



# Representation Of Subalternity: A Contemporary Analysis On Tamil Movies

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## Abstract

Caste and race play an important role in our present society. This paper tries to provide a deep vision of subaltern theory with reference to contemporary Tamil movies. In subaltern theory, concepts like hegemony and marginalization are visible. Like this, Tamil movies reflect the marginalized communities. They are isolated from society due to their color and status. This is very relevant in the present scenario.

Five contemporary Tamil films in which casteism appeared as a major issue are selected for analysis. The films chosen for the study are Pariyerum Perumal, Asuran, Kaala, Jai Bhim, Karna, and Love Panna Uttranum from the film anthology Paava Kathaigal. The study approaches these films with a distinct understanding of the atrocities of casteism in India, especially in Tamil Nadu. This paper provides more focus on the movies that were published after two thousand fifteen. Contemporary films started to analyze the living conditions of these peoples. Not only a particular language but the whole Indian languages deeply studied subaltern-related issues and problems. Mainly in South Indian languages, it becomes evident.

Here we have to analyze the thematic elements of contemporary Tamil cinema. Themes of racism, Dalit problems, inequality, power domination, etc. can be connected with subaltern identity. The theory mainly focused upon the problems of lower-caste people and their identity crisis. Due to the overpowering domination in the society, some people are always avoided by the mainstream. They didn't get equal rights like the elite people. They face suppression and malpractice from high-class people. Dalits have been portrayed in both stereotypical and contextual ways, especially in the last decade. It is evident that subaltern theory can act as a strong weapon to act against marginalization.

Index Terms - Marginalization, Dalit community, Subaltern people, Casteism

## INTRODUCTION

Based on color, Black people face oppression and mental struggle. There are different kinds of power domination. These power systems made a number of distinctions between common people. Also, these relations have a strong hold of authority in our society. These are reflected in our social media, films, magazines, and literature. Contemporary Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada films try to express these kinds of inequalities on the visual screen. Subaltern theories, post colonialism, casteism etc. evaluate these kinds of problems. We can get complete, true pictures of the lives of these low-caste people from movies. They are mainly focused on the life conditions of Dalit people. Dalits are under the domination of high-class authority. They don't usually get enough opportunity and equality. The essential need of these people is equality for all humankind. There are different movies that spread light to the lives of Dalit people. The famous Tamil movies such as *Jai Bhim*, *Asuran*, *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Love Panna Uttranum*, and *Kaala* deal with caste issues. Not only South Indian movies but also the Northern movies express such issues. The movie *Jai Bhim* was directed by T. J. Gnanavel. *Asuran* was directed by Vetrimaaran, the famous contemporary Tamil director. *Pariyerum Perumal* was directed by Mari Selvaraj. These directors give true insight into the lives of common subaltern people. Tamil films always analyze truth.

While films from the nineteen fifties to the eighties had a huge theme of social equality, political developments and differential socioeconomic mobility complicated the harsh social realities of caste corporations in the state. In the book '*The Dravidian Years*,' Dr. S. Narayanan argued that the substitution of the karnam, or the village headman, has an important role in the socialization of caste. The movies, such as *Karnan* and *Asuran*, have their own subaltern music and theme. It is evident from the movies.

The movie *Jai Bhim* can be interpreted with the issue of subaltern. In this movie, Dalit people are oppressed on the basis of money, caste, and low social status. The movie was released in 2021. It was based on a real-life incident. *Jai Bhim* is about inequalities and injustice. Power and authority can dominate the world and can create their own rules and regulations. Here we can see a fight against the whole world created by dominant authority. The movie takes its inspiration from an authentic story that happened in 1995 in India. Then this event produced the habeas corpus, filed with the aid of Rajakanny's wife, Senggeni, and it was momentous in Chennai High Court.

