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## Spectacle spaces: Production of caste in recent Tamil films

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This paper analyses contemporary, popular Tamil films set in Madurai with respect to space and caste. These films actualize region as a cinematic imaginary through its authenticity markers – caste/ist practices explicitly, which earlier films constructed as a ‘trope’. The paper uses the concept of *Heterotopias* to analyse the recurrence of spectacle spaces in the construction of Madurai, and the production of caste in contemporary films. In this pursuit, it interrogates the implications of such spatial discourses.

### Spectacle spaces: Production of caste in recent Tamil films

To foreground the study of caste in Tamil films and to link it with the rise of ‘caste-gestapo’ networks that execute honour killings and murders as a reaction to ‘inter-caste love dramas’ in Tamil Nadu,<sup>1</sup> let me narrate a political incident that occurred in Tamil Nadu – that of the formation of a socio-political movement against Dalit assertion in December 2012. In bringing together groups belonging to the intermediate castes and repeatedly referring to themselves as ‘non-Dalit’ organizations, the attempt hit out at sections of Schedule Castes and demanded dilution of the law aimed at curbing anti-Dalit atrocities. Dalit youth were accused of fomenting social tension as they ensnared girls of other communities with their bogus proclamations of love. ‘They wear jeans, T-shirts and fancy sunglasses to lure girls from other communities’ was the phrase of contempt. This was organized immediately after the Dharmapuri caste violence against the Dalits in November.<sup>2</sup> Later, a front under the banner, ‘All Community Federation’ was started by intermediate-caste based parties to criticize the Dravidian parties for their role in the survival of casteism,<sup>3</sup> apparently, the front which claims to represent ‘all communities’, has also been running a campaign against inter-caste marriages and seeking amendments to SC/ST prevention of atrocities act. (Hugo Gorrington and D. Karthikayan “A new churning in the caste cauldron”)

In this context can films, as socio-historical material, be sought to study and critique caste? Does cinema as a category offer ways to understand and study this violent divergence? Can spatial signifiers of difference offer ways to understand and study the spatial discourse of caste? This paper seeks to critically study, a component of popular contemporary Tamil cinema, especially foregrounding the films – *Kadhal*, *Veyil*, *Paruthiveeran* and *Subramaniapuram*<sup>4</sup> – produced between the years 2004 and 2008, which represent Madurai as a cinematic space to link, understand, and unpack the spectacular spatial production of caste in order to make sense of the reality that sustain it. These films received an unprecedented popularity amongst the cine-going publics and they were celebrated as ‘new wave’ as they are directed by new directors with new faces. The low

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budget productions<sup>5</sup> achieved a cult status. This phenomenon, in the industry, is also called as the success of the ‘new Madurai genre’ (Hariharan 2).

### **The Madurai genre**

Madurai is the third largest city in Tamil Nadu and one of its oldest. In the screen history of Tamil cinema, Madurai has played an important yet changing role as a narrative space.<sup>6</sup> Popular films, bearing caste names and content,<sup>7</sup> increasingly construct a cinematic imaginary of southern Tamil Nadu as ‘a distinct entity submerged in pre-modern violence, caste bigotry and anarchy’ (Krishnan “Imaginary Geographies” 140). These representations of a particular spatial setting raise criticism, and indicate the investment of ‘spatial othering’ in Tamil cinema. Three interlinked aspects seem to differentiate the portrayal of the South in Tamil cinema: colonial British government’s relationship with the south, 1990s caste clashes, and a certain ‘exteriorization’ and ‘exoticization’ that locates Chennai as its ‘enunciatory location’.<sup>8</sup> The accompanying violence portrayed in these films seem to have its origins in the colonial era, as cultural anthropologist Krishnan has observed.<sup>9</sup>

Drawing from Krishnan’s proposal of the ‘exteriorization/exoticization’ of the south in Tamil cinema, I should clarify that many films do not present Chennai as a civic ‘other’ to the non-modern Madurai ‘on screen’. There are, in fact, several contemporary Tamil films<sup>10</sup> that deal with exteriorization of the slum within an urban space such as Chennai. They implicate the unintended criminal excess of the city and problematize its sophisticated, ‘modern’, ‘civic’ portrait. The films deal with goondaism, rowdyism, dons and mafia-dom in what could be called as criminalization of the modern city. Hence, Chennai as a ‘modern, enunciatory location’ in Tamil cinema is not an essential entity.

Hence, I take a point of departure and intervene to reflect on the re-presentation of Madurai as a spatial construct, in Madurai films, that have repercussions for the production of caste. A repetition of spaces as an actual type is signified in the films which I call the recurrence of spectacle spaces. I would like to draw from the ‘exteriorization/exoticization’ of the ‘rustic’ in Madurai to discuss the narrative space in the ‘new Madurai genre’.<sup>11</sup> The ‘trope’, that emerged in earlier films, feeds into these films, so much so that the cinematic apparatus appears to construct a non-contemporaneous present on screen. The films seem to embody a marginal actuality which is not coeval to the secular-modern realities that the Indian State professes to practise. In want of a better term, I demarcate the selected films as belonging to the ‘Third Wave’, since Tamil cinema can be categorized into three waves. Perhaps a brief account of the three Tamil waves may instruct us to understand this phenomenon explicitly.

