



A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE THEMES APPLIED IN TAMIL CINEMA TO SIGNIFY DALIT IDENTITY SYMBOLICALLY

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception, the film industry has been actively involved in an ongoing attempt to both eliminate and maintain the boundaries that now exist between the leading groups and the minority groups. The clothing that a person wears is one of the elements that, in the minds of individuals, helps to form a picture of the group that they belong to. The utilization of the aforementioned characteristics in the films is what ultimately leads to the completion of symbolic representation. These two movies, *Kaala* (2018) and *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018) were selected to serve as examples for this inquiry because they are particularly relevant to the topic at hand. The type of analysis known as the "mise-en-scene" analysis is the one that is being utilized in this situation. For example, in the movie *Kaala*, during the scene in which the leader of the community, Kaala, is having a conversation with his wife after a major conflict with their adversaries, the backdrop properties reveal volumes of K. Daniel's writings, which are dalit-based short stories and novels, as well as *Raavana Kaviyum*, which is an epic about Raavan. These writings include *Raavana Kaviyum*. The figure of Karuppi, a dark-colored hunting dog that appears in the opening sequence of the movie *Pariyerum Perumal*, is only a symbol of the Dalit identity. Karuppi is a paradigmatic illustration of how the more powerful members of society exercise their dominance over those members of society whose freedom is constrained by the fetters of caste. During the process of carrying out this research, the methodology of content analysis was utilized. An analysis of several different scenes is the focus of this unit of study.

Keywords: Film industry, Symbolic representation, Dalit identity, Dominance and Minority groups

Introduction

This is important to remember: the film market has had a huge effect on our world. Some of the other things that affect people are books, newspapers, and many other things. That being said, I think it's pretty true to say that movies have more of an impact in India than newspapers and books put together (Nehru, 1989).

Acker (1991) says that movies are a form of mass media that boosts people's experiences while trying to share ideas and points of view. Movies are meant to do more than just entertain us. They can also communicate meaning, and sometimes awe and a deep understanding of the reason for our existence (Axelson, 2017). In India, cinema is the only form of art that has been able to bring people from different social groups and castes together on the same stage. The walls between those who control and those who are controlled have been broken down over and over again by filmmakers. Screenplays based on race have brought more attention to the abused Dalit group through films about their battles (Joshi, 2017).

Tamil movies play a big role in society, and over the years, certain race stories have been created, kept alive, and praised on the big screen. In the history of the state, this has happened more than once. Films may be more important to the people here than anywhere else in India when it

comes to their social, cultural, and political lives. Tamil cinema has been the most socially and politically important business in the state. The movie theatre is an alternative to standard public spaces because it gives different groups in a community a way to show themselves and let others know who they are. Not only are the stories based on real events that happened to Dalits, but the movies also use a lot of Dalit art and culture. The history of Dalit writing can be linked to the history of Dalit movies. The research by Greenwood et al. (2014) says that watching movies can have a big effect on how a young adult grows socially and emotionally. People will probably remember the movie's social lessons, character relationships, and lessons about life for a long time after it's over. There is a chance that Dalit films could offer a form of performative protest against the complex web of connections between race and capital. Dalit films can lead to a united fight against hegemonic caste dominance if they can criticize not only caste but also gender, class, and other forms of abuse.

The Indian social order has been shaped by a strange thing called caste since ancient times and is still present today. No matter if they are "art," "commercial," or "parallel," big movies keep castes on screen for a long time. That being said, it might not be clear right away that rank is at play. Deeply held religious views are what keep



the caste system going. During the post-colonial era, the rank system became even stronger, and it even made it into movies. Movies aren't always clear, and the lessons they send aren't always clear at first glance. The movie theater is used as a symbolic means to try to get people who aren't being led to adopt a fairer social structure. Gopu Mohan of The New Indian Express says that young Tamil directors are "defying tried-and-true formulas of filmmaking to tell stories the way they need to be told." These "films are successful in the box office too," he says. Even though mainstream ways of making and seeing movies are in place, the movies Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal have different subaltern symbolic meanings that need to be carefully looked at, studied, and figured out. A socially aware movie that doesn't show the lives of repressed people from the "dominant reading," but from the subaltern's point of view only.

