

The Dawn of Adivasi Cinema: A Tamil Cultural Analysis of Adivasi Representation in Jai Bhim with Special Reference to Thani Marabu and Silapathikaram Parallelism

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Abstract

The oppressive Indian caste system has led to the marginalization of the Scheduled Castes or Dalits and Scheduled Tribes or Adivasi. Tamil Cinema has begun to represent Dalit's narratives through the perspective of the Dalit protagonist, depicting a fairly realistic representation of the struggles faced by these communities. However, the Adivasi have hardly made it into being a part of the Tamil Cinema narrative, Jai Bhim, directed by T.J. Gnanavel has been the break of dawn for 'Adivasi Cinema'. The film is based on a true story portraying the struggles faced by a tribal woman to find her husband, who out of suspicion was taken under police custody, capturing the social, cultural and political struggles this woman faces to unearth what she is entitled to know. This paper contains a cultural analysis and literary analysis with special attention to the parallels drawn from Silapathikagaram and Thani marabu (idioms) used in the film dialogues, further deriving the representation of the marginalized Adivasi through the lens of Gnanavel.

Keywords: Jai Bhim, Film analysis, cultural analysis, caste, Tamil, Silapathikaram

The Origins of Casteism

India's society is built within the framework of one of the most rigid structures known as the caste system (Singh & Azeez, 2021), unlike the class system which is flexible or fluid in nature, as individuals can move from one stratum into another. This stratification of the social structure is based on elements of society such as wealth, education, power, property, income and occupation (Jha, 2020) (Sociologyguide)., all these elements don't remain rigid rather are fluid, allowing an individual to move from one stratum to another based on socially perceived appreciation or depreciation. However, the caste system is different because of its rigidity.

"An implicit status is attached to one's caste which historically changed from the social roles to hereditary roles. This, created status hierarchies on hereditary basis with limited social mobility." (Sankaran et al., 2017)

Thus, once an individual is born into a certain caste, the 'caste' becomes attached to the individual throughout life and through generations, inherited from one to another following the patriarchal structure. The order from the highly regarded are the Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and, the Śūdra being the lowest of them all, each caste was said to have originated from various parts of a god in a hierarchical manner thus the stratification. Later, another much lower sect emerged known as the 'Untouchables' or Dalits and Tribals, also known as Adivasis who weren't even included in the caste system, rather were excluded from the association as they had occupations involving hunting, scavenging, dead animal disposing and executing and earth working (Lee & Growler, 2015). In order to understand the structure, its origins must be understood, the caste system was introduced in the *Rig Vedas* and further established in the *Manusmriti*, which was followed by the *Bṛhaspati Dharmashastra* the latter two were highly regarded texts which established and justify the caste system and mandates the supreme caste or *varna* the *Brahmins* to follow it (Sawant, 2020) (Harad , 2020). Some excerpts from the text that establish the caste system are as follows:

"A Shudra who insults a twice born man with gross invectives shall have his tongue cut out; for he is of low origin." (Manu VIII. 270.)

"Let him not give to a Sudra advice, nor the remnants (of his meal), nor food offered to the gods; nor let him explain the sacred law (to such a man), nor impose (upon him) a penance. For he who explains the sacred law (to a Sudra) or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that (man) into the hell (called) Asamvrita. (Manu IV-80 to 81)

"He must never read the Vedas in the presence of the Shudras." (Manu IV. 99.)

These texts derived from the *Manusmriti* reveal the oppressive nature of the text and the instructions followed by the Brahmins of the society. Sudras were restrained from attaining knowledge or any form of education, probably as a means of centralizing power by restraining knowledge of the *Vedas* avoiding any opposition or questioning by the lower castes. In order to abolish such hegemonic practices of the Indian society, the anti-caste movement began in the 19th century spearheaded by Dalits from within the society, Jotirao Phule and Dr. Bhima Rao Ambedkar through literary texts that deconstructed cultural power and scrutinized the Brahminical social order as an antidote to the Manusmriti (Ingole, 2020).

