

Assertion of fairness as beauty in a non-white society through Neocolonialistic values in the movie “*Colour photo*”

R. Sathyavarshini

MA in English with Communication Studies, Christ Deemed to be University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

ABSTRACT

In a country like India, where people are prominently dark-skinned, people are still obsessed with fair skin. The movie "Colour photo" addresses casual racism in the Indian context. The movie represents the typical neo-colonialistic scenario of how a couple of different skin colours are mocked and jibed. This research will be focusing on how the inferiority complex of dark skin implanted during the colonisation affects the colonised people by altering the ontological perspectives on understanding superior-inferior relationships between groups. The colonisation effect presented by Fanon as "alienation of black man" will be compared to the protagonist of the movie- Jayakrishna. The research will look at the depiction of standardisation of Eurocentric appearances intersecting with the Indian caste system in the movie colour photo. Consequently, the paper will look at breaking down the belief that "fairness is beauty" as a benchmark for perpetuating identity in the name of beauty.

Keywords- neocolonisation, colour photo, whiteness, caste.

IJARIIE

In a non-white country like India, many are obsessed with white skin. Having a lighter skin tone or darker skin tone is often associated with the colonisation history. In India racism is exacerbated with casteism. It is often assumed that lower caste people are dark in colour and upper caste people have lighter skin tones. The race factors in a colonial minded society have overvalued fairness and thereby undervalued the condition of caste. In a neocolonised society, everything boils down to a fact of belonging and not belonging to a particular race or caste. In Indian- a neocolonised nation, caste acts as a substructure as well as a superstructure. The belief that an upper caste person is fair-skinned and lower caste person is always dark-skinned is believed even today. It is in this matrix of cultural speculation that we locate the Telugu movie *colour photo*. The movie was released in the year 2020 in aha platform. The story is written by Sai Ranjesh and directed by debutant Sandeep Raj. The movie stars Suhas as the main character, along with Chandini Chowdary, Harsha Chemudu, Diva Sripada, Vidya Maharishi. The movie *Colour Photo* is a perfect cinéma-vérité that highlights the subjects hidden behind crude reality. The film focuses on racial ideologies prevalent in an Indian society which is the broad research area adopted in this study. This research is a visual analysis of the movie *colour photo* and will focus on the neocolonialistic ideologies of having lighter skin tone to be accepted in society. The movie *colour photo* is set in the late 1990s and is based on the intersectionality of colourism and casteism. Therefore, “ The caste system depicted in the movie “*Colour photo*” discloses the inferior position of dark-skinned people in a non-white society.”

The story of *Colour photo* is set in Machlipuram and narrates the story of Jayakrishna (played by Suhas). Jayakrishna is a son of a milkman and is Pursuing his mechanical engineering. Knowing that his education will be a gateway to a better life, he thinks that his education will help him escape his caste situation. He falls in love with an upper-caste- a fair-skinned girl named Deepti (played by Chandini Chowdary) and Deepti is a sister of a narcissistic moral police officer who lives by the idea "white lives matter". Sunil plays the role of Deepti's brother. Krishna is a complete introvert and comes from a poor background. While, Deepti is an extrovert and, comes from a well off background. Krishna is dark-skinned, and Deepti is fair.

The movie pictures the characters in a well familiar context. The subject of exploring obsession with fairness sets the film in a unique context. The soundtrack adds nostalgia to the movie's background. The characterisation in the movie is very common, but the narrative is unusual. When Jayakrishna falls in love with Deepti, he feels that he's no match to her because of his dark skin. Jayakrishna insists on keeping their relationship secret to avoid bullying from their college mates. Casual racism in Indian society is presented at the garb of humour. White and black photos, rasagulla and gulab jamun, are names given to couples who are of different skin tones. The name of the protagonist Jayakrishna depicts the image of Lord Krishna to highlight worshipping of dark skin god's in India.

