REALIST CINEMATIC FEATURES IN CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKAN CINEMA: A STUDY OF *AYU*, *RIVERSTON*, AND *DEKALA PURUDU KENEK*

Kulathunga Arachchilalage Rashadhi Yureshika Kulathunga*

University of Colombo, Sripalee Campus, Wewala, Horana, Sri Lanka

*Corresponding author: pfa1464@stu.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract

Contemporary Sri Lankan cinema has increasingly shifted from conventional commercial narratives toward a distinct realist cinematic language. This study examines how realist features are represented in three contemporary Sri Lankan films, *Ayu*, *Riverston*, and *Dekala Purudu Kenek*, which depart from traditional conventions through techniques such as natural lighting, minimal editing, and realistic sound design. The objectives were to analyse how cinematography, editing, and sound design construct realism, how screenplay, characterization, and mise-en-scène reveal the social, economic, and psychological realities of Sri Lankan society, and whether these films contribute to a new realist trend distinct from mainstream commercial Sinhala cinema. A qualitative textual and film analysis was conducted, involving close scene-by-scene examination of shot composition, editing rhythm, sound design, and mise-en-scène across the three films, supported by relevant film theory on cinematic realism. The analysis indicates that the films construct realism through restrained aesthetic choices rather than dramatized narrative conventions, positioning them as a coherent counter-movement within contemporary Sri Lankan cinema. These findings contribute to theoretical understanding of realist film language in the South Asian context and offer implications for filmmakers, critics, and scholars interested in alternative cinematic movements grounded in authenticity and social reflection.

Keywords: Sri Lankan cinema, cinematic realism, film language, mise-en-scène, film analysis