



THE INTERFACE OF CASTE AND POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON TAMIL FILMS PARIYERUM PERUMAL, KARNAN AND JAI BHIM

¹ANULAKSHMI. K, ²KAVYA PURUSHOTHAMAN

¹ PG Student, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, Kerala, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi campus, Kerala, India.

Abstract: Today, almost everyone believes that caste is a long standing, unalterable institution that is only kept in place by ingrained religious ideology. It frequently appears as a social type in multi-ethnic civilizations. Nonetheless, it evolved into a very inclined, politicized kind of racial classification in South Asia as a result of the ongoing exertion of socioeconomic dominance. This paper focuses on how three important Tamil movies Pariyerum Perumal, Karnan and Jai Bhim depict the terrifying events that the Dalit people must deal with and their helplessness. These films illustrate how the government and the so-called privileged group of people respond to or react to the concerns of this poor population. The caste system is a form of slavery which is indoctrinated into our Indian culture. One difference being the slave trade was in Africans, while the caste system traded in Dalit's, Adivasi's and later called Harijan's name a few general castes.

Key words - Dalit, Justice, Pride, Honor killings, Custodial-murder.

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the impact of movies is bigger than the combined impact of literature and newspapers. The film industry has played a crucial role in molding public attitudes, much as Indian society has been represented in the movies. It is believed that movies only mimic humanity. As a result, it makes it possible for us to face the truth about what is happening in our society. It aids in exposing issues that we may have previously overlooked and presents things honestly. Movies are generally regarded as fiction, unrealistic, and having little value in describing how events unfold. However, it is important to consider how films reflect and affect the overall human mentality. In a way that no government has ever been able to, the film industry has contributed to raising awareness of Indian culture and customs on a global scale. The construction of society is greatly influenced by films. The treatment of members of lower castes in society is quite clearly depicted in the south Indian films Pariyerum Perumal, Karnan, and Jai Bhim. They are still entirely shunned and viewed as untouchables in the twenty-first century, whether in relationships, the law, or daily life. These films eloquently reflect the unsung stories and experiences of these groups of people, raising the general public's awareness in the process. An improved understanding of the issues can be obtained from seeing the movies.

The word "subaltern" was created by Gramsci. Simply put, to refer to individuals who were seen as inferior due to their gender, class, or caste. It should be highlighted that "Dalit" is not something which is referring to a particular caste or a religion, but rather to the realization of what life is like for people in the lowest social strata. Despite the horrors of physical abuse and exile, history has rendered them verbally incompetent, yet they still had passionate songs about their gods and way of life. The Dalits established a distinctive and distinguishable cultural landscape from that of the majority. They have an oracy-based culture and were firmly rooted in the ground. The only language used to describe the Dalits is one of tears. India's society is dominated by caste. One cannot disregard the persistent existence of the marginalized from the global mainstream.

To imply that caste had become India's primary symbol is quite disheartening. Mutual communication, social monitoring, and local knowledge served to define each caste. 300 homicides in incidents of various

caste-related aggression have been documented in Tamil Nadu during the course of the previous five years, according to the 2015 provisions of the 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Amendment Act'. India as a whole is in worse shape than simply Tamil Nadu. Crime against Scheduled Caste cases increased from 42,793 in 2018 to over 50,000 in 2020, and crime against Scheduled Tribes cases climbed from 6528 to 8272 within the same time period. Since very long ago, Dalits have suffered discrimination and abuse all over the nation. Even from the 11th century A.D there is evidence of Dalit writings which indicates that their suffering is not something new. It is vital for us to comprehend the trauma Dalits encounter. Even some of these destitute individuals belong to lower castes or notified tribes that the British have labelled as inherently criminal. For any nearby offences, they were imprisoned.