Objective

Look at the movie Pariyerum Perumal and Kaala for hints. How do the signs help with the process of telling the story?

- To understand how the films reflect the politics of representation in the Dalit community through the use of symbols and signs.

Research Question

What parts of the character of Dalits were emphasized in the Tamil movies Pariyerum Perumal and Kaala?

- In the movies Pariyerum Perumal and Kaala, what different kinds of signs were used to help the Dalit characters become who they were?

Need for the Study

The objective of this study is to look into how the identities of Dalits are shown in two Tamil movies that came out in 2018: Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal (God Who Mounts Horse). Pa helped make both movies. For people from subaltern groups, these movies have become a sign of the problems they face and the everyday struggles they go through. These movies get their ideas for their images, symbols, and icons from "equal-rights movements" that have happened all over the world. Clothing, language, habits, set, qualities, color, and places where people live, as well as the variety of characters, all show how marginalized groups live their cultural and physical lives. Some scenes from the movies Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal have been chosen so that we can talk about each of the parts. This study is mostly about how to understand both movies from a subaltern cultural point of view. It also looks at how these movies were used as symbols to get

people who didn't know what they were doing to work toward a fair social order.

Approaches and theories

In this area of study, the semiotic theory is used. Studying semiotic theory can help you understand how meaning is made and how it is understood. The main point of it is to show that acts and things that work as "signs" are used to make meaning by connecting to other messages. Barthes' theory is also used by the researcher to break down all forms of meaning, such as myth, denotative meaning, and connotative meaning. We can say that the movies "Piyerum Perumal" and "Kaala" show a lot of signs because of what the study found. After all this study, we finally understand what the movie is really about. By comparing the images in this movie to each other, we can get a sense of the cultural differences and changes that exist.

Analysis

The movies used visual messages to record the words of those who were being abused. Both movies show the fight that happens between people who are being pushed around and the people who have power. The chosen movies are works of art that both show the awful side of the caste system that exists in southern Tamil Nadu and give a voice to the voiceless. The movies have used a lot of different symbols and changing elements to show the extremes of dominating, intermediate, and subaltern

societies. Some of these things are body language, dress rules, music, slang, the way a town is set up, symbols, and signs. For this study, we will be looking at what they wear, how they live their lives, and the slang words they use.

Garb

There is a lot of research that says clothes can help us communicate. Dr. Ambedkar was criticized for dressing in a Western way because it wasn't "culturally authentic" and wasn't right for a leader who was supposed to speak for the poor (Jaoul, 2006). Several frames in both Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal are dedicated to showing the color blue as a symbol and clothes as a symbol. People believe that this color is very important for showing the Dalit character in movies.

In the 2016 movie Kabali, directed by Pa Ranjith, Rajinikanth played a character from an oppressed group for the first time. The movie also paid respect to Dr. BR Ambedkar and talked about freedom from caste. Rajinikanth says in the movie, "Our clothes are our resistance," while wearing a three-piece suit. It was very rare for an Indian movie not to make fun of the hopes and dreams of India's usually disadvantaged groups. The coat and tie that Kabali wore were meant to be a tribute to Dr. Ambedkar. Sai Dhanshika's performance as Kabali's daughter Yogi is a nice change from how Bahujan women are usually



presented in Indian movies. She has a short haircut and wears a leather jacket, jeans, and combat boots to fight in Malaysia's secret gang wars.

Rajinikanth and Ranjith worked together again on the 2018 movie *Kaala*. Ranjini wore a lungi in that movie. This was the first time that the lungi was shown in Tamil movies, and it was usually associated with bad guys like thieves, bullies, low-class people, and drunk criminals. In popular society, the white vetti or veshti, which is the style of the more powerful classes, has become accepted as the typical clothing for Tamil men. The vetti or veshti is usually white, which is why this is the case. The usual ways of thinking about black and white were completely turned on their heads by Ranjith's *Kaala*. Nana Patekar, who plays the bad guy, wears only white clothes, while Rajinikanth, who plays a person from the Dharavi slum, wears black lungis. A big change has happened in the way that downtrodden classes and their culture are shown in Tamil films because of Ranjith. Because of the success of *Kabali* and *Kaala*, there is now a new wave of Tamil films that are against caste, like *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018), *Asuran* (2019), *Mandela* (2021), and *Karnan* (2021).

