monologist discourse in which direct is the person who envisages the film and it was his creation of art as cinema was the always considered as directors art. Even the camera positioning often changed in congruence with the democratic vision of life. While the previous generation films the camera was focused always on the hero to bring out the effect of a cosmic hero and the aerial shots were prevalent in them to show the omniscient presence of the director or the hierarchical structure of the society. While in the New -Gen the camera was panning around the least important character even to show sometimes these insignificant characters also can turn the actions in to another direction. Instead of the traditional monologos linear plots these films dialogic carnivalesque nonlinear plot and it represented the locus just as Baktin's chronotope they demonstrate the quality of polyphony and the other characters of dialogism. Post-2010 films, however, reimagine the chronotope by presenting space and time as fluid, transformative, and inherently dialogic.

For example, in *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25* (2019), the rural-urban dichotomy is questioned through the arrival of a humanoid robot in a conservative village, creating spaces where tradition and modernity coalesce and clash. Time, too, is no longer linear; films like *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016) and *Joji* (2021) blur past, present, and future, reflecting a fragmented, modern experience. This reconfiguration aligns with Bakhtin's view that time and space is not inert containers but active forces that have been shaped by cultural consciousness.

This article demonstrates a detail study of the aestheticism of the NewGen films in the light of Bakhtinian theory. In examining the narrative and aesthetic choices of new-generation Malayalam films, Mikhail Bakhtin's theories offer a compelling framework to understand the shift in storytelling. Bakhtin's concepts of the chronotope, dialogism, and the carnivalesque illuminate the interplay between time, space, and voices within these films. This cinematic movement reflects a democratization of voices and perspectives, mirroring Bakhtin's emphasis on polyphony. By breaking away from linear narratives and traditional character arcs, these films embrace multiplicity and nuance, fostering a dialogic relationship with the audience. This theoretical lens allows us to delve deeper into how Malayalam cinema negotiates its socio-cultural realities and redefines its artistic boundaries. As a stark contrast to the traditional linear plot and monochromatic structure, these films accept polyphony. There, several voices, viewpoints, and social realities coexist and interact. This dialogue dynamism not only reflects the social and cultural environment of Kerala, but also questions the traditional film shooting standards, promoting attractive interaction between the story and the general public.

Till 2010, Malayalam films primarily followed linear narrative structures rooted in family drama, social realism or morality tales. Though artistically rich, these films primarily position the viewer as a passive recipient of a fixed, authoritative voice. For example, films like *Manichitrathazhu* (1993) and *Kireedam* (1989) featured stories in which the central conflict revolved around individual protagonists and their moral or emotional struggles.

Pre-2010 Malayalam cinema predominantly adhered to a linear narrative structure, often rooted in family dramas, social realism, or moralistic tales. These films, while artistically rich, largely positioned the audience as passive recipients of a fixed, authoritative voice. For instance, films like *Manichitrathazhu* (1993) or *Kireedam* (1989) presented stories where the central conflict revolved around individual protagonists and their moral or emotional struggles.

In stark contrast, new-generation Malayalam films challenge this singular perspective. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, these films open up narratives to multiple voices, each holding equal significance. For instance, *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019) dissects family dynamics not through a single heroic figure but through an ensemble cast whose intersecting stories dismantle traditional hierarchies of gender and familial roles. This democratization of perspectives embodies Bakhtin's idea of a dialogic text, where meaning is created through. The carnivalesque character of eccentricity wins over the traditional heroic concept in the minds of the audience. Familiar free interaction with people destructing or discarding the decorum is an intrinsic behavior of canivalism, the existence of dualism fades away like mist and all the duality and "carnival often brought the unlikeliest of people together, those ordinarily separated by impenetrable socio-hierarchical barriers. The suspension of distance between people encouraged free interaction and free individual expression"

The narratives and aesthetic evolutions in new-generation Malayalam cinema find a profound resonance with Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical constructs. Bakhtinian concepts like dialogism and carnivalesque and also the chronotope—the intrinsic connection of time and space in narrative—can be used to analyse this New-Gen films and their layered narrative styles. At the start of a traditional linear plot and monochromatic structure, these films accept polyphony. There, several voices, viewpoints, and social realities coexist and interact. This dialogue dynamism not only reflects the social and cultural environment of Kerala, but also questions the traditional film shooting standards, promoting attractive interaction between the story and the general public. For example, in most of NewGen films introduction scene is always shows the bustling activities in market place of in harvest (*Maheshinte Prathikaram*, *Salt and Pepper*) might serve as a chronotope where diverse social interactions occur, highlighting multiplicity and dialogue. In contrast, a secluded place evokes introspection or isolation. The chronotope helps us understand how settings are more than physical locations—they embody cultural, historical, and emotional dimensions that drive the narrative forward. In that setting each and every person is significant to the development of action while the traditional plots encompassed the fillers or stock characters To illustrate these types of casting can be found in numerous number of films. But in NewGen films camera its self plays a pivotal role as it keeps it self-absent from its magical presentation other than represent the as an ordinary person sees around him.

"Carnavalesque is a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. For Bakhtin, "carnival" (the totality of popular festivities, rituals and other carnival forms) is deeply rooted in the human psyche on both the collective and individual level.

"Profanation, in carnival, the strict rules of piety and respect for official notions of the 'sacred' are stripped of their power — blasphemy, obscenity, debasings, 'bringings down to earth', celebration rather than condemnation of the earthly and body-based".

Most of the NewGen films exhibit the profanity in its content, tone and creation. They always showed in its crude form.