The language's restrictions have been broken, and the Dalit voices are now effectively represented. Films are a significant media that aid in such potent portrayal. The Dalits are now viewed as a symbol of change by the rest of the globe. In the 2018 movie *Pariyerum Perumal*, a lower caste law student falls in love with an upper caste woman. Their closeness, however, frustrates the girl's family, who relentlessly torments the boy. In this film, one can observe how the members of the lower caste are even deprived of the right to love. *Karnan*, a movie from 2021, is about a small village in Tamil Nadu populated by people from a minority race. A young man works for the rights of his villagers because he is outraged by the inhumane treatment they receive. This film demonstrates how the upper caste restricts the downtrodden people their right to education, access to transportation, even power and other necessities out of sheer caste pride. The movie *Jai Bhim*, which was released in 2021, depicts how a valiant activist lawyer battles for justice after a destitute tribal guy who has been wrongfully accused of robbery goes missing from police custody. This film reveals how police officials name-drop persons from lower castes, those who are detained for stealing, and other minor offences when charging them in active cases. Even after serving their sentence, they are not permitted to leave once they have been caught. The biggest curse in life is not being wanted, and lower caste people are the ones that live with this misfortune their entire existence.

This paper will investigate the Tamil films *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Karnan*, and *Jai Bhim* in order to determine how much of truth these films have managed to capture. These movies do a great job of capturing the misery that these poor, ordinary folks go through as well as how society views them. These people's futures and daily lives are rife with uncertainty and hopelessness. They cling to hope in order to survive. The government and the official are mystifying reality in some way. In terms of depiction and the scope of the issues that members of lower castes experience, these three movies could not be more dissimilar from one another. Has anything changed about the disenfranchised group's situation? Even in the twenty first century, it is a serious issue to dredge up. Having been a subaltern once, you will always be one. Exclusionism casts a shadow over every part of Dalits' lives and permeates every area of their existence. Numerous tales fail to adequately depict these people's perspectives. What would have occurred if these folks were not represented? We are witnessing a voracious desire for equality and to take possession of their proper place in the world.

On September 28, 2018, Mari Selvaraj directed a realistic Tamil film *Pariyerum Perumal*, which translates to "a horse laden deity," was released. It was based on the director's life story. According to Mari Selvaraj, *Pariyerum Perumal* is both a well-known name and the deity of his community. He has gone through a lot of pain in his life. Nonetheless, he asserts that transforming it into contentious artistic works makes all of his sorrow go away. So that someone else can benefit from it. The Tamil Filmfare Award for Best Film went to this movie as well. The opening line of the film declares that "Caste and Religion are against humanity." The film takes place in 2005. The characters *Pariyerum Perumal* and *Jyothi Mahalakshmi* are the major leads in the film. Even in the names of the characters, we can observe how their caste influences have been mirrored. The movie depicts the daily activities of a group of residents of the lower caste *Puliankulam* hamlet. The locals are portrayed as being uncivilized and ignorant. Since they used to hunt with dogs, dogs have played a significant role in their lives. This people have very strong ties to both the natural world and to animals.

The film portrays the Dalits' extremely hard reality. The men from the *Puliankulam* village used to bathe in the dirty ponds in the so-called upper caste people's fields, along with their dogs. Even this infuriated the powerful clique. Even worse, they kill *Karuppi*, a dog owned by *Pariyan*, by tying it to a nearby railroad track. In this movie, a character has a speech that is particularly memorable: "They have everything. Our fields and farms are with them and we have only our empty stomach". The dog is mourned by the poor people as though it were a family member. They are very innocent and kind hearted. *Pariyan* was the first young man from the group who got admission at the Law Collage. Two key components of the lives of marginalized people are primarily highlighted in the film. One is how English impacts their lives, and two is how society views or treats them. Many Indians still struggle to grasp what is being said when it is written in

English. English is given increased prominence both in education and in legislation. Even though many students found it very challenging, the entire session was conducted in English when Pariyan entered the collage. Due of their fear of being prejudiced, none of the kids have yet to admit that they do not comprehend English. Even we can understand that Pariyan is suffering twice as much injustice due to his caste and his limited command of the English language. The students from higher castes preferred to sit in the front rows in class because it wounded their pride to simply seat behind their lower caste classmates.

