

DILEMMA OF MORALITY AMONG SPECTATORS ON THE SUBJECT OF *MAARI* AND *MANKATHA*

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Abstract:

*The Cinema provides a platform for depicting the legitimate, cultural, naturalised, behaviour and it also contributes to the moral progress of the audience. It is an imitating art that promotes ethical, social, cultural, ritual and aesthetic values. The moral dilemma is contemplated through lyrics, characters, behaviour; dialogue, setting, recurring events, symbolic deeds, costume and so on. The movie portrayals have undergone a far-reaching picturisation that it has changed from projecting the protagonist winning against the villain to anti-heroes winning the bribery game through villainy deeds. This indirectly creates a chaos in the mind of listeners towards moral uprightness. It advocates an ideology, stereotypes and desensitisation among the viewers over an issue. It influences the moral perspective of the audience and they are introduced to the moral dilemma in the societal and behavioural context. They conceptualise themselves as a replica of the illusive characters on the big screen. This paper seeks to analyse the two blockbusters (*Maari* and *Mankatha*) contemporary films in Tamil to the moral dilemma that has been created through the script. It also tries to analyze the deeds of the protagonist and antagonist in attaining their strong goal.*

Keywords: *Tamil Cinema, Maari, Mankatha, and Moral dilemma.*

Mankatha, Indian Tamil film which was released in the month of August 2011 where Ajith Kumar plays the leading role. *Maari*, is also an Indian- Tamil film which was released in the month of July 2015. These two films are examples from contemporary Tamil films which have portrayed unethical and immoral values through characters in the form of dialogues, lyrics, costumes, and in various forms. The plot and narrative style have also threaded in such a manner to exhibit unacceptable behaviour as ethical values. This paper seeks to analyze the dialogues, costumes and other elements that are involved which has contributed to the moral dilemma in the audience. Hardgrave says that Tamil cinema as prominent and persuasive cinema centered in Chennai. Chettiyar describes cinema as a part of people's life of Tamilnadu, the movie watchers are in the highest number when compared to the other people in other states. (qtd. in Jesudoss)

Godard says “the beauty can be a symbol of morality, but only when ethical content is moulded into an appropriate sensible form...” (Downing 22). Ethical content is inbuilt attributes of morality. In the contemporary movies, moral values and ethical content fall flat and they are substantiated by violence. The moral and ethical values are being dominated by the immoral deeds. They are established in a convincing manner and those activities are being encouraged in the plot.

The characters portrayed in *Maari* and *Mankatha* deal with a moral dilemma in itself. In *Mankatha* the protagonist is a cop and he is projected as a hero fighting against the unethical values in the society but he isn't. In *Maari* the plot revolves around the protagonist, a rowdy who bribes money from the people, smuggles sandalwood and involves himself in pigeon races. Eventually, the film ends by depicting that the protagonist as the better person than the government cop. The values that are portrayed in the movie create a dilemma among the spectators. The research is a descriptive type of study where the film will be analyzed

through the lens of moral values and how it convinces the audience perspective. The research paper attempts to unfold the character depiction, parameters used for convincing and perception as to attribute in convincing the audience. The characters that are involved in the movie, *Maari* and *Mankatha* are promoting moral dilemma through its text, image and sound which is can be interpreted through Psychoanalysis theory by Lacanian.

Jean Mitry approaches cinema as a rich image which isn't real but has access to the traces of reality. Tamil Cinema has occupied third place in terms of infrastructure and production in India (Thoraval 318). According to the Munsterberg, "overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination, and emotion" (Miller and Stam 71)

"Media critics and the film industry share a certain notion on the contemporary as an incomprehensible space, a wild zone where violence is a routine and everyday experience." (Mazumdar 29). This violence has been attributed to political culture, cultural values, and identity in the era of globalization. The both films have two gangs and they rival against each other. Both *Maari* and *Mankatha* have a rift between reason and feelings, they are comical but the cognitive aspects terribly fail in the film. Thrashing the pigeon is given as a justification for the rage of Maari(goon) against Pandi(goon) which doesn't stand strong as a valid reason; it gets relocated from the reality.

The psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the relationship of the spectator with the film text (Pribram 149) Lacanian psychoanalysis will help in understanding the point of view narrative in the story. Both the films are narrated in the perspective of the so-called 'protagonist'. *The Cinemas of South India* defines a Protagonist as "in possession of certain characteristics and who is also coerced to perform certain actions traditionally in accordance with hero-ness" (Dechamma 96).

