



# An Analysis Of The Movie ‘Ma Mannan’ Through The Lens Of Sociology Of Media.

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**Abstract:** The relationship between movies and the culture of the people involves complicated dynamics. Movies are an integral part of mass media, and also determinant and constituent of culture and attitudes of the audience. This study analyses the movie Maamanan and the application of concepts and theories of media are discussed. This movie was again an attempt by Mari Selvaraj to question the deepened roots of caste system and the injustice rendered to the minorities. The application of ‘Two – Step Flow Theory’ is decoded in the film. In 1944 Paul Lazarsfeld, (1901-1976) an American Social Researcher, Bernard Berelson (1912 –1979) and Hazel Gaudet was introduced The Two-Step Flow of Communication in the book named “The people’s choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign. New York: Columbia University Press”. The theory states that mass media content first reaches the OPINION LEADERS, people who are active media users who consume, collect, interpret the information and then disseminate, diffuse the information to the less active media consumers. This also deconstructed the dominant notion prevalent at that time, which assumed that media had a direct influence on people. Some cultural behaviour or group of people is dangerously deviant and poses a threat to society is exposed in the film.

**Index Terms** - Complicated Dynamics, Culture and audience, Caste system, Opinion leaders, Media consumers, Cultural behaviour.

Media has the ability to influence people with its complicated dynamics. Media shapes the narratives of the society. Films in particular shape the philosophies of the society. The culture of the audience in all walks of life is showcased in movies. It occupies a high proportion of the free time of an individual. The relationship between movies and the culture of the people involves complex subtleties. Movies are an integral part of mass media, and also it has become a determinant and constituent of culture and attitude of the audience. The boundary line between the behaviour of the audience and the scenes in the movies is diffused.

Tamil Film industry has created a greater impact on the lives of people both culturally and politically. It has a long history of politicising the mass. Astute politicians and intelligent social activists has used media especially Cinema as one of the means to propagate their ideas. As Tennyson in his ‘Ode to the West Wind’ wishes the west wind, to be his ‘trumpet of a prophecy’, in order to create new ways, leaders of Tamil Nadu has used the medium of cinema as their own trumpets. If we trace the history of cinema we can found themes such as social inequality, injustice, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, economic and political mobilisation etc. The difference of the new era of films compared to the previous eras lies in the changing perspective of directors and the impact that it creates in the audience besides many technical developments.

The paper is broadly based on the perspectives that media tries to showcase to the society. It analyses how media explores the intricacies of the society and how it acts as an influential agent in the social construction of beliefs, attitudes and even stereotypes. This is analysed through the movie 'Ma Mannan', a Tamil film directed by Mari Selvaraj that explores themes of caste, social injustice, and resistance. While analysing the film through the lens of the sociology of media, several concepts emerge. Effect Analysis and Qualitative Analysis are used as the methodology for the article

#### Plot of the Movie:

The Tamil movie 'Ma Mannan' was an attempt by Mari Selvaraj to question the deepened roots of caste system and the injustice rendered to the minorities. In the film Maamannan (starred by Vadivelu), a Dalit-Arundhathiyar, starts his life as a party worker in Salem's Kasipuram district, TamilNadu. Athiveeran (starred by Udhayanidhi), his son, is initially close to his father. The situation changes when few members from the dominating group attack Athiveeran and his friends. Maamannan follows the party order rather than advocating for justice in the incident. So Athiveeran begins to distance himself from his father. In the meantime, Maamannan becomes an MLA. Still Athiveeran continues the same docile behaviour.

Their relationship takes a different shape as the movie progresses since they have no other option but to get together to face a battle. On the other hand, Rathnavelu (starred by Fahad Fasil) is a power-hungry cruel man from a dominant caste, who is also a district secretary in the same party. The father-son duo is forced to oppose Rathnavel as he disrespects Maamannan. The intermission happens at this point, and with this backdrop, the story thereafter delves into the internal clashes between groups within the party and how Maamannan fights back to establish his rightful position.

#### Sociological Analysis:

The film exposes the deeply entrenched system of oppression based on an ascribed status – caste identity and its subsequent oppression prevalent in the rural south. It explores the subtleties of social stratification and the hegemonic nature of dominant caste through which the marginalised communities are rendered powerless, situating casteism as socially constructed systemic oppression. It critiques the justification of caste supremacy and legitimisation of violence against the marginalised communities through amplifying the counter hegemonic discourses that interrogates caste hierarchies, advocate social justice and affirm the dignity and humanity of the oppressed community. Through highlighting the intersection of caste, gender and age in sculpting an individual's experience of oppression and resistance, it underscores the importance of intersectional understanding with complexities such as social inequality and marginalisation.