A girl named Jyothi assisted Pariyan with his studies, and the two finally fell in love. The situation between the dominant group and the oppressed ones is greatly amplified by this. By the family of the girl, Pariyan was beaten to death. Even his father, who was poor and innocent and used to dance as a lady in temples, was severely degraded and forced to run naked by the upper class. The familial ties shared by the lower castes are depicted as being genuine and heartfelt. The parents wanted their children to live happy lives, but society prevents them from achieving their dreams. These scenes make clear how defenseless these innocent people are. In the movie, there is an elderly man from the upper class who used to murder every boy and girl from the lower caste just because they fell in love with the higher-class individuals. The folks from the lower classes were constantly to blame. The elderly man deceives the innocent people and kills them without raising any suspicions about the crime. If he is unable to finish off his target, he is even prepared to end his life. The old man says that, "I murder for the honor of our women and men. It's my offering to God!" The man ends his life just because he fails to kill Pariyan.

The movie closes on a somewhat upbeat note and has a powerful last scene. The leftovers in the cup of tea that Pariyan and Jyothi's father consume. While Jyothi's father prefers milk tea, Pariyan prefers black tea. Even though the director uses two equally potent pictures, one of them depicts the lower class and the other, the higher class respectively. The little jasmine flowers between the teacups symbolizes hope. The majority of Indian households continue to favor caste- and religion-based marriages. Violence, such as "honor killing," has repeatedly occurred as a result of unrestricted marriages. The practice of inter-caste marriage, which is regarded as hereditary, ensures that the caste system will continue to exist. Caste distinctions have existed for a very long time, and Dalit males who have married upper caste women have been murdered. According to the National Registry of Crime Bureau's data, 77 murder cases were reported in 2016 with an honor killing as the primary suspect. In 1872, a law was created in India permitting non-conversion marriages between men and women of various castes or religions to be officially registered. However, this rule is merely a name-drop.

The movie Karnan, which was released on April 9, 2021, was directed by Mari Selvaraj. Editor and primary reviewer Jaya Gomathy Mirea of Cinema Express examined the parallels and linkages with Selvaraj's prior films, Pariyerum Perumal and Karnan. Many critics claim that the "Kodiyankulam Caste Violence," an actual event in 1995, served as inspiration for this movie. The Indian Express and other publications recognized Karnan as one of the top Tamil movies of 2021. As examples of works with similarities to the movie, she cited "Seven Samurai," "Bacurau," and "Les Misérables." The movie is set in the year 1997 in a village called Podiyankulam where a group of people from the lower caste lives. Their village can be called as a literal wasteland. The life of people there is very much associated with animals like pigs, dogs, and hens. They live in very much harmony with the nature.

The opening scene of the film shows a little girl dying while lying in the middle of the road close to a community of lower caste citizens, and nobody intervenes to help her. The girl was the sister of the film's main lead, Karnan. All the buses in the vicinity belonged to a higher social level, and they were unwilling to stop at any of the locations close to the village of Podiyankulam. The lack of mobility caused those people a lot of hardship. Village girls were terrified to step outside because the dominating group hassled and humiliated them. All their freedoms and rights were taken away from them. The higher class used to hold kabaddi tournaments and defeated the Dalits by any means necessary, including cheating. given that it was a source of pride for them. A bus was vandalized by the villagers as a symbol of protest. The tone of the film shifts after this point. A bus was vandalized by the villagers as a show of protest. The tone of the film shifts after this point. The police and the entire government were against these people. The police officer who arrives to the Podiyankulam region to carry out an investigation becomes quite furious simply because the residents there have names that are evocative of Mahabharata figures, such as Duryodhana, Karnan, and Abhimanyu, all of which were given to members of the royal family. The officer made a rather startling statement. "Duryodhana is nowadays Maadasamy's son. You believed that you could change your name one day and ascend to the throne the next?" Even in the context of today, this is a highly significant and thought-provoking subject.