Most often the protagonist's purposes will be moral according to prevail ethical norms. However, in a large number of standard cases where this does not hold, the protagonist's possession of saliently presented virtues will project the moral valuations of the films. Virtues are the basic means of establishing the moral sympathies of the films (Carroll 105).

The Lacanian Psychoanalysis can be used to interpret the connection drawn between the spectator and visual text in *Maari* and *Mankatha*. The violent zone can be interpreted through space, zone, and daily experience. The role of protagonist and the character can be analyzed through the formulated characteristics by Dechamma and Carroll. The protagonists are usually driven by virtuous deeds but these contemporary films go against the predicted norms. This notion of understanding or relating the protagonist with the moral or ethical values can be applied in understanding the contemporary evolution in the films in Tamil. These contemporary films when compared to the films of mid-twentieth century are having the evolution in the leading characters.

Mankatha, is narrated from Vinayak's point of view, so he attempts to be dominant. He calls himself as the protagonist "Its hero entry...The King...The Mega"(*Mankatha*), this statement is the marker of the heroic component in the plot. The heroic and moral values are represented as Kamal Ekambaram, he serves well for the welfare in the case but he is portrayed as ado. Vinayak is suspended assistant commissioner of police and Kamal Ekambaram is a special police officer to inspect the act of bribery. A film attains its complete meaning through the signs and symbol; they operate differently but give effectiveness for the film. Metz's *Film Language* has directly addressed the 'structural' issues that embody the film and conveys depth meaning than the comprehensive epistemology (qtd. in Kickasola, 460-461). The characters in *Maari*, has given few epithet names which symbolizes the character itself. Robo Shankar and Vinoth have played as supporting characters in the movie *Maari*, they are by worded as 'Sanikizhamai' and 'Adithangi', according to the belief, a person who brings bad luck is known as 'Sanikizhamai' and a person who can withstand the assaults is named as 'Adithangi'. These humorous names introduce the characters in the plot. The article "Cinematic Sense of Place as a Window to Politics of Dominant Ideology,

Materialism and Morality in Tamil Cinema: A Case Study of the film 'Madras'” emphasis on the fact of violence and morality that are existing in the twentieth-century films, taking 'Madras' into consideration. *Mankatha* deals with mimesis than diegesis, the filmic narrative is a mixture of mimesis and diegesis, mimesis being the larger proportion, i.e., unlike the literary narrative, it mostly “shows” through images, as the main narrative components, rather than “telling” (Ghaffary, and Nojournian 278). The symbols and signs can be analyzed through images in the films.

In *Maari*, the pigeon can be interpreted as a symbol of peace, but the entire film revolves around violence. Two contradictory symbols were placed in a scene where the pigeon nest is set on fire which creates a rage among Maari and his sidekicks. 'Fire' can be interpreted as a symbol of violence where else 'pigeon', as a sign of peace. Maari, prefers the path of violence for power and respect but he has also used the mode to attain his desire. These activities can be interpreted as criminal activity. When the cops arrest Maari and push him into the police jeep, he wears coolers. The coolers are a representation of great decent deed that has been resulted from his past. In *Mankatha*, diverse international currencies like Polish Zloty, Dirham, Italian lire, and many more currency images are shown in the initial scene which is incorporated with the suicide case of a cop, he is Kamal Ekambaram. The international currency represents that the movie revolves around the looting, gambling, hacking and betting. The cop, reporters informs the audience about the suicide case but that signs and symbols play the vital role than dialogues. The chessboard is depicted as the game of rich men; Similarly, Vinayak represents the position to his sidekicks to the pieces on the board. He envisions few sequences as to cheat and kills them. The chess pieces are being dashed down in respect to his visualization. He represents himself as 'king' in the chess piece and the others as soldiers and he strikes them down and emerges as the ruler, as in the whole plot or narrative.

Casetti has demonstrated about the potential point of view that is usually used in the narrative films. “*The objectively unreal configuration*”, which means the omnipotence of an outrageous character, is showcased through the Wellesian low-angle shot. In *Mankatha*, while introducing the leading character, Vinayak Mahadev, whose introduction scene as a cop begins with his car being parked and the camera angle slides from his toe to head is being produced by the Wellesian short angle. The low angle shot initially covers the police car and then Vinayak steps out where the attention is given to his boots and slowly drives above. It helps in projecting the character as a super-hero, who has the ability to fight against the antagonist.