Formation of Hate

Sara Ahmed in her book on the 'Cultural politics of Emotion' explains how emotions move and shape the body or the communities, they can stick as well as move over time through repetition further shaping the bodies that come in contact (2001). She further deconstructs texts or speeches to analyse how emotions act as 'affective economies' and can circulate emotions such as hate among the bodies thus 'lowering' or 'heightening' them within the social structure. Further, it can also create a sense of pain and otherness within the bodies that collide, where a spatial reorganization takes place eventually framing the 'other' as hated bodies, she goes on to explain that these emotions of hate are root causes of hate crimes (Ahmed, 2015). This model can be applied on to the caste driven Indian society, where the higher caste, the brahmins having been educated and acquired powerful positions have localized power to oppress the lower castes, especially the 'Untouchables', later as 'Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribe' by the British Colonisers or 'Dalits' and Adivasis. Similarly, Foucault's illustration of how power is acquired and closely associated with knowledge and later used to decentralize power over the bodies (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984), here religious knowledge which is inscribed through '*Vedas*' has been restricted from the Shudras who are hierarchically above the Dalits and Adivasis, restricted from learning or acquiring any form of education, so this identity through power has been inscribed in the body of the Shudras and other lower castes. Though these texts date back to sometime between 1500 – 2000 BC (Mittal, 2016), the habitus of 'untouchability' that was once formed, becomes more difficult to change or abolish over time (Gorringe & Rafanell, 2007).

This ideology had also penetrated into the Tamil cinema industry which originated in 1916 (Jesudoss, 2009) when India was under British Raj. Brahmins who had been highly educated in Sanskrit law during the period of British colonization, the British judiciary were dependant on the Brahmins to interpret the law, thus giving them "the highest posts of power, profit and confidence". Eventually, the British colonizers were heavily

influenced by Brahmanical perceptions used to interpret the Indian law then established also giving Brahmins power (Riser-Kositsky, 2009). Tamil films released in the year 1931 and from then on unto the 50s, this era of Tamil cinema is known as the puranic, mythological and folklore period (Damodaran & Gorrige, 2017). From then on the 'cultural space' of the Tamil Cinema industry was dominated by the upper caste while Dalit and Tribal hardly had opportunities to be portrayed or seen on screen, additionally, this space was also politically dominated by politicians who went on to become Chief Ministers and other office-bearers. In the late 90s casteism was a dominant discourse in the film industry, however, it was further used to represent upper-caste protagonists upholding their 'stereotypical' identity, for instance, the film *Thevar Magan* (1992) which was a highly acclaimed film starring Kamal Hassan which portrays the true spirit of being a Thevar while glorifying elements and symbols that are associated with the Thevar caste (Devika, 2019), which belong to the Kshatriya, upper-caste.

Marginalised under the Tamil Cinema lens

Sreeram Gopalkrishnan (2019) outlines the new wave cinema also known as the neo-noir era of Tamil Cinema which had the theme of the marginalized as one of its prominent themes not only based in class but also on caste. Some of the films he draws to attention portraying the marginalised of the Tamil spatial dimension are *Paruthiveeran* (Warrior of Paruthiyur, 2007, Dir: Bala) showcasing a love affair between a mixed-caste originating boy and his cousin, a girl belonging to the dominant upper-caste whose father is also the village chief. This film, however, only skims across the resistance of inter-caste marriage rather than portraying the struggles of the marginalized from their perspective. Similarly films like *Kadhal* (2004), *Madras* (2014), and so on which have casteism as a part of the narrative yet dilute the issue down to love affairs and the problems that occur due to inter-caste marriages, this often seems as a dilution of the issue portraying a negative impression on the upper-caste audience as well as create a stereotypical idea that the lower-caste desires to have marital associations with the upper caste. This further idealized the problem of identity in a patriarchal society like India where marriage isn't just a union of individuals but families so, it involves the transfer of wealth, status, and economical stance. When a Dalit or lower caste member attempts to have a union with the upper cast it is often seen as though they are desperate to have associations with the higher stratum and thereby improve their status quo in society, film narratives often merely discuss marriage as the predominant issue among the Dalits. *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018) also has a similar narrative of how a relationship between an upper class girl and a Dalit boy raises ears, though they hadn't taken their relationship any further than being good friends, it mentions struggles faced by the protagonist, in college as a student and also by his father for being a folk dancer. This trend has

