

Framing Dalit Identity in Pariyerum Perumal Movie: Semiotic Analysis

R. Monica Maria Bastina

M.Sc. Student, Department of Visual Communication, Loyola College, Chennai, India

Abstract: In the History of Tamil cinema, The Marginalized situation of the Dalit was not shown. Even some of the movies are talked about caste discrimination but the current reality was not shown in the movie. The Box office hit film of Tamil history as only talked about Tamil pride and the most of the film justified that caste pride is right. The alternative point of view of the marginalized was not shown in majority Tamil movies. The film *pariyerum perumal* released in 2018, describes how the caste pride affects marginalized Dalit people and how its feel be marginalized. More over the film shows the honor killing happens in the southernmost Tamilnadu district. This makes a *pariyerum perumal* as peculiar film to do research.

Keywords: Dalit Cinema, Semiotics, marginalization, Dalit in Indian cinema, Alternative Dalit Cinema, Dalit Identity, Ambedkar, Blue, Caste Dress Code, Tamil Cinema, Mobility, Representation

1. Introduction

Cinema has been an important source of entertainment for the mankind since its creation. Film is a series of still images which when played creates an illusion of moving images. It has been over a century since the first film was made and since then many theoreticians have tried to learn film and developed many theories. There are many ways to analyse a film and one of the way is semiotic analysis. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. The word semiotic is derived from the Greek word 'semion' which means sign. According to Umberto Eco "anything that has a meaning is a sign" Cinema has been a subject to analysis since the beginning of the cinema and many theorists developed theories and analysis methods to analyse the cinema. Semiotic analysis is one such method to analyse the movies. Metz considers film as a language and hence tries to understand the structure of this language and its meaning. Cinema connects common people to the director through the story.

2. Review of literature

A number of researches have been conducted previously on semiotic analysis of a film and related to the semiotic approaches to film.

The "Dalit," according to Bharati (2002) is not a caste but an identity, which is constructed and yet a reality beyond denial. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (2015) report for Tamil Nadu shows that the SCs population constitutes

20.01% of the total population. The commission passed a reservation policy of 18% for SC groups in Tamil Nadu to support the upliftment effort of the 76 SC groups in Tamil Nadu. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar saw the attainment of political rights through reservations and conversion to Buddhism as an ideological attack on untouchability against the dominant upper caste Hindus (Racine & Racine, 1998). There are two narratives on how untouchability emerged in Tamil Nadu. One group says that in the Sangam period it was based on birth (Subramaniam, 1966) whereas the other group contests this on the basis of occupational practices (Hanumanthan, 1979). The most punctual notices of Dalits can be found in the Tamil Poems, *Purananuru*, which has a reference to *Parayan* (a term that means Scheduled standings in today's setting).

Anbayin Hasanli (2017) did a semiotic analysis of the movie *Bandit*. He wanted to understand the relationship between cinema and semiology and hence applied the theories of semiotics to the movie 'Bandit'. He also aimed at explaining and solving the use of codes, images and signs in cinema through cinematic method in cinema. He analysed different codes and signs present throughout the movie like the lake, the amulet, train journey etc. According to his analysis the signs and codes were actually showing the state of Istanbul at that period and the lives of people there and also the mental state of the character and the happenings in their life.

Sigit Suraham did a semiotic analysis on the film *7 hearts 7 love 7 women*. He employed Roland Barthes theory of semiotics to analyse the film and to interpret the signs and understand the representation of women in the film. His main objective was to analyse the film in order to find out the portrayal or representation of women in the movie *7 hearts 7 love 7 women* through semiotic analysis of the movie and interpreting the signs. From the movie he finds that women are given tradition position (house wife) which is domestication of women. Portraying women weaker in relation to men. The movie according to Sigit Suraham, portrayed metropolitan women weak and as objects of exploitation. He uses constructive paradigm to find the results.

Feyrouz Bouzida (2014) emphasizes "the non-verbal communication or the visual image as a sign system." The process of semiology in this field refers to signs in all their manifestations, linguistic or non-linguistic, which involve the signifier and the signified as the main components of media

signs according to the cultural phenomena.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2009) highly illustrated the images, which gives important visual references to many old and new films. The illustrated images of posters, photographs and publicity materials represent a lot about the changing trends of Bollywood over last 100 years.