Scott Trow mentions in 'What's wrong with bribery?' that bribery as deeply immoral and unlawful. In the plot of *Maari*, the cop and the rowdy bribes people which is an immoral and unlawful in any system. The localities support Maari after facing the troubles from Arjun (a cop) and Ravi (rowdy). Maari indulges himself in the act of bribery, murder, teasing and torments the public which violates moral well-being of the vicinity. Arjun arrests Maari and Velu in jail and he pairs with Ravi (a rowdy) to collect bribe from people. The localities trust Arjun because of his good deeds but the real self is revealed as the frame progress. He confesses in a scene by saying that “Naan kadathalvellaikuthankutituponain, naanum Ravium seirthuthanninthavellaiyasenjaturukom. Athai sollikuputu irunindha, vellaiku vanthiruka matinkala (Yes, I called them for kidnapping red woods. Ravi and I are indulged in this activity. If I had attempted to call you by enquiring the real situation, you would not have turned up)” (*Maari*). Arjun bring in the sidekicks of Ravi and ill-treats the vicinity, regarding bribery. This statement is uttered by Arjun to Maari, “Why did you refused to pay the bribe amount, when they asked for?” The rowdy and the cop are combating with each other for bribery in the community. Mostly, movies in 20th Century have a protagonist, in representing of good deeds and good qualities and the antagonist of bad manners. But now days, the films are focusing on the winning of hero, the means to attain the respective goals are indifferent. This movie serves as a great example for the transformation in the Tamil film industry. The two characters fight with each other in establishing their power over the community in terms of bribing.

Maari takes pride in murdering Pandi, this can be perceived prominently while his narrating about

the flashback to Sridevi. Maari articulates these dialogues, “Pandi..Pandinu oruthan erunthan, weight party avana yarum thodamudiyathu. Naan avanaorunalsorukituvanthen. Anaa avaansakala, athanalaathukolaiaakathu, athukaparoomovanorendunallkaparom poi potutan. Anna massmatumnamakuaietuchu. (Pandi, is a rowdy and people dared not to disturb him but one day I went and slayed him. He didn't die because of me. So, it can't be considered as murder. Somebody murdered him after two days but the reward was given to me”) (*Maari*). These flashbacks is an incident of him establishing his power over the community.

“Aavan vazharthapuravamazhakaivachanga (Maari killed him because he murdered a pigeon)”, (*Maari*) says Sanikizhamai. This may be considered as per the plot but that does not hold valid before the life of an individual. The story is narrated from the perspective of Maari, and it is also backed up with many incidents from his past. These flashbacks tries to convince the audience for slaying Pandi as a righteous act. In *Mankatha*, “pathumanikuaparamsarakukooduthalum seal vaipankiringkoodukalanaum seal vaipangiring, Neenga nazhlavarakettavara (After 10:00 P.M, you are corrupting the wine shop in both the cases even it's locked or unlocked. What can I consider as your identity? Good or bad)” (*Mankatha*), this statement is been said by a wine shop seller to Vinayak and Prem. The shop keeper can be set as an example depicting the common man. He is confused about the true identity of the cop, it's because of his established behaviour. Violation of traffic rules can be considered in many scenes, racing the car in high speed and riding in the opposite direction in one-way lane. The looting gang involves five members and among them there are two police men, which is led by Vinayak. Vinayak has failed to perform his duty as a cop, which creates confusion among his co-characters and audience. The policemen in the film dictate the other characters in executing the plan of looting and gambling, they have failed to execute the duty as a cop.