begun to change with films like *Kabali* (2016), *Kaala* (2018), *Asuran* (2019) in which the issue portrayed in Dalit cinema goes beyond marriage into struggles faced by these marginalized sections on a daily basis. However, Adivasis are hardly represented in Tamil cinema, a few films like *Kumki* (2012), *Oru Indhiya Kanavu* (1983), *Vanmagan* (2017) show glimpses of their community and a few issues they face, these films neither bring the Dalit or Tribal character into limelight nor does it depict the struggles faced by them in society. *Jai Bhim* is one of the first films to bring to the limelight the struggles faced by the community; here the 'Irula' tribal community their everyday routine and lifestyle while showcasing the discrimination they face under the social, political, and legal structures.

Literary Analysis of Thani Marabu (idioms)

A number of *Thani Marabu* (idioms) phrases have been identified in this film's dialogues, which are also used commonly in society today, some of these phrases refer to the communal identity of individuals. Out of the idioms and phrases only those that are derogatory and against their communal identity has been identified and analysed for their study, the semantic meaning has been derived from the subtitles and the pragmatic meaning has been formulated using visuals and, preceding and succeeding dialogues.

Time Code	Idioms and Phrases Used	Semantic	Pragmatic
00:02:29	Enna Aalu	What caste?	As the prisoners are released one by one, the police inspector at the gate checks their caste and separates the minorities from the other caste, these people are shortlisted to be framed on false charge.
00:02:53	Evaru Periya Pichavaram Jaminu	As if he's a lord!	The police inspector mocks at the person from a minority caste while others in line are treated with respect

00:07:4 5	Unnam oorukulla udrathe thappu	Big mistake letting you in the village	The landlord accuses rajakannu being a tribal, its a mistake to let him in the village. In reality hes been employed to clear off the rats in his field
00:07:4 6	Iruga Edam kodutha padukka edam kepiya	Offer a place to sit, you'll ask for a place to lie down	The landlord comments on the tribal community as if they are trying to take over the village while being offered employment in the village
00:13:3 7	Yaer matta Eppo da oorukula Vitanga	Since when is your place part of the village?	Yaer madu actually refers to a bull used to plow the fields. Usually the cow is tied down and only used for labour. Rajakannu and his community here is compared to the cow.
00:14:3 2	Neengalam padikalenu evan ya aluthan inga	Who cares if you learn to read or not?	It's no ones problem wether people from tribal community learn to read or write. When rajakannu along with his family members requests for caste certificate to make his cousins get education, the dasildhar mock at them and asks them to go meet the collector. As a dasildar he should be the one who's working for their right to education but

			hes making it seem like it's no one's problem.
00:27:40	Periya olaga Alagi	Think you're Ms. World, eh?	Sengani request the police officer that she'll report to the police station in the morning as being a pregnant women. Ignoring her requests the police officer proceeds to snatch her and verbally abuse her, dragging her to the police jeep although it is unlawful to arrest a woman late night. The offices is mocking sengani's physical appearance
00:31:26	Ivangelam yaru ulla vittanga	Who let these people in?	The public prosecutor sees the tribes inside the court hall and comments on who let them in. This shows that there is set discrimination in the judiciary system. Though everyone has a right to seek constitutional remedies and seek justice according to the constitution of India.
00:49:56	Kuppaiya koluthura mari koluthiduvn	I'll burn you like trash	Though sengani is begging the police officer saying rajakannu is innocent, the police officer kicks her asnd

			tells her that he'll burn her like trash, referring her to trash.
00:52:19	Yaarudi aambala	Who among them is a man	Mosakutty requests the police to release the women (pachaiyammal) as there are men remanded. The police replies sarcastically saying 'Who here is a man' when there are actually three men. The police goes on to sexually abuse the women and asks one of the men to prove their manliness degrading their masculinity.
00:57:26	Naadodi kaluthaikk Paecha Paru	The cheek of this vagrant!	Sengani requests the village president to recommend her husbands release But he mocks her and calls a wanderer.
01:03:02	Paavam paatha pitchai podalam aana case nadatha mudiyuma	Out of pity I can give out alms. But can I take up a case?	Sengani is only seen as an object of pity, while she deserves justice as per the constitution of India
01:26:50	Ooraiyum policeaiyum pagachikittu nee vaazhnthuduviya. Kuntha edam koduthu polaikurathaku velai kodutha thimiraeduththu alaiyirueenga	Think you can survive antagonizing the village and the cops? We give you a place to live and work and it gets to your head?	The village elders conduct an enquiry with the tribals and ask why they have filed a case, if they can survive in the village after filing a case. Though the case is between her and the