*Pariyerum Perumal* is a Tamil movie directed by Mari Selvaraj. Through all these studies, we can make a strong study on caste issues and color problems. We can't learn anything without strong evidence. But here these films can be taken as strong, powerful victims of subaltern studies. There are a lot of Black heroes in the film industry who come from low social backgrounds. They can easily express the subaltern problems in front of the camera. Annihilation of caste and race should be our aim and focus. We can make a complete analysis of these in the study.

*Kaala* is a 2018 Indian Tamil-language film written and directed by Pa Ranjith and produced by Dhanush, a movie that is similar to *Kabali* in some ways. Rajanikanth starred as a hero in both movies. The film also features Eswari Rao and Samuthirakani in supporting roles, and Nana Patekar plays an antagonistic role. In Mumbai, the people who had migrated from southern Tamil Nadu are living in the slum of Dharavi. Haridev and Abhayankar, previously a gangster who had carried out attacks in Dharavi, try to evict the people of Dharavi and take their land. Over the years, he became a Union Minister. In this movie we can see a struggle between marginalized people and rich people.

When we analyze the film *Kaaka Muttai*, which was directed by M. Manikandan. Here the audience witnesses the impoverished life led by slum dwellers. The term 'Periya' means big, and 'Chinna' means short. Globalization began to make the existence of the slum dwellers more pathetic. The movie can be viewed as a social report that chronicles the deplorable prerequisites of the life. The movie focuses on the outcomes of globalization and its effect on the marginalized section of society. The major issues that were discussed in these movies are patriarchal society, power dominance, subaltern issues, racism, and discrimination. Love, romantic themes, stunts, parallel movies, etc. can be included in other genres.

Exaggerated images and scenes are avoided nowadays in contemporary movies. Here we can mainly give more emphasis to three movies named *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Jai Bhim*, and *Kaala*. These are the realistic Tamil movies that were produced in the twenty-first century. Three of these movies have some kind of similarity. Three of them can be analyzed from a subaltern point of view. The role and condition of Dalit

people in our present scenario was not good. They face a lot of discrimination and inequalities from our society. From our daily living conditions it is evident. From our newspapers it is evident that a lot of Dalit people were killed by the high-class dominant authority. They didn't have a dream of their own. They were under the domination of some power. They can't act freely and can't think independently. The government provides some kind of resources for those marginalized categories. But it does not fulfill all of their needs and conditions. These movies correctly express the conditions of these citizens.

Pariyerum Perumal is a movie directed by Mari Selvaraj. The hardship of the caste issue is well portrayed in the movie. According to some critics, there are two deaths that happen in the movie. One is the death of a dog, and the other one is the death of a man. Both of them were heartbroken by the events. It is very painful to say that in the twenty-first century people give more importance to caste and religion in the deal of marriage. A marriage should always occur on the basis of love, and mutual understanding of the people. Money, wealth and beauty are not a factor in marriage. In our Kerala one year ago, a lower-class Christian man named Kevin was killed by his lover's family members. The caste issue was the major problem behind this murder. Due to the influence of money and social power, they can easily decrease the number of punishment years. It is not an ordinary thing. People should raise their voices against such attitudes of these people. The film's protagonist, Kathir (Pariyerum Perumal), belongs to a lower-class family background. Also, the dog Karuppi belongs to him. The name 'karuppi' signifies the color black. It is evident that selection of name for black protagonist and other black peoples is a matter of discussion.

Here the director Mari Selvaraj directly or indirectly gives a Black identity to the dog, which belongs to the low-class dalit protagonist. The plot of the movie begins when the hero joins the law college. Here the law college has some implied meaning. Because, according to law, all people are considered to be equal. There is no distinction between sex, race, and caste. In the college he faced many problems especially due to his poor English. It makes him panic. The arrival of the heroine makes the movie into a more complex plot. The relationship between the hero and heroine is threatened by the family members. Here Mari Selvaraj directly portrays the existing caste discrimination, marginalization in our society. The writer also shows us how honor killings are passed off as accidents. The killing of Kausalya Shankar is an example of this. There is an old killer in the movie. According to his opinion, all the murder he commits is a tribute for his master. He justifies his caste killings. In our nation there were different riots are occurred due to caste issues. In this movie high-class girl loves a low-caste boy. Because the society not only kills the boy but also the girl. This is the major problem behind the issues.

