

Social realism – A facelift in Tamil Cinema

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Abstract - Early Tamil films start with the genre of Mythology and then to historical, Dravidian concept film, communist film, films that glorify the caste, hero centric film etc. In recent times films which talks about social justice and equality from the subaltern perspective is emerging and hit the box office. The story of these films acts as protagonist. Since these films tell the story from the perspective of oppressed people in the society and registers the voice of the voiceless people by exhibiting their struggles and conflicts in their daily life they fall in the category of social realism. This article studies such types of Kollywood films which were released in 2021.

Key Words: Social realism, Subaltern, Marginalised group, Tamil films.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Adhikar (2018) realism is an attitude of mind in the broadest sense, a determination to stick solely to the facts, a recognition that man is a social being, and a perception that he is inseparable from his position in society. Film theorist Siegfried Kracauer points out that film is capable of portraying the actual specially and could do so with as little artifice as possible. Branson and Stafford suggest that one of two traits needs to be demonstrated for a film to be plausible. First of all, the filmmaker would have intended to capture the perspective of the real case presented. Second, the filmmaker has a particular point or statement about the social world to convey and uses practical conventions to communicate this message or argument. The social realistic film aims to disclose the conflict between an oppressive group and the hegemonic power. Samantha Lay (2002) says that social realism is tough to outline not least of all as a result of its political and traditional contingent. As society evolves and changes the subject of social realism also evolves and changes. She conjointly argues that social realist texts disagree with other films in a range of ways and to variable degrees. Social realist

texts are texts that explore contentious problems in society. Leonard (2015) sees social realism as contemporary social inclusion. Samantha Lay (2002) suggests that through such messages, the filmmaker hopes to teach their viewers. Hallam and Marshment (2000) note how socially realistic texts take characters from the edges of society. He also suggests that the inclusion of the previously under-represented people in the film is not just a representation, but rather portrays them from particular social contexts.

2. SUBALTERN

The tutor of Subaltern studies is known to be Antonio Gramsci. Rao (2008) says that the word is used in South Asian culture as a name for the general trait of subordination, whether articulated in terms of status, age, gender, class, etc. Subaltern studies provide a familiar form of analysis focused on oppressed members of society. He insists that a subaltern is not a rigid institution but a heterogeneous institution that penetrates inside the power structure. He defines power as a space given to one inside a social structure. He has added that in India Dalits as a subaltern unit is seized in the conglomeration of hegemonic powers which is exercised by the political, economical, religious, and social institutions. He says that Dalits experience distinctive space with restriction in social mobility. Vaid (2014) says that the Indian social system is based on caste which has been legally accepted interrelationship with the socioeconomic or labour market. Srinivas and Kaali (1998) state that in Tamil films, Dalits are portrayed as comedians or as minor characters and they have added that Dalits are not only portrayed in a humiliating way but their presence in the film itself less. They are also portrayed as submissive people who follow the rules of landlords in the film.

3. KARNAN (2021)



Fig -1: Karnan

Directed by: Mari Selvaraj. The subaltern protagonist struggles for the upliftment of their community through transportation and education access.

The plot of the film deals with the constant conflict between two neighbouring villages Podiyankulam and Melur in sake of caste. People in the Podiyankulam are subaltern people and they are restricted to have a bus stop in their village by the oppressor in Melur. Karnan from the oppressed community rises his voice against this and lead the entire people of his village to fight for social justice and equality. He and his friends vandalises a bus when it is not stopped for a pregnant lady. The bus owner has filed a complaint and it has been investigated by the Superintendent of Police Kannabiran who is a casteist person and a supporter of Melur. Kannabiran brutally attacks some old people in Podiyankulam using his power and he mocks the head of the village for having the name Duryodhana. The film not only represents it as an conflict between Karnan and Kannabiran but it exhibits the tension that prevails in the subaltern under the hegemonic power. An image of a donkey with tied legs is used to represent that caste has tied Karnan's feet. In the first scene of the film a small girl lies in the middle of a road due to a fatal seizure. No one has stopped their vehicle to help her and at last she has hit by a bus. Her death evokes a strong emotion and throws light on the condition of the subaltern. He fights not only for getting public rights for his own people and serves as an assertive subaltern character.

4. MANDELA (2021):



Directed by: Madonne Ashwin. The film focuses on the sudden power gained by a Subaltern protagonist for the sake of two upper-class political parties's election.

The film explicit the social stratification in our Indian society. The protagonist of this film is named as Elichavaayan (fool), a barber and later changes his name as Mandela. Even to make him to clean a toilet for the need of the villagers, he has not allowed to get into the car instead he was made to run behind the car. Through this scene the director has showed the worse face of caste discrimination and dominant attitude of the people very strongly. As the name Mendela refers his struggles to reclaim his identity and to break the identity that has been set by the society on him. The voice of the oppressed is exhibited throughout the film.

5. SARPATTA PARAMBARAI (2021):



Directed by: Pa. Ranjith. The film establishes the struggle of a Subaltern clan living in a segregated Madras area in 1970s.

The subaltern culture is manifested in Sarpatta Parambarai. In 70's boxing served as a prominent entertainment as well as prestigious game in North Chennai. The story revolves around two teams and the politics behind it. It presents the rise of a socially oppressed person Kabilan as a protagonist. While showing the life of Kabilan the film captures the subaltern cluture by breaking its stereotypical image. Kabilan is kept as the symbol of the whole oppressed group. A man says a dialogue to Kabila, "Kabila neeyela ingu nikkavae koodathu, po". It means that Kabila you don't deserve to stand here. This conveys the class conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. He fights against class, caste, the lure of making money illegally and alcoholism. The rise of Kabilan symbolises the rise of subaltern.

6. JAI BHIM (2021):



Directed by: T. J. Gnanavel. The film portrays the oppression faced by Subaltern tribes and their struggle for justice.

Jai Bhim is one of the first films to alleviate the grievances of the neglected people in Tamil cinema. The film sheds light on the abuse of power by the police, who falsely accused Rajakannu from the oppressed group. The dark life of the oppressed group is reflected throughout the film. The film portrays the uncompromising legal struggle of a lawyer in the Chennai High Court echoed the voice of subaltern people who are deprived and live far from even basic amenities.

7. CONCLUSION

Film plays an important role in shaping individuals' perception towards society. It can be used as an instrument for changing one's beliefs, attitudes, opinions and stereotypes. A significant impact of film is that it has an ability to change and create attitudes towards certain social groups. Even though film is an effective medium of entertainment it can act as a catalyst for social change which can be contrived through social concern directors. Social realist directors try to portray life at that time and they intend mostly a political one. They depict a type of social injustice, such as economic hardship, discrimination, or political injustice. The social realistic film contains an element of social extension by which previously underrepresented groups in society become represented. These films portray attitudes and life factors of oppressed people. They often represent oppressed characters living through a struggle and exhibit them as a protagonist. They focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life in which oppressed people survive and make the audience sympathize with them. Using the genre social realism they reveal the tensions between an oppressive and hegemonic force. From the emergence of these types of film which talks about social justice and equality has risen and have started a social realistic era.

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