

Subversion in Digital Space: Troll Narratives on Social Issues in Kerala

Reenu S John

II M.A. English

Maharajas College (Govt. Autonomous)

In this digital era Trolls diversify the horizons of the networked world and thereby underscores the sociopolitical contexts in which these texts are significant. At a time when the public sphere as advocated by Habermas is dwindling, the new virtual space offered by the social media becomes instrumental in creating a ‘new’ public sphere. Arguably Trolls thus function as a powerful innovative expression in the new Cyber democracy. The security and liberty of anonymity contribute to a new creative output with its own ideology. As the German playwright Bertolt Brecht puts it “Art is never without consequences” hence these micronarratives as objects of ‘viral art’ have significant reachability, potential and command. The visual dimension of these trolls along with the catchy taglines amalgamates the serious sociopolitical concerns with everyday humour of the Popularculture. As Sigmund Freud opines in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* “by making our enemy inferior despicable or comic we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming them”, thus the sarcasm, blackhumour and pun elements present in the trolls help the troller to question the authority subtly thereby disseminating his ideology to the mainstream. When these texts reach a greater number of users they become a collective emotion of the state bringing common man close to democracy. The room for his comments and opinion further validates his stand on the issue. Thus, the political issues get digitalized just as the digital world becomes politicized.

In the context of Kerala which has a tradition of many great satirists ranging from Kunjan Nambiar, sarcasm has always been an effective tool. When Narendra Modi visited Kerala and made a comparison to Somalia in relation to infanticides and child mortality, social media reacted recklessly with the hashtag and the caption ‘pomonemodi’ to show the protest. Apart from the political dimension of the comment the racial and national sentiments creatively found expression through trolls. The widespread protest to this captured international attention and became a major topic of discussion on various domains. Michael Bakhtin's thought Carnavalesque which refers to the literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant through humour and chaos is appreciable in this context. Trolls thus act as texts of resistance to authority in a space where cultural and potentially political change can take place. As the digital humanities has received increasing attention and newfound cachet, its discourses as that of trolls have grown introspective and selfreflexive. The major troll sites such as I C U (International Chal Union), Troll Malayalam, Arshabharathasamskaram have all an ideology of its own that have proved to be introspective and selfreflexive. The troll sites have edited some of their trolls for its racial and gender outlooks that they represented were biased and offensive. However it is also a point that the psychological distancing of the virtual world brings forward various questions on narcissism, sadism, machiavellianism and psychopathy which are attributed as the negative traits behind the creation and reception of these trolls. The gender war that takes place on the cyberspace has given rise to the new concept of ‘networked misogyny’ which in fact demands for special attention hence there are troll pages exclusively against feminine sentimentality. It is quite an irony that even when there are number of social groups that are functioning for female empowerment and gender equality, the pages as that of

Masculinist India find a space for their parochial expressions. These trolls seek pleasure in portraying personalities such as Meena Kandaswami, Ranjini Haridas, Arundhati, Deepa Nishant for they have all been attacked with the piercing venom of ‘Toxic Masculinity’ which itself gets negotiated in the virtual world of anonymity and subjectivity. However there is a counter movement happening simultaneously in the same space that brings forward the hollowness and unjustifiable absurdity of these arguments. Troll pages such as Yakshan, Yakshi, Kallinyankattuneeli provides a poetic dimension of these trolls with its experimental syntax and thought. Undoubtedly the discussions and deliberations on sociopolitical scenario of a state is integral to every democratic system. Trolls thus depict an essence of the happenings around a social being after negotiating hegemony and pluralism with the weapon of humour.

Reference

Habermas, Jürgen (1989), The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Thomas Burger, Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 30, ISBN 0-262-58108-6 Translation from the original German, published 1962.

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