Pariyerum Perumal is a strong departure from normal Tamil cinema, tackling casteism with poignancy. Director Mari Selvaraj draws from personal experiences to make a powerful narrative that sheds light on the harsh realities of caste discrimination and inequalities. Despite handling a sensitive subject, Mari maintains a firm grip, avoiding preachiness. The film's 2005 setting highlights the peak of casteism during that time. With stunning cinematography and music, the film's technical aspects complement the narrative structure. Mari's positive ending is commendable, making Pariyerum Perumal a must-watch movie.

The movie Jaibhim deals with caste discrimination and marginalization. The movie was directed by T. J. Gnanavel. It is considered the best revolutionary film in the Indian industry. The protagonist of the movie is a tribal woman named Senguni. There were some strong emotional scenes in the movie that portrayed the female protagonist. The plot of the movie is based on real incidents that happened in Tamil Nadu. The movie is focused on the Irular community in Tamil Nadu. In the first scene of the film, there is a police officer who is segregating some suspects based on their caste and color. If they are dalits or from a tribal community, they are considered isolated peoples.

Dalit people are considered to be inferior, and they become the victims of all crimes in the society. They didn't get proper education and economic development. It is their major problem. Based on the color of their skin and the way they speak and behave, they are considered to be a marginalized community. It is a three-hour-long film. There is a goosebumps-raising moment in that film when the female character raises her voice against all of upper-class society. Looking at it purely from the point of view of Tamil cinema's masala conventions, it is essentially a strong scene written for all Dalit characters. Only through these movies we can raise our voice against all kind of oppression.

Asuran is another movie that deals with subaltern issues and casteism. The movie was directed by Vetrimaaran. The film was based on the novel Vekkai by Poomani. Asuran is a story of a dalit man named Sivasamy, and the role was played by Tamil actor Dhanush. It is an unusual story in that it doesn't reflect to violence or revenge but rises above it. When we considering the history of Indian cinema, most of the positive characters are white and fair. Also negative roles are provided to black peoples. Dalit people's lives are always a source of new innovations in film industry. It is very evident in these movies. The term Asuran signifies a negative character. In our present society, the world is full of corruption and problems. Casteism is an important factor. Here the family from the underprivileged class causes the death of a high-class man. Here, moreover, a lot of people give more importance to class structure. It can be connected with Marx and Engels class conflict. Class conflict is another issue that we discuss with subaltern issues.

The theory of subalternity is still relevant today. There are so many issues regarding subaltern problems happening in our present society. We can't avoid these problems. These issues are continually studied by the theorists, and they made an analysis for this. Contemporary cinemas started to reflect problems of poor and common people. They are not only poor in economic issues but also in their caste and race. Sometimes their color started to signify their ethnic groups. These people are under the domination of a high ethnic group. They are under the surveillance of these rich people and forced to obey the commands of these people. However, there is a slave trade relationship between the low-class and high-class people. Ambitions such as education, good clothes and good health conditions etc. are some of the desires of subaltern peoples. The term subaltern is coming from some Indian theories. Subaltern theory can be compared with post colonialism. Because India was a colony of British people for a long time.

Contemporary films started to analyze the living conditions of these peoples. Not only a particular language but the whole Indian languages deeply studied subaltern-related issues and problems. Mainly in South Indian languages, this becomes evident. Because progress and development are still lacking in South India. In North Indian states like Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Jaipur, these inequalities occur. Malayalam films such as Pazhassiraja, Kayamkulam Kochunni, Marakkar Arabikadalinte Simham, etc. reflect the living conditions of the common man and how they are treated by high-class authority. The Tamil films, such as Kaaka Muttai, Rangasthalam, etc. also symbolize caste-related issues. The movie Rangasthalam is directed by Sukumar. It was released on March 30, 2018. In some ways they give reference to subaltern issues. The Black heroes in movies were always avoided and misunderstood by other people.