In the film, *Maari* the heroine Sridevi may have appeared in few scenes but she is the driver of the plot. She installs a boutique in a place where Maari is the authoritative. Maari and his sidekicks disturb her often by torturing the costumers and compelling her to for partnership. She complains to the cops and ends up spying Maari, she plays as a witness for putting Maari behind bars but towards the end she stands in favor of Maari. Sridevi stays confused when she knows the real self of Arjun and she utters, “Neenga nazhlavarununinachu than help pannai. Anna, neegaevangapechakeetutupaipadipanninga. (I thought you are morally good, but you are misbehaving by supporting Ravi and his troops)”, (*Maari*) this change in character helps in understanding the nature of Maari and duty of policemen. She apologizes to Maari by uttering that “Naan sorry solla than vandhan, yen sidezhaiyumoruniyayameruku. Naan nalzhathuseirathanenachupannan. Anna nan thampanavana support panranutheriyamapochu (I am here to apologize...I too justice in my side, I thought that I was assisting something good but I was unaware that I am helping the corrupt person)” (*Maari*). Sridevi represents the feeling and emotions of the entire community and the change in their mindset. There is also few instance of people celebrating the arrest of Maari, People enjoy Maari arrest by bursting crackers but the same folks come back to him once he gets released. “Enga Maari kitanaangapesavanthirukom, nee illathanerathula nanga roombakastapattom (I am here to have a talk with our Maari, we suffered a lot when you were in prison, the cop is a trust breaker)” (*Maari*) says a middle-aged man. This statement is powerful statement since it reveals the people's change in attitude. Towards the end of the film, on the day of Diwali celebration, the localities submit Maari's bribing money to him instead of giving it to Ravi's gang. This can be considered as weighing two bad people and picking the less dangerous one. In *Mankatha*, Arumuga Chettiyar articulates “Yethukuna voongalukukassukodukuran, ride namunnadeyasollamathingala” (Why do you think I am bribing you people?, won't you tell us in beforehand if there is a ride) (*Mankatha*). Arumuga Chettiyar is willing to settle any amount to run his business smoothly. In one case, the characters suffer because of bribing and in other one of the lead character is willing to bribe them at any cost, in relation to their disturbance of his activities.

In *Mankatha*, Pritiviraj, Assistant Commissioner of police, as a righteous deed of a cop, he traces

the illegal money and submits them to the department. His introduction scene is portrayed as him arresting eight bookies involved in the betting, he gives assurance to the people about the possibility of seizing the power of bookies. While discussing the Mumbai gambling case he utters, "Let's make our country proud", (*Mankatha*) which is a contradictory statement. Such dialogue makes the audience believe of his good nature. He serves as the backbone of the story even though he plays the minor role.

In *Maari*, Velu says towards the end of the movie that, "Revenue department la nammaalzhapotachu, enna, ennakupaaiyapadi power vara poguthu (we have appointed our people as officials in the revenue department so; in future we won't come across any problem)" (*Maari*) This dialogue evidently reveals the mindset of a rowdy, which means the illegal activities, can be peacefully carried out. Velu does sandalwood business in an unlawful way and he also develops enmity with people. Even though *Maari*, helps in arresting Arjun he does it for his own benefit. After arresting the cop he takes authority over the community, he again begins to collect bribe and tortures people. It clearly indicates that they are uncontrollable and the concept of evil winning over virtue. In *Mankatha*, after all, twist and turns in the film, it ends with one winner and as predicted it's the protagonist. He runs away to the abroad country with illegal money where he is being encountered by Praveen Kumar. He is being mocked as 'James Bond' by Pritiviraj. Even though he has devoted himself he is being mocked towards the end of the movie. "Game Over," says Vinayak, which means the game has been started by him and he is ending it as he wished. Both the films have the final sequence in the movies promotes the evil winning over virtue.

Richard Dyer has said that the appearance, speech, gestures, costume, make-up, hairstyle, posture and actions of actors construct the meaning to the film. In terms of speech, "What is it from, how it is said" (Hill and Gibson 32). The protagonist in the film "Maari", has a unique gesture, speech tone, and costumes which were followed by his fan followers for a longer time. The protagonist of a film is expected to act certain deeds and actions from the spectators. *Maari* uses "Senjiruvan", six times in the movie which means 'to harm or threaten someone physically'. The spectators imitated his dialogues, actions and costumes after watching the movie. During an interview by *FullyFillmy*, Balaji Mohan (Director of *Maari*) answers about the influence of *Maari*, as it has created a pop culture, some films with the potential character has the ability to create a rebel among people. He articulates in terms of the influence that it has created among the audience. The success of *Maari* was estimated by the response by the people and the replication of the dialogues and costume.

The cognitive and social psychology indicates that the visual images are emotionally interesting and imagery-provoking. This may incline the viewers to apply the disposed ideology in real cases (Caarrol 285). Prem establishes his talent by hacking the website of the bank, he also hacks the traffic signals to control the signal for his sophistication. These activities can be termed under cyber crime. The looters exchange the container "Sanjana Charitable Trust" with other by having traffic signals under control through cyber activities. The mission is getting completed as they wished and the 500 crore amount is shifted to a godown. These scenes of success by attempting cybercrime can also enhance the perspective of the spectators. Vinayak is a trust-breaker, he traps Sanjana, Arumuga chettiyar, Faizal, Ganesh, Mahat, Sona and Sumanth. Trust is intertwined and it is the vicious circle where people cheat each other for money and are being killed except Vinayak and Prithiviraj. The plight of Sona, Sumath, and Mahat clearly reveals the role of backstabbing in the plot. Pritiviraj cheats his colleague Kamal, who is a devoted policeman, he uses him accordingly to conceal his secrets.