Mari Selvaraj, the filmmaker, is an exceptionally talented director. He employs the most basic picture of two tea glasses in Pariyerum Perumal to convey extremely deep interior thoughts. Like in Karnan, he

employs a donkey to symbolize a change in power in the Dalit community's way of life. A donkey's front two legs are tethered by its owner for much of the first half of the movie in order to keep it from wandering off and settling somewhere close. Even trying to walk around unrestrainedly is really challenging for the donkey. This situation is like that of the marginalized. They once performed the duties of slaves for their owners. They are still unable to escape their suffering and tribulations since their legs remain chained. Once a subaltern always remains a subaltern wherever they go. Contrary to popular belief, donkeys are extremely intelligent animals. Without education or due to lack of awareness about their on rights the marginalized people will become defenseless. Karnan liberated the donkey as soon as he started to protest the upper caste people. Similar to the youth of his town, he revolts against all forms of inhuman treatment and frees all of his fellow beings, even the donkey, who works and lives in the village. When the people began to gather to protest their electricity and irrigation facilities were all stopped. Many village elders passed away. Children and women were assaulted. Even the main character Karnan kills the policeman out of remorse and rage. In prison he was. The lower caste people were ultimately released from the chains set by the dominating group after enduring 10 years of hardship. They withstood all the misery and cruel treatment before ultimately achieving their goals. The film ends on a positive note with the villagers finally getting chances for electricity, transportation, and education.

In India, caste violence is still a concern. According to official statistics, more than 40,000 offences against lower caste people were registered in just the year 2016 alone. Due to a merciless Hindu Caste hierarchy that castes them at the bottom of the heap, Dalits are the most oppressed citizens. They had historically been separated from the upper castes and were not permitted to attend the same temples, schools, or even have drinks with those from the higher castes. They are frequently the targets of exploitation, abuse, and assault and lack access to education and employment opportunities. The film Karnan is exactly depicting a group of helpless people just as mentioned above who are subjugated to the margins of the society. While in 21st century, there are many incidents and revolts that happened in South India which is based on caste. Kachanatham Temple incident in 2018, April Caste protest that happened all over India, Ariyalur gang rape case in 2016, the Marakkanam Violence in 2013, the Dharmapuri violence in 2012, and the Kambalapalli incident in 2000 are all examples for this. While looking up to the North of India the statistics are even more shocking and terrifying.

T.J. Gnanavel's movie Jai Bhim was released on November 2, 2012. Rajakannu and Sengeni, two members of the Scheduled Tribes, Mythra, a teacher, and Adv. Chandru, an activist lawyer, serve as the film's key protagonists. The title of the film Jai Bhim is a slogan and greeting used by the followers of Bhimrao. Ramji. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution of India and the former Minister of Law and Justice. This movie is an actual-life story. A few events, people, places, and dates have been made up for dramatic and filmic purposes. The movie takes place in 1995. It focuses on the predicament of the scheduled tribal Irula community. For more than 2000 years, we have maintained untouchability, and even today, no one is concerned. The opening of this movie says, "English is the language of argument in the Chennai High Court. The courtroom exchanges in this movie are portrayed in Tamil because of necessity ". Like in the movie Pariyerum Perumal, where English is regarded as a language of nobility in classrooms, even if there are many Indians who are unable to understand it, the court and other institutions of law and order continue to use it.

The opening scene of the film demonstrates how police officers use the impoverished, oppressed group of people as pawns in order to advance their careers and maintain their positions. By simply glancing at the caste of the individuals, the cops from various stations were tasked with distributing those who were arrested for theft and petty crimes evenly. Even after they had served their sentence, they were not permitted to leave. Nobody was present to demand their rights and speak on their behalf. In front of the prison, their family begged and cried to the police, but it was to no avail. Even throughout the British era, it was common practice to categorize the impoverished as inherently criminal. People are being branded by their caste. Law and order are a powerful tool. Who we are using it to defend, though, is what is crucial. If the police officers and judiciary work together the rights of the people will be upheld.