			cops, the village Persistent makes it sound like its the village and cops versus the tribals, othering them though they are a part of the village. Furthermore he also says, its them who have given them a place to live and work to do, as if the tribals are living because of their mercy though it is actually their space and the early occupants of the forest region.
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Over time they have become derogatory in nature thus defaming certain communities. The analysis of these phrases reveals simple phrases such as “Ena Aalu” which translates to ‘which person’, questioning the identity actually has a pragmatic reference to the caste of the individual rather than any other identification. This is portrayed to be used in all walks of society, especially in front of the judicial system in this film. Furthermore, words like, “neegalam” (you all), “Naadodigal”(Nomads), “Erumamadu”(Buffalo) and “Kuppaiya” (Garbage) and some of the other words used to other the Adivasi community in this film, It helps bring to notice how offending and hurtful these phrases could be when used against them, yet the people hardly react or respond when these words are spoken showing how it has become a routine for them. Hate speech against these communities are portrayed through this film. In conclusion, these derogatory words have been effectively portrayed to reveal their pragmatic context thus highlighting the misrepresentations and abuse against such communities in a realistic and raw portrayal.

Parallelism of Jai Bhim and Silapthigaram

The Silapthigaram written by Illango Adigal during the Sangam age, the protagonist of the film, lawyer Chandru refers to this story and depicts Sengani as the Kannagi of this age, however he hopes that the Kannagi of this age, who represents the women and minorities in today’s society, gets her justice unlike the Kannagi from history. The Kannagi from the Sangam age burned down Madurai town, the Kannagi (Sengani) of this age has burned down the misrepresentation of minorities, who are often portrayed as those

greedy for money, choose to win the battle for justice rather than receiving a bribe, thus symbolically burning down the misrepresentation. Again, Rajakannu is the Kovalan here who is being wrongly framed as the thief, for stealing an ankle and is penalized unto death just like Kovalan for a mistake he hasn't committed, just like Kovalan. Like Kannagi, Sengani fights to prove her husband right through the eyes of the court. The deep contrast lies in the justice sorted out through the judicial system which had not existed in the Sangam age, this strong contrast helps the writer to notice the power of the Indian judiciary system. Though the film is a true story, the narrative follows a few key points of Silapthikaram as a storyline which helps the audience connect with the main incidents of the film, bringing out the justice contrast.

Jai Bhim and tribal Identity and Oppression

Jai Bhim is a film centered around the lives of the Irula tribal community, written and directed by T. J. Gnanavel, the title of the film 'Jai Bhim' translates to 'Hail Bhim' or 'Victory to Bhim', a slogan used by the followers of a Dalit leader, jurist, economist and the Law and Justice Minister in India, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, he had taken a lead role in forming the constitution of India, the legal structure, while fighting for the marginalized of society the Scheduled castes (Dalit), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasi), the Other Backward Castes and women introducing policies that channel empowerment (Dhavaleshwar & Banasode, 2017). The story is based on true events in which a tribal woman Sengani belonging to the Irula tribal community, uses the law to find her missing husband Rajakkanu who was taken under police custody for interrogation as a suspect for missing jewellery in the house of the village panchayat leader. Rajakkanu had been to the village leader's house when he was called to catch a cobra, just as the family was leaving out of town for a few days. When they had returned, they found jewels missing, upon police investigation they asked the leader if he had any suspects in mind repeatedly, his wife recalls the cobra-catching incident and so he says that he suspects Rajakkanu. With no further investigation carried out, Rajakkanu becomes the prime suspect, unable to find him as he is away working a brick kiln factory, and so a few of his relatives and community members are arrested overnight, as soon as he returns Rajakkanu is arrested too. They are violently dealt with while being 'interrogated' by the local policemen, trying to force them to accept a crime they hadn't committed. One fine day, the three of them are missing from the local jail and are accused of escaping from prison. The suspicious wife of Rajakkanu, Sengani now full-term pregnant tries to find him with the help of the village adult literacy teacher Mytra, they meet advocate Chandru a staunch Ambedkarite who agrees to take up the case, upon listening to the chain of events narrated by Sengani, he decides to file a habeas corpus case (Sumi M, 2019) (The Constitution of India 1950). This kind of case is rested as a remedy to those deprived of personal liberty, here the oppressed, uneducated and innocent Rajakkanu who is wrongfully accused and abused by the policemen is the object that seeks liberty