The movie celebrates the power of grass root mobilisation and solidarity in confronting the oppressive power structures and advocating the social change. Thus the film portrays the struggles and resistance of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, against caste-based discrimination and oppression. Through its characters and narrative, it sheds light on the lived experiences of Dalits and challenges dominant narratives perpetuated by mainstream media that often marginalize or stereotype these communities. As Karthick Ram Manoharan rightly quoted Karl Marx, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

#### Application of theories of Sociology of Media in the film Ma Mannan:

The theory of sociology of media discusses the effects of mass media on society. Scholars have developed different approaches and theories to dissect the influence of media on culture and society. Sociologists term this as 'mediated culture' which as a discourse, focuses on how culture is a reflection of media. The paper discusses various media effects theories and it provides insights into how the movie influences audiences' perception, beliefs, attitudes regarding the notions of caste and social justice.

The first theory to be decoded is Spiral of Silence Theory, proposed by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974. The term 'spiral of silence' denotes the tendency of the people to remain silent when they perceive their opinion is in opposition to the majority, dominant opinion on a particular subject. This

silence or suppression of opinion is fuelled by the fear of isolation and fear of reprisal (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). The fear of isolation steps in when the individual himself/herself realises that his/her opinion is a divergent opinion from the status quo or dominant group view. The fear of reprisal is a consequence of fear of social exclusion where the individual with minority opinion might think that voicing out divergent opinion might lead to a negative consequence such as firing from job or being labelled as deviant. Hence an individual with minority opinion is stuck in a spiral of silence that's created or reinforced when someone in the perceived majority speaks out confidently in support of the majority opinion. This spiral effect is experienced downwards, characterised by the accumulation of fear within the minority opinion holder.

With regard to media, it plays an impeccable role in perpetually dictating the majority opinion in the mainstream media. This theory aligns with the core concepts of the film 'Ma Mannan', and in particular with the climactic scene that expresses the crux of the film. In this scene, Fahad calls Vadivelu and Udhayanidhi to resolve the dispute made by Fahad's brother, so that his political reputation is not defamed. When Vadivelu arrives, he stands before Fahad who is seated in the chair, whereas Vadivelu stands in spite of presence of an empty chair. This scene has a lot of significance, since this is a manifestation of caste discrimination and the subordination in the structural hierarchy. When his son, Udhayanidhi asks him to sit equal to him, Fahad says this is long practice and Vadivelu knows its significance and he cannot break that on the go. Here the protagonist Mamannan, a member of marginalised community is not ready to follow his son's words at that moment, the discriminatory practice that has been followed since times immemorial but he's reluctant to express his dissenting opinion against the hegemonic antagonist. It's represented in the movie through gestures - he stands with his hand tied and bowed in respect in front of Fahad Fasil, the antagonist. Here there's also interplay of age as social variable. Even though Fahad is younger than Vadivelu he is very much indulged in the notions of hierarchy and power and hence he renders Vadivelu as powerless due to his lower class affiliation. Here emerges the significance of spiral of silence theory, where the reluctance / silence of Vadivelu is the consequence of fear of social ostracization that is cognitively registered in his mind. He perceives that when his dissenting opinion of sitting in chair is expressed, then the majority (Fahad and the dominant caste) would outcast him or reject him. He also fears that the voicing out his unpopular minority opinion of equality might lead to the disruption of his well-being and could affect his political career.

According to this theory 'spiral' is symbolic of the tensions undergone by the individual here that is Vadivelu, who is not able to express his opinion since he perceives it to be a minority opinion by himself. It is clearly seen in emotions shown by him when his son urges him to sit down. When Udhayanidhi asks him to sit down he is reluctant because he is in spiral and he is silent without reacting since his opinion was perceived as minority opinion on his own. The effect of the spiral is so much experienced and it is represented in his actions. It also activates a downward spiral where fears continually build on the minority opinion holder until it's voiced out. Udhayanidhi urging and compelling Vadivelu to sit down is an effort to breakdown his spiral of silence and also breaking the injustice of caste system. Hence this scene is a manifestation of Spiral of Silence Theory. Thus, this movie illustrates how the Spiral of Silence reinforces the dominance of mainstream discourse and perpetuates the marginalization of dissenting perspectives. The reluctance of Dalit villagers to openly challenge caste-based injustice allows the dominant caste groups to maintain their hegemonic control over social narratives, norms, and power structures, further entrenching the cycle of oppression and silence. Portraying 'Ma Mannan' as an opinion holder who breaks the spiral of silence empowers the audience since it publicly expresses dissent, advocating for change, and mobilizing collective action against caste discrimination. The opinion holders challenge the prevailing silence and inspire others to speak out against injustice.