As the story unfolds, Deepti's brother comes to know about their relationship. Her brother opposes their relationship and warns Krishna. But then, the whole college comes together in support of Jayakrishna and Deepti. As revenge, Deepti's brother Rama Raju decides to disunite their relationship; he reaches for Jayakrishna's educational certificates. He burns Jayakrishna's certificates to make him realise he is fit only to be a milkman. Deepti's brother does not like the fact of a poor man holding on to his merit certificates. In India, the race is often seen as a dependent variable and is assigned prime importance to the caste system. The idea of an educated Dalit is considered as oxymoron even today. His hatred towards Jayakrishna is because of his skin colour. Even though he doesn't consider Jayakrishna as a handsome man because of his dark skin tone, he wants white-skinned groom for his sister. With lost hope, the couple attempts suicide on the seashore near their place. Deepthi's brother comes in search of her and sees her fainted. Her brother saves Deepthi, and Jayakrishna is already dead when his friend finds him. While Jayakrishna is cremated in a miserable condition and Deepthi is married to a foreign settled groom.

The colonisation effect of standardising white skin as beautiful is persisting in India. Indians have been deceived for their physical attractiveness by the colonisers, and they have internalised this belief that white people are socially accepted than dark-skinned people. This assumption comes from mimicry behaviour adopted during the colonisation and is gradually internalised by Indian mindsets. In the movie *colour photo*, we see that the Deepthi's brother- Rama Raju is obsessed with whiteness and he often uses face powder to whitewash himself. Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry is based on the obsession of the non-white society to practice skin-bleaching(Baiq 12). Mimicry is the reason for the massive sale of skin lightening products in India. Indian people are seen to use a lot of skin lightening products and are shown in the movie as well. For example, we can see Deepthi's brother-Rama Raju using fairness powders and the hero of the movie Jayakrishna is seen using fairness products after falling in love with Deepthi so that he can match with her. He wants himself to be equally beautiful as Deepthi in terms of being white so that others don't bully them. The colonists have left an impact on us to a level that it is believed a person will have to have white skin to be a successful person and to be as high-class couples. Even, Television ads such as fair and lovely show women with fair skin to be successful and women with dark skin to be a subject of mockery.

Neocolonialistic ideologies are deeply rooted in Indian minds that marrying a dark-skinned person will ruin one's reputation. Rama Raju, who carries a lot of colonial baggage, wants his sister to marry a fair-skinned guy so that he could have a fair-skinned offspring through his sister. His aim in the movie is to marry off his son to Deepti's future child who should be white. He has this white man's burden of whitewashing his future generation in the name of beauty. The movie depicts the idea of Fair skin becoming a common preference among Indians as it guarantees social acceptance. The believed Indian history that white-skinned people are Brahmins, who are descendants of Aryans and they claim to be superior because of their white skin. White skin used this theory to escape oppression from white people.

In comparison, darker-skinned people are seen as descendants of lower races. The character Rama Raju- a fuzzy copy of the invaders, regularly carries white man's burden of subjugating dark-skinned people. The conflict of coloniser's mindset is not just confined to the main characters but also with the other characters in the movie. Harsha Chemudu, who plays the role of Jayakrishna's friend, tries to impress a girl with his name Bala Yeshu. He calls

himself child Christ and talks in the English language to impress her. The film is ironically set in a black and white world, and in a scene where Jayakrishna is about to show his photo to Deepthi but later refuses to show her only because the photo highlighted his teeth against his skin. The emotions portrayed in the movie spread thin as there are too many antagonists in the plot like the strict Principal, the immoral senior and Deepthi's brother.

Fanon in his "*Black skin, white masks*", he mentioned about the psychological impact of being other as a black man. Fanon claims that people of colour rejected their own social and cultural identity as they were inferior to whites(17). The black person cannot merely escape his inferiority because he cannot completely identify himself with the white man and thereby, alienates himself from the society. In the movie *colour photo*, The character Rama Raju has taken the position of colonisers to stay powerful. He eventually takes the position of the coloniser to gain control over the dark-skinned people. Jayakrishna, to overcome his psychological disability of being black smears white powder on his face and is seen using fairness cream. His actions resemble Fanon's idea of a black man wearing a white mask. The imperialistic powers did not only colonise the lands but also the world view of what Fanon calls "*Epistemological colonialism*". The character Jayakrishna is a victim of epistemological colonisation as he is stuck in the problematic dichotomy of colour and hierarchy of caste. Gradually the film sheds its theme of skin colour and enters the melodramatic K.Balachandar's territory and thereby limits its appeal.