through the court. However, through careful investigation by advocate Chandru and the special police force reassigned to file a report, reveals that Rajakkanu was murdered. Due to severe flogging and violence by the investigating policemen in attempts to force Rajakkanu and his friends to accept the crime, he dies in prison while his two other friends are framed as though they had escaped but were secretly locked up in another prison. The tribal object that seeks liberty is portrayed by the police as though they had found their own way to liberty but one was beaten to death while the other two serve imprisonment for a crime, they had nothing to do with. This paper culturally analyses the representation of the struggles faced by tribals in the Tamil society through the lens of director Gnanavel, embodied with Dr. Ambedkar's principles. The predominant themes discussed in this film are the tribals' identity, powerlessness, capitalist oppression right under the nose of the caste-abolished constitution, the film also leaves a window with a ray of light towards the liberation of these marginalised sections of society.

Identity Of the Tribals In Society

The tribals are also known as Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes (ST), they still reside in isolated communities within their villages, often distanced from civilization. This film pictures their community lining in the forest region away from the village, the villagers regard them as outcasts and refrain from having any sort of association with them. After Rajakannu captures the cobra successfully which had found its way into the Panchayat leaders' house, the leader offers some money which he refuses to take and says his wife was from his village so he doesn't expect any wage, for which immediately she responds aggressively for having associated her with him, an outcast. Though these communities may favour and even protect the upper sections of society, this showcases how they are 'other-ed' especially due to their history of origin and exclusion from the caste system. This community is also portrayed to have been 'other-ed' by the so-called democratic system which the film throws light at which would eventually change the course of the court proceedings. Special provisions have been made under the Indian constitution to empower the marginalized ST, however, certification is required to avail these constitutional reservations, yet when Rajakkanu approaches the concerned officer they are denied. The officer also sarcastically comments asking whether the boy who required the certificate knows how to catch snakes for which Rajakkanu replies that he wants to study so he had not been trained. Here the tribal body is denied its right to empowerment, the right not to claim to be powerful but to call itself marginalized. The film goes on to portray the struggle this community faces to simply get what they are entitled to, a ration card, voting rights, and '*patta*'. The teacher who engages them in adult literacy classes teaches them two words '*patta*', meaning a document used to prove ownership of land and '*padi*' meaning to study, seeing this Rajakkanu jokingly asks why they are being taught when they aren't entitled to own any land, the teacher Mytra replies 'study, everything else will follow'. While the symbolically represented tribal, hardly

understands the discrimination or politics behind it, however, the teacher who represents education and knowledge enlightens them about the seriousness of it.

During a tribal case proceeding, as the prosecutor enters the court, he passes a derogatory comment seeing a few tribals involved in the case, he says ‘who let them in?’, depicting a symbolic representation of the hate between the two bodies, Sara Ahamed (2015) illustrates hate as a circulation, every time hated bodies have an encounter history are reopened and realigned, reforming social and bodily spaces. Another such example is when, the same prosecutor tries to caress the little girl Alli yet hesitates to touch her (Fig 1), through tribals do not fall under the ‘untouchable’ section of the caste system, the existing hate that Ahmed (2015) illustrates is reopened here, the modernized man powerful under the social structure comes in contact with the outcasted, jinxed tribal body so the historic hate is reopened, transforming the tribal body into a hated body.

Fig 1: The public prosecutor tries to caress Alli but doesn't touch her (Amazon Prime)

The prosecutor also identifies the innocent tribe as ‘habitual offenders’ which again is associated with the course of history, during the British Raj an act known as the ‘First Criminal Tribes Act 1872’, stigmatized the tribes involved in criminal offenses as ‘born criminals’, later post-independence this act was repealed (Kumar, 2020), however, this stigma and hate reoccur when the bodies spatially re-align.