Due to some hierarchical order and systems, some people are always in the domination of power systems. It can be connected to Marxism and post colonialism. The term subaltern is related to power systems. Power comes from multiple sources. Each of them has different targets in the audience. Also for fulfilling some aims they made some power relationship. Some of them originate from different characters. It has also happened in cinemas. Some characters are created with more power, and some of them with less power. The less power becomes a symbol of the other. For example, women, children, black people, aboriginals, etc. were always powerless. In legitimate power, the individual is determined by the organization. Power can be exercised with multiple degrees of intensity with aggression. In the nineteenth century, hegemony represented the social and cultural scenario. It could be used to mean a regime that exerts more influence within society. From a theoretical viewpoint, it can be said that a cause and effect relationship.

We can take some examples from the movies that deal with Dalit issues and situations. The movie Jai Bhim is a Tamil-language film. It was translated into different Indian languages. But the intensity and depth that are given by the film are the same in all languages. In the Tamil language, it becomes more effective. Because the incident that is described in the movie originally happened in a Tamilnadu. The movie was based on a real-life event. The movie focuses on a Dalit man who was named Rajakkannu. He was accused of some mismatch that happened in money. He was arrested by the police. The only reason for his arrest was his low caste and low social status. Here the police is a symbol of hegemony and power. It was very common during that period in which high-class people dominated the poor people. They are under the domination of authority.

Karnan, played by Dhanush, is the protagonist of the movie. He is a young man who belongs to the oppressed community in his village and has grown up witnessing discrimination and violence against his people. Karnan is a strong-willed individual who is determined to fight for justice and equality for his community. He is willing to take risks and make sacrifices to achieve his goal. Karnan is portrayed as a deeply empathetic character that cares deeply about his people and their struggles. He is shown to be a person of integrity who is not afraid to stand up against injustice and oppression. He is a complex character whose inner struggles and conflicts are portrayed with great depth. Throughout the movie, Karnan is shown to be a skilled warrior who is not afraid to use violence to achieve his goals. However, his use of violence is always shown to be in response to the violence and oppression that he and his people face. Karnan's character is also portrayed as a tragic hero, whose fate is sealed by the larger social forces that surround him. Tragic heroes are always common in literature and movies.

The movie portrays the problems of the caste system in India and its long-standing impact on the lives of millions of people. Exploring caste-based violence is another thing. Through the struggles of Karnan, the movie gives a light on the everyday violence experienced by the oppressed and marginalized community in India. The movie emphasizes the importance of education in the life of the subaltern and the need to empower the oppressed. Through Karnan's experiences, the movie shows the often ignored experiences of marginalization and exploitation of India's subaltern communities. The movie accurately portrays the harsh realities of life in India's impoverished villages. It explores the idea of justice in a generation of inequality.

The Kaala movie can be evaluated through subaltern issues. Dalit identification and its forbidden place in 'civilized society' are articulated in different ways, too. There's the recurrent imagery of an oppressed donkey in Karnan whose legs are tied. Dhanush, in the end, frees him. The movie's central theme comes from the village no longer having a bus stop, a powerful symbol for progress and primary human rights. It clearly deals with life of Dalit community and a place that where they resides.

In Tamil films, Rajinikanth stepped in with his dalit film Kaala. The film, in its Hindi translation, is a juxtaposition of the Tamil identity of blackness. We know that subjugated Tamil hero represented by the epic's noble villain Ravana pitted against the entitled, fair-skinned Northerner Ram. The sub-nationalism of on ethnocentrism and language takes a low-caste hero. Tamil films will never be the same again. In fact, the homage to the subaltern couldn't have been better with the mainstreaming. Here shockingly emerging from the Rajini persona in a super hit movie played by the biggest anti-hero turned establishment of superhero.