By analyzing these books, thesis and journals the researcher found that semiotic analysis is a proper way to identify the symbolic meaning from the signs or codes used in the movies.

3. Theoretical framework and methodology

Semiotic theory is adopted in this research. Semiotic theory helps to understand the production and interpretation of meaning. Its fundamental aim is that meaning is made by the deployment of acts and objects which function as 'signs' in relation to other signs. Moreover, the researcher applies Barthes's theory to dismantle the meaning (denotative meaning, connotative meaning and myth). Based on the result of the analysis, it concludes that pariyerum perumal movie give numerous signs. From this analysis, finally we understand the hidden meaning of the movie. Through the comparison of this movie Visuals, we get an assumption of cultural difference and variants.

4. Objective

- To Analyze the signs in pariyerum perumal movie. How the signs help in the story telling process.
- To understand the representational politics involving the Dalit community with the help of costumes that the characters adorn in the films.

5. Research questions

It is evident from the literature review that many initiatives had been taken by Government, Social Activists, NGO and Individual to eradicate or defuse the caste system. As like these various efforts, many film makers intended to discuss the ill effects of caste. In this sense, this article intends to discuss the following two questions.

1. How Dalit identity has been portrayed in the Tamil Movie Pariyerum Perumal?
2. What are the semiotic elements that constructed the identity of dalit in the movie pariyerum perumal?

6. Hypothesis

1. The Social Codes, Linguistic codes & Aesthetics Codes are used to analyze, according to the culture and preferences of the audience of that industry.
2. Additional contents in the pariyerum perumal movie songs, which will help it to connect with audience.
3. The socio cultural norms of the society such as dressing style, body language etc.

7. Data interpretation

A. Scene-1

Pariyan Character and his fellow members sitting in the pond and they are relaxing after Hunting. As pariyan sees other Caste Group members coming towards them he tries to leave the place and after a little bit of conversation with fellow members and they leaves the place. Karupi shown and train coming on the track is shown in the scene, Pariyan and fellow members sitting in the pond shown. One of the member in the group sings "vanakam vanaam" song. The lyrics of the song describes the story revolves around Puliyangulam (thoothukudi). Pariyan call his Dog kruppi and pariyan lift karupi and make her to bath in the pond. Other Caste Group coming towards the pond is shown. pariyan notices and says 'shall we move from this place. 'A little bit of conversation happens with the fellow members. Other character says that 'why we Should to be afraid of them'. But pariyan insist that next day he has to attend his first day college (it implies he don't want to get into any trouble). All leave the place, other cast people nearing them was shown.

B. Scene-2

The other caste group arrives to the pond and they started Urinating was shown. They say that how dare they come to our place for hunting. they also discussed they have done something to terrify them. The camera angle moves to the birds eye view. The pariyan and fellow members coming away from the pond is shown. One of the character says that Why we should be afraid of them. The other character replied we should. because we have to face all these legal consequences. other character replies that they will also face the same trouble. They own all our lands, we have nothing. pariyan character searching for is dog "karupi" is shown. One of his fellow member hints that the other caste people done something. Then pariyan hears the train sound he doubted whether the dog tied along with the track so he run towards the railway track with hurry to save karruppi, she remains calm. In front of Pariyan train hits karupi. All the fellow members along with other dogs surrounds pariyan.

The story plot takes place in tirunelveli, to represent that the important place was shown. the statue of indra Gandhi, MGR were shown, Dr. Ambedkar statue and cast leader Mthuramalinga Devar were shown.

C. Scene-3

Pariyan Enter into the law college with his mother was shown. The innocence of pariyan mother was shown through the Dialogue. The principal ask about fathers Occupation, Pariyan Mention that his father occupation is Having Vandi Maadu. The dialogue of the college principal implies that it is really Hard to get a law seat (He means that he is from submissive caste so it is really tough to get law seat). Principal ask him What he wants to become? As pariyan replies that, he wants to be a doctor, the Attender sarcastically laugh. Then the principal says that, it is a law college you can become an advocate not a doctor. Pariyan says that I have not mention

MBBS Doctor, I mentioned am become a Dr. Ambedkar. He Ask the Attender to mark his name because that these types of peoples surely get into problems.

D. Scene-4

The main Antagonist character (the old man) was shown, this character got in a bus and he make a youngster to fall down, then the youngster dies. After that including the antagonist character and all the other peoples in the bus mourns for his death and a young girl inside the bus emotionally cries. this implies that the young boy lover of her he is from a submissive caste. So the Antagonist character murders him (Honor killing) (This Scene Describe how honor killing is converted into normal death.). The youngster's death was reported in the newspaper as a normal accident.