Another stigma portrayed in this film is tribals seen often as ‘objects of sympathy used for publicity’, this film itself was criticized to have been made as a means of sympathy and publicity by portraying the marginalized Irulas. While the tribal remain voiceless in the Indian society, Adivasi cinema could act as a voice representing these marginalized communities, as a representative for the marginalized according to the Habermasian ‘public sphere’ (Livingstone & Lunt, 2002). Another interesting portrayal of discrimination is found even in re-telling histories is an eye-opener, Chandru attends a school competition where children are dressed up as various freedom fighters such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda, Bharathiyar and Jawaharlal Nehru (Fig 2), Chandru asks why Dr. Ambedkar isn't here, though he had played a vital role in representing the marginalized and in forming the Indian Constitution, the leaders whom the children have dressed as had all belong to upper-castes while Ambedkar was a Dalit, lower-caste.

Fig 2: Children dressed up as Subash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Swami Vivekananda and Bharathiyar (L to R)

Powerless Among the Powerful: Irulas and The Capitalist Society

The film depicts the prevalent capitalism within society, The director introduces us to the habitus of the Irulas community, they are on farmland hunting rodents using primitive tools and methods, the landlord interrupts by saying they have created a mess and that they would not be allowed again. Though the landlord mentions that they were allowed only to help him clear the field of snakes, these tribals were overstepping their limits. In order to fulfil their basic needs, the members of the community are hoarded with insults, despite being helpful and maintaining the ecosystem of their habitus, they aren't given any remuneration while also, lacking any participation in their public sphere. Similar situation arises in the house of the panchayat leader where Rajakkanu goes to rescue a cobra, though their services are used but neither paid nor recognized for their efforts, the community is also depicted as experts in treating snakebites using herbal medicines made by them without any charges. Strong opposition against capitalism is expressed through these visual narratives, Adivasi and Dalits are largely migrant workers working in oppressive work environments, even before the rise of capitalism and it has continued on (Lerche & Shah, 2018).

Rajakkanu and his wife have a moment alone when their house door falls during the rain, their dream is to build a house made of bricks opposed to the feeble mud and palm leaves hut they live in while they had worked in a brick kiln factory yet couldn't afford any. The film strongly opposes capitalism with strong red tones of communism, Advocate Chandru's house has portraits of the face of communism-Karl Marx, the man who opposed caste system and fought for the right of the marginalised-Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the face of Dravidianism - E.V Periyar, along with sculptures and figurines of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin also an heir of Marxism (Fig 3,4,5). Though each of these leaders represents various ideologies each has contributed to the rights and freedom of the marginalized and oppressed in society.

Fig 3: Portraits of Karl Marx, Dr. Ambedkar and E.V Periyar found in Adv. Chandru's house (Amazon Prime)

Fig 4: The figurine of Vladimir Lenin found

Fig 5: Sculpture of Karl Max mounted on the table (Amazon Prime) the wall behind Chandru (Amazon Prime)

Chandru comments just before filing the Habeas Corpus case, saying '...the case we're filing with no evidence is not just against three cops, it is against all those in power (subtitle)', this further establishes the powerlessness of the tribal oppressed by the powerful social structures such as the legal system, the elite and those in political power. An audio note accompanies the background score while showing montages of Chandru

working, it says “we have been carrying on with untouchability for the last 2,000 years. Nobody has bothered about it.” The last phrase is echoed creating an emphasis also showing Chandru thinking about those lines, this lies as the crux of the film, what have we done about it? Though the constitution has paved way for the empowerment of the marginalized with reservations in schools and employment, giving them an edge even before the law yet they are being deprived of their rights and freedom. The question remains what have we done about it, thus this film.