The Irulas once engaged in snake-catching. It is a task they must complete, as well as one that their predecessors did. They were once very much skilled bowmen. But now they do not even have a place even in the village map. They labor on the higher caste's farms. To keep snakes away from the fields, they also used to catch rats. Even the rats are cooked for their food. There is no land for the Irula community to reside on. Their names are not even on the voter list, and they do not even have ration cards. There was no one from the community who went to school or had received education. Every day a teacher visits the community to try to educate the residents. She makes every effort to secure the rights that the Dalits are due.

In the movie, Rajakannu, a member of a scheduled tribe, responds to their call and captures a snake from an upper-class man's house. Rajakannu was wrongly accused with this robbery after a thief stole all the cash and jewelry from the house. Even without notice and only out of suspicion, his entire family was sent to prison. His sister was assaulted and mistreated by a police officer, and his pregnant wife was severely beaten. The unfortunate woman consumes poison as a result of her humiliation, yet she manages to be spared somehow. For the rest of her life, she suffered from trauma. Rajakannu along with his two men who were at the police station was said to be escaped and they went missing. But actually, after all the brutality Rajakannu was got killed by the police officers and his two companions was sent to other different prison where no one could find them. The movie depicts custodial murder or how lock up deaths occur in a very genuine and graphic way. The police took a bribe from the guilty and made the innocent tribes the scapegoats despite knowing who stole the gold and money. The lawyer and activist Adv. Chandru revealed the real reason behind Rajakannu's demise. It should be mentioned that Adv. Chandru is not a made-up persona. He was a genuine champion of justice for the weak and defenseless. Sengeni, Rajakannu's wife, needed learning the whereabouts of her husband, and Adv. Chandru was eventually able to provide the just verdict for her.

The real Rajakannu story goes like this: He was killed by beatings at the Cuddalore, Kammapuram police station, and the police said he escaped after discarding his body at the Trichy border. The Habeas Corpus petition that his wife Parvathi filed was momentous in Chennai High Court history. Adv. Chandru's legal battles were important in securing justice for the victims. He has not charged a single rupee for any of the human rights case that he handled. In order to defend the rights of the Irulas, the "Palangudi Irular Pathugappu Sangam" was established in 1966. The union has handled more than 1000 lawsuits for the Irulas with the help of human rights activists like Professor Prabha Kalvimani. They are an oppressed minority that still finds themselves in jail on fabricated accusations, is unable to obtain land grants, and is not regarded equally by society. A lawyer for thirty years Chandru reclaimed the rights for thousands of workers. Justice Chandru used to always say that, "to understand the cases I handled as a lawyer and judge, the writings and words of Dr. Ambedkar greatly helped me." He issued decrees to ensure that Dalits receive Panchami lands, to let women to serve as priests in temples, and to end caste discrimination in cemeteries. The allocated land known as "Panchami Land" was given out to Dalits in Tamil Nadu in 1892, while the British were in charge. Such lands are not transferable nor can they be bought.

By recalling the longstanding tradition of Dalit resistance against caste violence, marginalization, and prejudice, Dalit studies provide a fresh perspective for the study of India. This enables a major re-evaluation of a number of the key tenets of Indian academics. Several men and women have dedicated their lives to the cause of human dignity. The Dalits in India had to put up with the harshest kinds of humiliation. The term Dalit, which originally referred to India's former untouchables, is now frequently used to describe their battles for dignity and against caste discrimination. The 1990s saw the emergence of fresh Dalit movement in South India. Due to the phenomenon of numerous Dalit killings in Southern India and the failure of both legislative parties and Marxist organizations to fully address this challenge, caste-based violence in India has recently been the subject of new discussions. The 1990s saw the founding of numerous caste-specific Dalit organizations, including the 'Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti' in Andhra Pradesh and 'Adi Tamilzhar Peravai' in Tamil Nadu, as well as autonomous Dalit organizations like the 'Dalit Sangarsh Samiti' in Karnataka, 'Dalit Panthers of India' in Tamil Nadu, and 'Dalit Mahasabha' in Andhra Pradesh. Even though caste is still the main method of hierarchical discrimination in use today, the subaltern studies initiative by people like Ranajit Guha and all failed to build a systematic engagement with caste inequality issues.