The next theory taken for discussion in the paper is 'Two step flow theory', introduced by Hazel Gaudet, Bernard Berelson and Paul Lazarsfeld in the book "The people's choice : How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign. New York: Columbia University Press 1948". The theory states that "the flow of media messages from radio and print to opinion leaders and then the leaders leads the messages to lesser active users in the population" (Katz and Paul, 1948). It means that mass media content first reaches the Opinion Leaders, people who are active media users who consume, collect, interpret the information and then disseminate, diffuse the information to the less active media consumers. This theory is analysed in the movie through two perspectives first through the protagonist Udhayanidhi as an opinion leader and second view analyses director Mari Selvaraj as an opinion leader. Udhayanidhi, himself a politician took this movie as an opportunity to reach his propaganda to the masses which has two impacts. The less active media consumers are made aware of the manifestation of the caste discrimination in politics and this reaches even the commoners. The second is this movie gives him the image of one, who deconstructs the caste system and its injustice, which



is a personal gain. Though the whole movie talks of the caste discrimination and the injustice rendered to subordinate classes, there's usage of powerful dialogues and scenes depicting the equalitarian ideology which could reach the masses as people consume media more than anything. The whole movie is about the life of Dalit politician who is suppressed by the dominant caste politicians and used as tools to win elections without even contesting in it. Here, Udhayanidhi himself is an opinion leader, he tries to reach his so called ideologies to the masses through the mass media ie films. Since there would be a sizeable population who would be the followers of him, his effort would prove successful since the necessary information is passed to the audience. Generally opinion leader is somebody who is popular and influential. The passing of information from the opinion leader i.e Udhayanidhi to the other members of society includes, the perspectives of opinion leader which is influential, that is evident in this movie. Through the second perspective, we could analyse Mari Selvaraj as an opinion leader of marginalised communities since all of his previous works have mainstreamed the narratives of marginalised communities and their systemic oppressions. So he established himself as an opinion leader of marginalised communities hence his opinions have a strong impact on them. Though the Two – Step Flow Theory emerged as a critique against Magic-bullet theory (which viewed audience as passive audience without any questioning of the media that is served) it is noticed that opinion leaders influence the audience for the pursuit of their personal gains ,thus making the audience passive.

The third theory that is analysed in the paper is Cultivation Theory proposed by George Gerber. Cultivation theory posits that prolonged exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of social reality over the time. In the case of "Ma Mannan," the film provides a sustained portrayal of caste-based discrimination, oppression, and resistance. Cultivation theory also emphasizes the role of media in resonating with viewers' real-world experiences and perceptions. For audiences who have personally encountered or witnessed caste discrimination, "Ma Mannan" may serve as a reflection of their lived realities and validate their concerns about social inequality. But it can also be seen in another contrasting perspective. Mari Selvaraj in most of his films portrays only the caste based disputes and caste based discrimination. Through this prolonged, consecutive portrayal it is generalised that all high caste politicians are ruthless and place supreme importance in their caste pride which may not necessarily be true. This generalization can also lead to hate crimes and false socialization. Though Mari Selvaraj takes an effort to deconstruct the stereotypes, he ends up constructing new stereotypes through his blatant generalization. Overall, the application of cultivation theory to "Ma Mannan" underscores the film's potential to shape viewers' perceptions of caste-based discrimination and social justice issues through its thematic content, narrative structure, and emotional resonances.

### **Outcome of the research:**

This research facilitates the audience to gain insights into the intricacies of social dynamics depicted in the film including power relations across the caste hierarchy and resilience and solidarity of oppressed castes. The analysis helps the viewers to recognise how media representations reflect and influence real world social structures and behaviours. By examining how media messages are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted within the narrative, viewers deepen their understanding of the complex socio-cultural issues addressed in the film. This analysis of the movie through the theories of Sociology of media highlights the role of media representations in amplifying marginalized voices and fostering social change. Through the portrayal of Dalit resistance and agency in "MaMannan," audiences are empowered to recognize and challenge systemic injustices, advocate for social justice, and mobilize collective action against oppression. This perspective enhances viewer's understanding of the film's socio-cultural themes, empowers marginalized voices, fosters critical reflection, and inspires action towards social justice and positive change. The film reveals the new avenues that Tamil Cinema has entered. Tries to expose the troubling impact of few celebrated films and the film tries to change the lens of stereotypes. The film brought the evergreen debate of depiction of casteism in Tamil cinema to the forefront and helped the director to stay in line as a forerunner of anti-caste films.

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