Liberating The Adivasi: The ray of hope

The film begins by showing a mother, a baby crying and an old man waiting outside the prison for their kin to be released along with other families, the shot cuts to a group of policemen waiting for the same men to resolve pending case files. Men belonging to powerful communities have their community members welcoming them, however there is a contrast drawn, lower-caste men having no one but a few family members waiting to receive them. The men are being questioned about their caste and are made to stand separately based on caste, while those belonging to upper castes are free to go, the Dalits and Tribals are detained. This is a powerful visual representation contrasting the freedom of the powerful upper castes and the oppression of the Dalits and Tribal, based on their identity. Another significant representation is the clothes these men being released are shown wearing, while upper-caste men wear pressed clean shirts while others wear stained wrinkled shirts, their body language also symbolizes their oppression and slavery, they come walking with tightly folded hands, slightly bend and raised shoulders looking frightened while the others walk confidently and speak up their caste ‘identities’ boldly and walk free out of prison. The policemen converse asking why they aren’t released, ‘are they orphans?’ and the other replies by saying they are almost like orphans. As the title is an Ambedkarite slogan suggesting association with Ambedkar’s principles, the film also seeks to emphasize discrimination based on caste and had fought against discrimination, he had liberated the Dalit through the law of court, Ambedkar being a lawyer himself. Though the Indian judicial system has abolished the caste system and perpetuated laws to affiliate the oppressive system, it still continues to thrive in the Indian society over 75 years since implementation, ironically Ambedkar was the one of those who had initiated the movement to abolish the caste system through the Indian constitution, yet we still seek triumph over this derogatory system.

An adult literacy teacher, Mytra is introduced with a dialogue of her saying ‘*Nalla kalam porakkudhu!*’ (good times have begun) which is a popular phrase used by the tribes who practice fortune-telling and chant this phrase on the streets declaring the fate of towns, villages, communities and individuals. Here Mytra, the teacher is the symbolic

representation of education, as a social worker she engages in various literacy programmes for the Irulas. She also encourages them to learn their traditional medicines and skills, accompanies them to government offices to avail benefits and is the one who helps Sengani find the right people which leads to Advocate Chandru. This is a powerful representation depicting the importance of 'knowledge', not just education under the oppressive modernized education system but power/knowledge that Foucault addresses as being inseparable. Once Sengani understands the law, she'd rather prove her husband innocent and abolish the identity of being a 'thief' rather than receive a handsome cheque despite the poverty she faces, reveals how the power/knowledge given to her by the law has enabled her to stand up against the social powers.

Conclusion

Tamil cinema over the years had standard and repetitive themes, though marginalized were represented in a reasonable number of films, realistic depictions of their struggles, oppressive lifestyles, and social evils were often portrayed in a subtle or comical manner, for instance, comedian Vivek would address casteist practices in a humorous manner from a Brahminical perspective, as opposed to realistic representations of the marginalized Dalit or Adivasis. Dalit films had found their way into Tamil cinema over the past decade, however *Jai Bhim* is one of the first films that represent the world of the Adivasi that collide with the modernised social structure, oppressing them and suppressing their voices. The ray of hope depicted symbolically through visual representations and narratives was the dawn of the literacy program that enlightens the community to raise their voice following the way shown in form of a 'teacher'. Alli, the daughter of illiterate Rajakkanu and Sengani, who had learned to write her name, is in juxtaposition with Sengani not knowing how to sign the Habeas Corpus petition and so leaves a thumb imprint. The final scene comes through powerfully showing Alli reaching out for the newspaper and imitating Chandru's body language and trying to read the newspaper. This shows how she also becomes a part of the social structure; the next generation of the community is forced to leave their habitus and join the modern structure; mere survival knowledge isn't sufficient but knowledge/power is needed for them to survive.

Fig 6: Alli imitating the body language of Chandru while reading the newspaper (Amazon Prime)

Cinema a self-conscious medium can be used to create awareness among the marginalized, encouraging them to avail of constitutional remedies and policies they are entitled to while also creating an awakening among other audiences on social evils. *Jai Bhim* can be said to be the dawn of 'Adivasi Cinema' with films such as *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018), *Asuran*(2019), *Kaala*(2018), *Kabali* (2016) paving the way to create a realistic representation of the marginalized Dalit, a similar movement in the representation of Adivasi or tribals could be expected in the coming years. *Jai Bhim* is director T. J. Gnanavel's second film, yet has been well received by the audience, having been nominated for the Oscars and surpassing the longstanding record of classic films such as *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Godfather* on IMDb listing based on user ratings. Though this is just the beginning of Adivasi cinema narrative, only one film could be considered for this study, an accumulation of films as they come along could reveal a comprehensive analysis of Adivasi representation.

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