A film has a strong impact on society and its audience. It not only conveys some dialogues and plots. But its emotions touch the hearts of the people. Some cinema has a long-lasting impact on the mindset of the society. It is similar in all languages. Here we have to analyze more contemporary Tamil language films. Due to an ancestral language, its cinema has some strong historical significance. Therefore, it always tries to convey the theme of the common man and reality. But in some way Tamil cinema was enriched in musical quality and artistic performance. There are so many heroes who are coming from other Indian languages who have flourished in the Tamil industry of cinema.

Here we have to analyze the thematic elements of contemporary Tamil cinema. Themes of racism, Dalit problems, inequality issues, power domination, etc. can be connected with the theory of subaltern identity. The theory mainly focused upon the problems of lower-caste people and their identity crisis. Due to the overpowering Domination in the society, some people are always avoided by the society. They didn't get equal rights like the elite people. They face so much suppression and malpractice from high-class people.

This social fact is also reflected in cinema. Cinema becomes a major source of all social realities. Tamil language films are enriched by community issues and racism. If we check a single film, it is evident that there have been some hidden practices of racism and color issues. It is a common theme in all films. Black-colored heroes have a wider significance in Tamil cinema. In some cases, some particular color can be considered as other. Otherness can be equated with subaltern community.

A deep analysis into contemporary Tamil cinema, such as *Karnan*, *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Asuran*, *Jaibhim*, and *Kaala*, which gives a complete analysis of casteism and subaltern theory by analyzing the movies *Jai Bhim*, *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Asuran*, *Kaala*, *Karnan*, and *Love Panna Uthranum*. The same themes are discussed in the movies *Karnan*, *Kaala*, etc. Here the theories of Gayathri Spivak, Dipesh Chakravorthi, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, and David Arnold made multiple contributions in this field. The severe and complex problems of Dalits always appear in literature and art. Not only Tamil film but also Hindi, Malayalam, and Kannada film industries try to express these kinds of problems.

## CONCLUSION

Through all these studies, we can make a strong study on caste issues and color problems. We can't learn anything without strong evidence. But here these films can be taken as strong, powerful victims of subaltern studies. There are many Black heroes in the film industry who come from low social backgrounds. They can easily express the subaltern problems in front of the camera angle. Annihilation of caste and race should be our aim and focus. We can make a complete analysis of these in the study.

There are multiple scholars and theorists who studied the life of these minority communities. Gayathri Chakaravarthi Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, etc. have studied them. It can be considered a key movement in postcolonial studies. Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, etc., are some scholars related to postcolonial studies. The term subaltern was first used by Ranajit Guha, an Indian scholar. Here the term was used on the basis of caste, class, religion, and color. There is a binary relationship in subaltern studies, which means it analyzes the subaltern and ruling class. Subaltern studies can be connected with cultural studies also. It is the "history from below."

While we are analyzing the term subaltern, it comes from the German word that means inferior rank. Subalternity is a form of revolt against all oppression. If we are analyzing a single incident related to colonial power, there occurs a kind of marginalization. These marginalized communities are forced to do and obey the rules. Discrimination is an important aspect related to subalternity. Subaltern rebellion didn't have any proper agenda or guidelines. The subaltern requires a strong set of unity in their revolt and movements. Women can be considered a doubly marginalized community. They are suppressed in patriarchal society and also within the same gender.

Here some castes have more significance than others. For example, in India, for the Hindu religion, there are different castes within a single religion. In that Brahmins and some high class have more values in society. Here, Black-colored people are included in a single caste, which was always avoided and ignored in society. These issues are discussed by film industries. These contemporary Tamil movies are some of the examples of that.

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