"Cinematic diegesis is an aquarium with one-way transparent glass"(Metz, 1982:92). The spectator always invades the personal space of the character because he can see the true self and can connect himself with the character. In 'Mankatha', Vinayak's master plans mostly revolve in the isolation, the scenes of his involvement and his solitude goes hand in hand. They are accompanied by the background music which involves his daily activities, with an exaggeration of numerable Vinayak. The cinema is guiding the spectators to what to think about and how to think about it. The film *Mankatha* has used the

personal space of the protagonist to drive the listeners to the propaganda of the hero where else *Maari* has involved the emotive response from a character to indulge the spectators to the perspective of the protagonist.

Lacanian Psychoanalytic film theory has comprehended the relationship between the spectator and to the film, "...the complex, the myriad mechanism by which the relationship of the spectator to screen links the human psyche, particularly the unconscious, to the film text" (Miller and Stam 149). Emotional scenes try to convince that *Maari* as a person of good attributes by accompanying 'Kavitha', a school student. She cries and says him that "School staff nee than en school fee ketetuerukanusonnaga... Unna andha police karanyemmathitaana jail la potana... orunaal un kailamatuval la (the school teacher told that you were paid off my school fees... Is the policemen cheated you and kept you behind bars... But one day he will endure for it)" (*Maari*). The emotion of a child is captured to convince the audience. Alcohol addiction and smoking habits are shown as a sign of decency and pride in both the films. In *Mankatha*, Vinayak promotes drink and driving, these components works in unconscious level of the listener. Rash driving and driving in the opposite direction in one way is also some of the elements that are embedded in the film. Sumanth, he serves as a sidekick for Chettiyar and Vinayak, he helps in doing unethical business for both but when he attempts for a change as a moral person. He is being killed by the cops themselves. This depicts the change in moral value is being rejected by the society.

The article, "Music, Song, Lyrics, Philosophy and Human Values: Exploring Poet Kannadasan's Contributions to the Tamil Community Worldwide", puts forth the twentieth-century philosophical lyrics which propagates human values and the evidence are brought in from 'Aandavan Kattalai'. The researcher concludes that songs play a vital role in influencing the public, educating and eliciting them (Muniapan, 2). The lyrical aspects link the film text and reveal the nature of the characters, usually, the lyrics are part and parcel of the films. In *Mankatha*, Vinayak is renamed as "Binladen", which attributes to his character. "Vilaiyaadu Mankaathaa", phrases dominant in the introductory song, which literally means 'Play Gambling'. In *Maari*, *Maari* is overemphasized as "Maari, the great!" These lyrics of films in twenty-first century doesn't contain human values as it has been said. In *R-rated Movie viewing, Growth in Sensation Seeking and Alcohol Initiation: Reciprocal and Moderation Effects*, establishes that effects of media in adolescent behaviour, the existing relation between the movie exposure and alcohol consumption. These short-terms behaviour leads to long-term sensation seeking habit, and it also affects the personality of the teenagers. This article has evaluated the behavioural change in an individual and it hasn't researched upon the potential mediators in this process. The research has extended on the mediators that are an integral part in estimating this ideology.

The article by Martinson contradicts the idea of media's influence on people. The article, "Does Movie Violence Increase Violent Crime?" denies the idea that the replication of visuals has an effect on daily human life. The result of the research suggests that the exposure to violent movies has reduced the crime during the evening and night hours. The article has bounded its research only in terms of violent behaviours. The film *Maari* can be extended in interpreting it in terms of ethnicity, identity, social, cultural, political and traditional practices. The films like *Deena* and *Soodhu kavvum* can also be examined in terms of morality and ethical values. Those are the films of the twentieth century which promotes similar ideas by narrating from the perspective of the protagonist. The factors are determined by the text, image and sound of the movie and they create a dilemma in the mind of the audience about the righteous and vitreous act in reality. The experiences create a screen-spectator relationship, the spectators are carried away by the portrayals in the film and they consider the visuals as reality, hairline difference is been discussed in the research in relation to the immoral deeds. Apart from the short-term effects of media on people it also has the ability to influence the belief, attitude, linguistic factor, and social system of the people on the long-term basis.

Filmography

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