Fanon speaks of whiteness as a moral category, which impacts the dark-skinned individual. Towards the end of the movie, we can see Jayakrishna trying to explain to Deepthi's brother how black he is and still divorce himself from blackness. He says that he'll study hard to find a good-paying job and then ask his sister's hand for marriage. He's trying to prove that he's black yet detached from all the derogatory values associated with blackness. He is provisionally recognising his physical blackness without admitting his psychological blackness. He's avoiding his blackness because of the whiteness of his soul. The colonial structures have implanted whiteness as a moral category and Jayakrishna unconsciously transposes it onto himself. At this point, he is conditioned of what Fanon calls as racial neurosis that exceeds his racial alienation. Race, unlike gender, caste, religion and other ethnicities can be hidden, and the race is patently visible, the black man is in a state to identify himself with the values of the white. Jayakrishna distances from blackness because blackness is objectified for him that he understands the value of blackness through whiteness.

In a college function, Krishna delivers a speech in front of a white chief guest. He delivers his speech in Telugu about the degradation of black skin right in front of his college principal who refused to give him a chance earlier because of his dark skin. Jayakrishna questions the audience if the chief guest would have been as much respected if he was Indian or black. In the same speech, Jayakrishna talks about the fatigued Indian minds sets of Indian mothers that they would choose to have babies in their womb for 18 months if they are told only then the baby will be white. The dialogues are strong enough to condemn the colourism in the society, he says "200 years ago, the Britishers came and conquered us, gifted us the heinous mindset that whites are the rulers and everyone else is beneath them. Imagine if the invading foreigners were black people, and he applied the same idea in reverse, would we still fight over the same things?" (Raj).

Interesting segments of the film is the fight between the Britishers and vanarasena before the college drama and the speech that Jayakrishna gives in the presence of a foreigner. In the fight scene between Britishers and vanarasena, Britishers were seniors of the college who take pride in wearing Britisher's costume, while vanarasenas are Jaya Krishna and his friends. The senior bullies Jayakrishna and his friends as blacky, they get provoked, and there's a fight scene depicting the independence struggle at the end in which Britishers are defeated. The visuals in which the falling Britishers cap on the floor are allegorical of their defeat in India. The performance of the main antagonist is natural that he brings the character's hatred for black skin through his emotions. The director takes up the malleable dark face of Suhas to mould it into a range of emotions. Even though it is challenging to slaughter the movie into good/bad or black/white, it depends on the viewer's perspective. When society is in a place filled with all the adverse effects of colonisation, the movie picks up all the negatives to make a colour photo.

The movie also addresses the condition of women in such fairness obsessed patriarchal story. In a scene where Deepthi talks to her sister-in-law, she laments that men are the ones making the movie and therefore, the stories of women are never told. The movie adopts the obsession of white skin as a leitmotif throughout the movie. The white mask that the villain- Rama Raju is wearing is designed by the colonisers, when Jayakrishna attempts to wear it is like "tying him to an image, snaring him, imprisoning him as the eternal victim of his essence, of a visible appearance for which he is not responsible" (Fanon 18). The fairness cream ads and other cultural influences have

classified that people with dark skin can adopt masks to become like white, but they fail to stand in the same relation as per the colonisers standards. Even Jayakrishna tries changing his colour, talks in English to cope up with the British standards. His acts depict what Fanon calls his wear of masks as "impersonation". Each time he wears sunglasses to see Deepti in a darker shade to overcome his inferiority complex, he is guilty of some profound sin without knowing what his sin is.