E. Scene-5

The first Day College Intro: The Seniors welcoming the students by sticking the welcome posters was shown. On that welcoming Juniors scenario three different groups of seniors were shown (SFI students, Dominant Caste Students, Submissive caste students). Pariyan was ragged by group of seniors was shown, the Senior ask he is from which place as pariyan replies he is from puliyangulam. One of the senior ask to another senior that who will be in puliyangulam for that the senior replies that you don't know who will be in puliyangulam (This shows that the people are identifying the caste by asking where they come from). The other antagonist character (Fresher) enters to the college in bike. But the same group of seniors talks to him nicely and they are not ragging them (this scene implies that the antagonist character is from a dominant caste). Pariyan walks into the college after ragging another senior ask him where he is from, as pariyan replies he is from puliyangulam, the senior ask he knows R.K Raja, pariyan replies that he is my grandfather. For that the seniors says that he is also grandfather to me (this implies that both belongs to submissive caste). Then the senior asks pariyan whether they ragged you even after knowing where you come from. Then the pariyan replies says yes for that. So the senior ask him show who has ragged him, but pariyan avoiding the situation and moves. Next the introductions of jothi laxmi (that is jo) Heroin character, Supporting character Anand.

F. Scene-6

The class teacher asked pariyan about his name, he says BA. BL (Mela oru kodu) for that everyone laughs. And then Seccod Class teacher came she started to history of courts, as pariyan can't understand the English language. So he insisted teacher to teach in tamil. But the teacher scolded him that he don't know English, then, after the class pariyan ask jo about what the teacher taught, jothi answered for that. Then pariyan asked her name jothi introduce herself.

Song: Vanakam Vanakam

The life style of pariyan shown in the song the land scape of the puliyangulam is shown, in a particular shot pariyan gives

ice cream to two old ladies in that shot the hose shown no door (through this shot the poverty of puliyangulam peoples expressed). In a sequence pariyan do hair cut for small childrens in another shot pariyan friends do hair cut for pariyan. (This shows that the caste discrimination). Pariyan day to day life was shown. Apart from going college pariyan works in field with his family (that is implies the caste based works). How pariyan is emotionally connected to the peoples in puliyangulam.

G. Scene-7

The English Professor Also scolds him for lack of English Knowledge and gives him Imposition,

And his friend anand also scolded by the professor, they both ask help from jo. As jo comes out

of the class she was ragged by the senior, Sangaralingam (antagonist) comes to the scene he says that he belongs to our caste to the senior. So she leaves her. Then Sangaralingam says to jothi why she has no said her caste name.

H. Scene-8

The antagonist Old Man was called by a family. The brother of the family says to the old man that he has beaten his sister for loving other caste man. He also says in that incident the girl was died. The old man make the family members sit outside of the house. Then he Tried to make the girls death as a suicide. Though the girl come to consciousness the old man kills. Then the old man calls the family member inside the house was shown and ,Everyone cries. Next day the honor killing was portrayed as Suicide.

I. Scene-9

With the confusion Pariyan and anand was waiting for jo, jo give the imposition to pariyan. Sir saw anand sitting in teacher chair, but he didn't say anything. Normal class was started. The teacher starts dictating. Pariyan couldn't understand so he starts scribbling. After sometime sir doubts pariyan and ask pariyan to give notes. As he refused he pull of the note. He ask jo to read it, jo refused ,sir demo to reading jo starts to reading. He criticize his admission "Kotta La Vantha Kozhi Kunju". Then pariyan get anger towards the sir ad pulls out students note book and ask him to read it for everyone. Pariyan and the English teacher when arguing and pariyan was forced to get out the class. Sir Read Everyone's Notebook, Everybody was scribbled he troughed it.