While pre-2010 Malayalam films occasionally employed humor and satire, they seldom embraced the chaotic, subversive spirit of the carnivalesque. Social hierarchies and moral codes remained largely intact, with disruptions serving to reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.

In contrast, films like *Angamaly Diaries* (2017) and *Thallumaala* (2022) embody Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque by celebrating chaos, irreverence, and the breakdown of social norms. These films revel in subverting expectations, using fragmented narratives, rapid cuts, and disruptive visuals to create a sense of participatory anarchy. The result is a cinema that mirrors the disarray of contemporary life while offering a space for alternative social imaginings

Carnival has no clear solution and always invites polyphony, differences of voices. These qualities are also present in the NewGen films, as it includes all opinions in its chaos. The audience is there to question and analyze the entire events of the film. They are not silent, passive spectators who must be satisfied and empathize after going through a lot of action. However, NewGen film continues to give the audience a voice that can maintain a dialogue, as the director does not solve any of the issues raised in the film. Since the film is not the crusade of a single hero but manifestation of life as it can be found in its locus.

In contrast to the prevalent cinematography of old school, new generation of Malayalam films is challenging this unique perspective. Built on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, these films open up the narrative to multiple voices, each with the same meaning. For example, (2019) analyses the dynamics of the family not by a single heroic figure, but through the overall cast, which crosses, dismantles the traditional hierarchies of the roles of gender and family. This democratization of prospects embodies Bakhtin's idea on the text of the dialogue, where meaning is created by interaction and not imposition.

In that setting each and every person is significant to the development of action while the traditional plots encompassed the fillers or stock characters To illustrate these types of casting can be found in numerous number of films . But in NewGen films camera its self plays a pivotal role as it keeps it self-absent from its magical presentation other than represent the as an ordinary person sees around him.

Carnavalesque is aliterary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. For Bakhtin, "carnival" (the totality of popular festivities, rituals and other carnival forms) is deeply rooted in the human psyche on both the collective and individual level. Though historically complex and varied, it has over time worked out "an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms" which express a unified "carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms".

The familiar and free format of carnival allows all dualistic separations of the hierarchical worldview to reunite in living relationship with one another — heaven and hell, the sacred and the profane, the high and the low, the great and the small, the clever and the stupid, etc.

The primary act of carnival is the mock crowning and subsequent de-crowning of a carnival king. It is a "dualistic ambivalent ritual" that typifies the inside-out world of carnival and the "joyful relativity of all structure and order". The act sanctifies ambivalence toward that which is normally considered absolute, single, monolithic. Carnivalistic symbols always include their opposite within themselves: "Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth. "The crowning implies the de-crowning, and the de-crowning implies a new crowning". It is thus the process of change itself that is celebrated, not that which is changed.

The carnival sense of the world "is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutise a given condition of existence or a given social order." This is not to say that liberation from all authority and sacred symbols was desirable as an ideology. Because participation in Carnival extracts all individuals from non-carnival life, nihilistic and individualistic ideologies are just as impotent and

just as subject to the radical humour of carnival as any form of official seriousness. The spirit of carnival grows out of a "culture of laughter". Because it is based in the physiological realities of the lower bodily stratum (birth, death, renewal, sexuality, ingestion, evacuation etc.), it is inherently anti-elitist: its objects and functions are necessarily common to all humans—"identical, involuntary and non-negotiable".

#### 4. DIALOGIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHARACTERS AND SOCIETY

New-generation films also explore the dialogic relationship between individuals and their socio-cultural contexts. For example, in *Ee.Ma.Yau* (2018), the sudden death of a patriarch in a coastal village triggers a cascade of social interactions. The film juxtaposes the sacred and the profane, tradition and modernity, creating a dialogic tension that reflects the community's internal conflicts. Here, the narrative does not privilege one perspective over another; instead, it invites the audience to navigate the cacophony of voices and draw their own interpretations.

Similarly, *Joji* (2021), inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, reframes ambition and familial betrayal within the context of Kerala's patriarchal land-owning culture. The film resists simplistic moral binaries, allowing its characters to articulate their desires and justifications in ways that compel empathy without absolution.

The embrace of dialogism in Malayalam cinema is not merely a stylistic choice but a reflection of broader societal changes. Post-2010 Kerala has witnessed increasing awareness of issues such as gender inequality, caste oppression, and environmental degradation. New-generation films reflect this complexity by presenting narratives that refuse simplistic resolutions. They invite the audience to grapple with ambiguity, recognizing that truth is multifaceted and constructed through dialogue.

For instance, in *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) and *Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022) these film's dialogism emerges through its critique of patriarchal rituals and also the institution of marriage hitherto unknown theme for films. While the central character's voice ultimately becomes a tool of resistance, the film allows traditionalist perspectives to be articulated, showcasing the pervasive and contested nature of these norms.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

NewGen films due to its revolutionary approach to the totality of the film making process and subverted all the conventional aesthetics. They conveyed their thoughts and life that they perceived as it is. There was chaos revelry and profanity but they declared it is the life that we live. That voice of resistance and resilience had the freshness and it provided a contrast vibrant picture in its back ground the dull monochromatic authoritative noises of the traditional cinema was silenced. This Era watches all that is plenty. There is no time for them to be dismayed; they are in a carnival and this is voice of the revelry. Bakhtin's theory on the novel is vividly expressed in a new generation of Malayalam films, where traditional narratives are replaced with a celebration of chaos, irreverence and diversity. By embracing the carnivalesque, these films not only entertain but also challenge and reframe cultural and social norms, offering a fresh and dynamic perspective on contemporary Kerala

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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