While Freud diagnosed such trauma created due to inferiority complexes as abnormal, Fanon, by contrast, considers the inferiority in black people like Jayakrishna as normal. Freud addresses the problem of inferiority from the white world, while Fanon argues that "a normal child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world" (Fanon 121-2). The inferiority complex inflicted upon Jayakrishna is a habit that is culturally acquired but not an instinct. Fanon says that black colonised people as inferior are collective unconscious as it is encoded in a cultural fabric, and acquainted from cultural habituation that shapes their outlook. Jayakrishna, along with his friends, is deeply influenced by the collective cultural belief of dark skin as a symbol of ugliness. Therefore, Jayakrishna's inferiority complex is a combination of being racialised as black by Rama Raju and also internalisation of shared cultural classification of black people as inferior.

The categorisation of black and white is a part of collective unconsciousness and is ingrained in broader cultural contexts. This inferiority complex cannot only be buried by rational thought that denies black people as inferior. The black victimised as inferior will certainly undergo trauma, and this is what Fanon termed it as "Negrophobia". Jayakrishna, who was influenced by all the construction of stereotypes against black skin, was unable to follow his rational thought and was trapped into Negrophobia. Jayakrishna at the end internalises the false belief that "the black man is not. No more than the white man" (Fanon 12). To become in par with the white, Fanon says that it cannot be achieved instantly by "embarking on a positive voice" (Fanon 206). He says that freedom needs an effort at "disalienation".

On the contrary, as a process of disalienation, Jayakrishna, who was tired of embarking positive voice commits suicide. The process of disalienation is only self-acclamation, rejecting blackness. The society will still keep throwing rejections at people for being black while black skinned people have to keep disalienating from blackness. So the mindset of people who still favours White skin in a neocolonised country will remain unchanged is the question.

Therefore, to overthrow racial differences in a neocolonised society, Sartre's idea of "radical conversion" can be helpful in terms of leaping beyond the bounds of the historical situation (Jonathan 19). Sartre's idea of "radical conversion" suggests that taking control of the masks or abandoning negritude will not help the victimised black. Instead of disalienating, He should have accorded a new role of struggle that dissolves racial categories underlying the dilemma of the whites. How racial categories can be dissolved in the Indian context is unexplored in this research and therefore is scope for further research. The process of Radical conversion of Indian mindsets that still thinks fairness as beauty is a call for demand. Therefore, The movie colour photo is an attempt to depict colourism within the caste system and portrays the fairness as a marker for social acceptance. When #blacklivesmatter was trending, we still had Indians facing discriminations for their skin colour. Bollywood songs like "Beyonce Sharma Jayegi" that had racial undertones get popularity and standardise white as beauty. Acts like these should be criticised and condemned. Black emancipation should work on a sedimentary level of criticising everyday racial differences. Thus, day-to-day racial slurs and discrimination presented in the name of humour should be criticised and confronted for a better society.

References

Bhabha, Homi K. "‘Race’, Time and the Revision of Modernity*." *Postcolonial Criticism*, 2014, pp. 166–190., doi:10.4324/9781315843452-7.

Colour photo. Directed by Sandeep Raj, performances by Suhas and Chandini Chowdary, Amrutha Productions and Loukya entertainment, 1985.

Fanon, Frantz. "Black Skin, White Masks". *New York:Grove Press*, 2008.

Hook, Derek. "Fanon and the Psychoanalysis of Racism." *LSE Research Online*, Juta Academic Publishing, 1 Jan. 1970, eprints.lse.ac.uk/2567.

- Nursey-Bray, Paul. "Race and Nation: Ideology in the Thought of Frantz Fanon." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1980, pp. 135–142., doi:10.1017/s0022278x00009484.
- Stam, Robert, and Louise Spence. "Colonialism, Racism and Representation." *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1983, pp. 2–20., doi:10.1093/screen/24.2.2.
- Wardhani, Baiq. "Colorism, Mimicry, and Beauty Construction in Modern India." *Jurnal Hubangan Internasional*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018.
- Webber, Jonathan. "Black Skin, White Masks." *Rethinking Existentialism*, vol. 2, 2016.