J. Scene-10

Pariyan was sitting on ground. Jo came to saw him and asked him are you still angry I want to talk to to u conversation starts about the language(English). She asked to him if you don't like English you can remain calm you getting agitated pariyan replies," who told you that I don't like English" she replied you only behaved such type. You peoples only treating me so. Jo asked pariyan how you passed 10th, 12th. Pariyan asked jo mark she tells" 360 again in tail 360". He ask her to guess his mark she told 200 with hesitation and again in Tamil she repeated

200” he told 390 but fail. (Because of English) Jo surprised and asked how pariyan replied “my teacher does not know it and I could not understand it”.Pariyan explain about his Attempts in 10&12 Exams. Jo asked pariyan you not at all have interest towards English then why you joined in law college. Pariyan replied it is because of R. K. Raja (Thatha). Jo asked who is he, Pariyan explain he is everything for us, Raja thatha enters to the thoothukudi police station pariyan and his fellow members were Half sitting in the outside of the police station along with the dogs.The inspector said outside the village the three hunddi in our village also two hunddi are broken.These guys only rooming with a dog like a dog. Why can’t this guys done. that. R. K. Raja ask to sub inspector, why are you enquiring the people who went for hunting. Police asked first tell who are you, he replied am R. K. Raja. Sub Inspector insulted him, R. K. Raja asked I just enquire why you have arrest them. The arguments went on R.K.Raja asked to subinspeter thus our people look thief to your eyes. Police slapped R.K.Raja and insulted him, are you a advocate asked question to me. Go and face the legal consequences. Constable asked why are you treating this old man like this, he is talking too much like advocate. He was shouted instead of pleasing me, if we allow all this waste people to speak like this all the advocate speak like judje. Pariyan Ask Sorry and make promise here after we won’t go for hunting. R. K. Raja said only we will also against all these people, Don’t tell this issue to this people. And advise pariyan to became to study and become the higher level, for that I can face all these struggles, at least one person has to come a higher position. Pariyan said I have to study you said what I have to study, to Represent all over people and speak boldly u have to study law. Pariyan pledged. I will study for law PARIYERUM PERUMAL B.A.B.L, after hearing this jo shocked and said I go to school, my father said law and I take this course, we having two papers in this semester what are you going to do, pariyan replied no other go with struggle only I have to complete. Jo offered pariyan, I will teach you English.

8. Findings

A. Pet Animal

- The karupi song and how pariyan treats karupi dog, shows that the pet animal is emotionally connected to pariyan.
- The other caste people ties the dog to the track,to show their power.

B. Statue

Ambedkar & Mutthu Ramalinga Devar, Indra Gandhi, MGR statues were shown. Ambedkar statues shown in eye level, Mutthuramalinga devar statue were shown low angle.

C. Posters

- The honor killing of the young character by the antagonist (old man) was reported on the news poster as a normal accident.
- The Seniors welcoming the students by sticking the

welcome posters was shown. On that welcoming Juniors scenario three different groups of seniors were shown (SFI students, two different caste students).

- The second honor killing of a girl reported in the news as a suicide.

D. Ragging

- Pariyan was ragged by group of seniors was shown, the Senior ask he is from which place as pariyan replies he is from puliyangulam. One of the senior ask to another senior that who will be in puliyangulam for that the senior replies that you don’t know who will be in puliyangulam (This shows that the people are identifying the caste by asking where they come from). The other Shangaranlingam (antagonist) character(Fresher)enters to the college in bike. But the same group of seniors talks to him nicely and they are not ragging him (this scene implies that the antagonist character is from their same caste). Pariyan walks into the college after ragging another senior ask him where he is from, as pariyan replies he is from puliyangulam, the senior ask he knows R. K. Raja, pariyan replies that he is my grandfather. For that the seniors says that he is also grandfather to me (this implies that both belongs to their caste).
- The senior girl rag jo and ask her to remove her bangle. Jo angrily breaks her bangle after that Sangaralingam (antagonist character says that she belongs to our caste) so this implies that sangara lingam and jo are same caste.

E. Place

- Pariyan and fellow members sitting in the pond shown. One of the member in the group sings “vanakam vankam” song. The lyrics of the song Describes the story revolves around Puliyangulam (thoothukudi)
- In a ragging scene the pariyan’s caste was identify by asking where he comes from.

F. People and life style

The song Vanakam vanakam pasamulla saboyorey shows the life style of the pariyan character. The people in the puliyangulam were Economically Backward was shown through the scene.

G. Honor Killing

The main antagonist character old man kills youngster for caste pride.