By highlighting various aspects of their problems, each of the three films, Pariyerum Perumal, Karnan, and Jai Bhim, presents the realities behind the lives of the marginalized group. It is quite sad to report that even highly educated people notice a lot of caste and even make snap judgements based solely on the caste of others. The lower caste community's way of life is depicted as barbarous in every movie. The main reason for their barbaric nature is that they do not get chances for education or they are not able to know anything about how other people in the society lives. Although the reality closely resembles what is shown in these films, the society's treatment of them as inferiors is even more savage. Every living being in this world has got the right to be treated equal. Humans are meant to have meaningful lives, but because of honor killings, custodial murders and other issues, there is no point to being alive. The so-called dominant group is becoming criminals just to save their pride. People who are marginalized have an inexhaustible number of stories to share. The society we live in keeps everything under wraps and sweeps it under the rug, so despite the various experiences and hardships people have had, nobody ever talks about them. The force of caste is literally destroying society.

It is stated that the caste system has been eradicated entirely in south India. But is the mission accomplished? Despite having a greater literacy rate, this is where we still discuss a lot about this issue. For instance, even if we argue that inquiring about someone's caste is inappropriate, we still need to fill out the caste section for each application that counts. Why cannot we get out of this caste situation yet. There are several instances of people killing one another in the name of the same. Marriage is when the real issue in our families starts to surface. We have identified multiple instances where people eschew constructive alliances because of caste. Even in the modern world, there are several examples here. Even now, do we truly need separate matrimonial websites according to each caste? Technically, trust, understanding, and love are always the cornerstones of a successful marriage. Caste is therefore a pertinent factor to consider. A classification called "caste" is one that is applied from the day one is born. So, caste politics, which formally depend on caste mobility, may be hazardous to democracy. Resultantly, eliminating the caste system is the sole means of combating caste politics.

REFERENCES

1. Arya, Divya. "The Couples on the Run for Love in India." *BBC News*, 14/04/2019. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47823588>. Accessed 16 March 2023.
2. Chishti, Seema. "Biggest Caste Survey: One in Four Indians Admit to Practising Untouchability." *The Indian Express*, 28/11/2014, <http://www.indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-in-four-indians-admit-to-practising-untouchability-biggest-caste-survey>. Accessed 12 March 2023.
3. Guha, Sumit. *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia: Past and Present*. Permanent Black, 2013.
4. *Jai Bhim*. Directed by T.J. Gnanavel, 2D Entertainments, 2021.
5. Kannadasan, Akila. "Karuppi the Dog Is the Film's Soul." 'Karuppi the Dog Is the Film's Soul' - *The Hindu*, 27/09/2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/karuppi-the-dog-is-the-films-soul/article25059177.ece>. Accessed 21 February 2023.
6. *Karnan*. Directed by Mari Selvaraj, V Creations, 2021.
7. *Pariyerum Perumal*. Directed by Mari Selvaraj, Neelam Productions, 2018.
8. Punetha, Prem. "Pithoragarh: Dalit Man Killed for 'Eating with Upper Caste People,' Case Lodged | Dehradun News - Times of India." *The Times of India*, 03/12/2021 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/dalit-man-killed-for-eating-with-upper-caste-people-case-lodged/articleshow/88058192.cms>. Accessed 20 February 2023.
9. Rajasekaran, Ilangovan. "RTI Data Point to High Incidence of Caste-related Violence, Murders in Tamil Nadu Between 2016 and 2020." RTI Data Point to High Incidence of Caste-related Violence, Murders in Tamil Nadu Between 2016 and 2020 - *Frontline*, 16/09/2021, <http://frontline.thehindu.com/dispatches/rti-data-points-to-high-incidence-of-caste-related-violence-murders-in-tamil-nadu-between-2016-and-2020/article36493766.ece>. Accessed 02 February 2023.
10. Rawat, Ramnarayan S, and K. Satyanarayana. *Dalit Studies*. Permanent Black, 2016.