The fact that Pariyan's name is written on the back of his T-shirts not only shows that he is part of a social group that is

on the outside, but it also shows what his given name looks like. This makes the crowd read as Pari-yan, which is the name of a group of people who are on the outside. Dr. Ambedkar's theory says that all living things are equal. The color blue, which is used as a sign, is used to show this on the faces of Pariyan and other subaltern figures. The clothes worn in the song "Vanakkam Vanakkamunga" show both the cultural life of a village and the "dirt and dust-filled scenes" of the life of a Dalit college student and his friends and family who live in a faraway country.

You can see in both *Kaala* and *Pariyerum Perumal* that several frames show how the color blue and clothes can be used as symbols. It is generally agreed that the use of this color is an important example of how Dalits are shown in movies.

Way of Life

The other thing that shows up in *Kaala* is the situations that were made to show how people live in a slum. Ranjith's portrayal of the housing board in *Kaala* shows how people live in small homes. It usually stands for the In a loud stretch, women talk about their sexual wants. In a different instant, a woman falls in love with her husband while she is waiting in line for the bathroom. When she thinks back to her time in Dharavi, the same public toilet line is one of the places where she and *Kaala*

looked at each other lovingly. By using this free form of portrayal, Ranjith can improve the stereotypical ideas about Dalits that people are used to seeing in Tamil films.

It can be seen that the basti is called Bhim Wada and is in Gautam Buddha Nagar. There are drawings of Buddha, Mahatma Phule, and Babasaheb Ambedkar on the wall. Very little can be said about the social makeup of Dharavi in general or about where the movie takes place in particular.

At every point in his life, Pariyerum Perumal, also known as Pariyan, is made fun of and hurt physically. He feels like he's losing something when he goes shooting. Because he doesn't speak English very well, he faces discrimination whenever he tries to go to school. People treat him like trash when he tries to be liked. Because he wants to be proud of his dad, he has to face how naked his situation is and how useless he feels in general. When he says he wants to live, he is pushed to the edge of death. Unfortunately, Pariyan is unable to get what he wants. He also doesn't get anything that he deserves.

The director lets the viewers into the oppressor's locked-up thoughts, so they can understand what it's like to be in those frames of mind. It also gives us a look into the minds of people who are oppressed, who can take pride in their humanity while also looking down on everyone else, even those

closest to them. It almost seems like Mari is trying to say that people born on either side of the caste system can be mean and that being mean isn't based on caste but on mental illness.

Conclusion

This is why a movie like Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal, which was directed by a Dalit filmmaker in an industry that is still mostly run by upper-caste Hindus, stands out. Its clear goal was to not only show the truth but also teach weak people how important it is to speak out against a system that profits from spreading fear and hatred. A lot of attention is paid to how things like clothes, language, and traditions, which are part of the setting, help us understand how the films Kaala and Pariyerum Perumal represent Dalit identity symbolically. There is a new type of movie being made in Tamil filmmaking. All of these movies, which are mostly produced by younger people, are selling out theaters across the state and bringing attention to Dalits. It's not the point of these movies to pick on or make fun of any one group. They don't do much more than bring attention to the unfair treatment of disadvantaged groups and the missed opportunities they have had. These movies are not about violence and nonviolence. Instead, they are an open thread for conversation between those who abuse and those who are oppressed.



Most of the time, movies that are supposed to show what it's like to be a Dalit show horrible crimes or cruel treatment. What they don't talk about is how to use film to show "invisible" casteism, which is something that needs to be done. It is surprisingly easy to show that someone is being tortured. It's possible, though, that the system also uses other forms of gender discrimination that aren't as clear. Making a movie about race isn't the only important thing; you also need to learn how to understand these problems through the lens of movies. The results of this study show that these movies help to create a mindset of "seeing caste." The issue of worries that have been kept quiet in most Tamil movies is brought up through the representation of Dalit identities as symbols.

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