9. Conclusion

The success of a film depends on the signs used that are carefully put and the combination of signs to make a whole and create meaning. The resurgence of nativist movies symbolized caste-based glorification of the intermediary castes in opposition to anti Brahminic sentiments from the Dravidian movement, organizing of caste-based groups within the industry influencing the movies that were made and

opportunities of work on caste lines, and formation of fan groups for the heroes heavily drawing on the caste identity of the hero and using it as a base for the promotion of that caste. It was only in the 2010s the Tamil cinema industry started acknowledging and depicting the struggles and lives of the Dalits. Till then the movies, acting as vehicles of cultural hegemony made the marginalized invisible, misrepresented them, or showed them in servile patron-client relationships. Dalit cinema in India has played the role of empowerment as well as been a resource for the establishment of the community's identity. In doing so, the filmmakers have often reinforced the notions and identity markers related to the Dalit community. This reinforcement stagnates their attempt to move beyond the established standards and markers of Dalit identity. Clothing has always played a huge role in prophesying the ideology of a community. Dress codes have been used by the upper caste and class to maintain their position in the hierarchy.

My research analyses this film to find the signs in the movie and how the director has made use of these signs in the movie to convey the messages. I would like to say that my findings tell us that the director has made use of symbols and signs in his movie to convey the messages. Semiotics in film is dependably an essential and astounding component in any image. It is the implication and correspondence of signs and images to build up a plot and characterize certain occasions that occur inside the plot. The first is that the film itself is as of now a symbol. The film also explores the meaning of education system for the marginalized. While education is often seen as a tool with the potential to transform the society, the education, within its institutional practices and rituals embeds the same power struggles and social injustices. For a subaltern, the educational institution is another social ground for humiliation, which the protagonist here faces frequently.

The major problem in semiotic analysis is how it is sometimes completely dependent on the pre-existing shared knowledge of the society. Sometimes the media takes the audience for granted thinking that they might already know the information on the topic. Signs and signifiers do not have meaning without these pre-existing knowledge. But a person

without these pre-existing knowledge can also understand the signs and its meanings but will not understand the signs and what the creator meant to convey as much as the person who has these pre-existing knowledge. It will be difficult for those people. Semiotics are used by different mediums to generate meaning like text, radio, TV, illustrations, comics and not just the films.

References

- [1] <https://theorisingfilm.wordpress.com/2013/01/26/8/>
- [2] Marco Pescetelli, "A Restored Silent Film from a Semiotic Point of View."
- [3] Zahra Aghajani, "A Semiotic Reading of the Film Not Without My Daughter."
- [4] Dezheng Feng, "The multimodal representation of emotion in film: Integrating cognitive and semiotic approaches."
- [5] Jessica Willis, "Sexual Subjectivity: A Semiotic Analysis of Girlhood, Sex, and Sexuality in the Film Juno," 2008.
- [6] Razia Sultana, "Social Semiotic Multimodal Representations of Gender Identity in Pakistani Documentary Film Saving Face."
- [7] Faiza K. Sartaj, "Semiotic Analysis of the Promotional Film Poster of 'E.T. The Extra Terrestrial'."
- [8] Eitan Wilf, "Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity."
- [9] Vladimir Shalack, "Semiotic foundations of logic."
- [10] Pravin Kalsariya, "Semiotic Analysis of RAYMOND."
- [11] Bruno Surace, "Semiotics (of Cinema)'s not Dead."
- [12] <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/film-studies/importance-of-semiotics-in-a-film-filmstudies-essay.php>
- [13] <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/221203>
- [14] <https://www.eurozine.com/metaphors-in-film/>
- [15] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1096548
- [16] <https://filmanalysis.coursepress.yale.edu/editing/>
- [17] <https://sophiegollop.wordpress.com/2015/10/09/film-scene-analysis-mean-girls-phonescene/>
- [18] Hamid Naficy, "Women and the Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema."
- [19] Muhammad Zamron, "106296634-Metz-Film-Language-a-Semiotics-of-the-Cinema-PDF."
- [20] Frank P. Tomasulo, "Conference Report: Semiotics and Cinema," University of Toronto, 1984.
- [21] Levi Merenciano, "Semiotics and Rhythm of film: Hollywoodian cinema compared to Cinema Novo."
- [22] Digit Create, "Using Triadic Semiotics in Storytelling."
- [23] Mikolaj Sobocinski, "Alice-in-Wodnerland Pragma-semiotics."
- [24] Göran Sonesson, "Cognitive Semiotics Translation and other acts of meaning in between cognitive semiotics and semiotics of culture."