### **The First and Second Waves**

I refer to Dravidian/political cinema as the First Wave, where political address, spectator identification, star/fandom, linguistic re-organization at a historical juncture necessitated a new way to understand and conceptualize Tamil cinema. The First Wave directly contests Indian cinema that ideologically constructed a ‘national’ audience. These films<sup>12</sup> thematically represented the question of caste and language in order to engender a radically different version of the post-colonial nation.

These cinematic narratives critiqued the caste-based, religiously driven, capitalist imperative that informed the postcolonial ‘Nehruistic’ construction of the larger Indian nation.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, these films ideologically projected a glorified Dravidian cultural

heritage. The centrality of the medium to the political culture of Tamil Nadu, particularly the way in which cinema was used to champion 'the Dravidian movement for non-Brahmin uplift in South India' has been documented by a number of scholars.<sup>14</sup> These projections and mobilization of a Tamil ethno-nationalism on the celluloid screen functioned to contest the dominant narratives of the Indian nation.

Importantly, recoding the status of the Tamil language and its relocation as central to the formation of a Tamil-nation was foundational. Many scholars assert that it became the mainstay of the ideological thrust of Tamil cinema. For example, the film *Parasakti* (Goddess, 1952) drew upon Dravidian culture and politicized it by reiterating the splendor of Dravidian heritage. It thematically depicted the triumph of rationalism over religiosity, anti-priesthood and self-respect.<sup>15</sup> Social Scientist Pandian analyzes and places the film in the Dravidian movement's history in order to understand the political tendency it ideologically represented, and register the socio-political forces which historically opposed the film.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the centrality of the figure of M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) to the production and dissemination of a specific form of Tamil nationalism was articulated through the DMK and later, the AIADMK.<sup>17</sup> Many films<sup>18</sup> reproduced a stereotypical image of a philanthropic, everyday hero which was made popular. The star status of MGR made him enter politics in 1953 and he was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu between the years 1977 to 1986. Pandian's foundational attempt at using Tamil feature films as historical source material, studies the construction of the immensely popular cinematic image of MGR. Pandian states that cinema was used as a means of political communication that skillfully transferred MGR's cinematic image to the domain of politics and invested it with a certain life-like authenticity.<sup>19</sup> Hence, it can be argued that the power wielded through the star status of MGR testifies to the way in which the manufacture and interpellation of an ethno-nationalism confronts the nation-state's subscription to a unified Indian nationalism through the instrument of cinema.

Following in the footsteps of the MGR star figure, the Rajinikanth-persona (aka Rajini) introduced the figure of a forceful, menacing, macho anti-hero which excelled in glamorizing and humanizing the lumpen proletariat roles.<sup>20</sup> The multiple levels of signification that encode the Rajini-persona closely adhered to the definitions of appropriate Tamil masculinity accordingly.<sup>21</sup> The Rajini-persona embodied a subaltern Tamil masculine type that became a symbol of rebellion. The subversive charisma of the Rajini-persona was particularly popular amongst the thousands of economically disenfranchised youths. This accounts for how the male fans from the subaltern classes and lower castes in Tamil Nadu related with the representational characters played by Rajini.<sup>22</sup> This identification that demarcates the hero as an everyman or a man from the masses also effectively contributed to the idealization and subsequent idolization of the persona.<sup>23</sup>

However, scholars observe a shift in the relationship between Tamil cinema and Bombay cinema in the 1990s with the emergence of director Mani Ratnam. Devadas and Velayutham argue Ratnam's works<sup>24</sup> addressed the aesthetic differences that marked Tamil cinema which aligned its stylistic form closer with Hindi cinema. It is observed that Ratnam's films depict elite (if not Brahmin-coded characters), urbane, cosmopolitan professionals as characters 'who had thrown themselves into situations of patriotic endeavor', in Kashmir and Bombay. Mani Ratnam's films negotiate a new position for the 'Tamilian' vis-à-vis the Indian nation-state as an entity reconfigured on to the global arena: audiences, in his films, are invited to identify with 'the urbane, English-speaking, cosmopolitan protagonist'.<sup>25</sup> (Niranjana 79–81)

Director S. Shankar intervened to begin a process of a generic evolution and recoding in his films.<sup>26</sup> He, perhaps, appropriated the discursive and stylistic techniques that entered the industry in ‘the aftermath of liberalization, globalization and the proliferation of MTV through cable’. A fusion of extravagant music videos, digital graphics and spectacular fight scenes along with a ‘serious political address’ marked his mega-budget blockbusters (Maderya “Rage against the state” 6). Shankar’s films present a luminal, ruptured character image as the new hero who interrogates modernity, the citizen-subject, caste and corruption in ‘modern’ India (Jananie 2009 90–91).<sup>27</sup>

These films, in a highly globalized context, were seen to work as a conduit between Tamilness and new trans-regional national elite at par with its global counterparts. It is apparent because the post-1990s witnessed a lot of exchanges between the linguistic cinema markets. A lot of Tamil directors/artists entered the Bollywood terrain. Unlike the centrifugal forces that characterized the politics of Tamil nationalism in the earlier cinema, the post-1990s Tamil cinema<sup>28</sup> was characterized by a centripetal tendency that consolidated the nation beyond and across the ethno-communal divide to build a common ‘national’ audience.<sup>29</sup> At the same time Tamil cinema was conceived as an ambiguous continuation that straddles between the issues of maintaining a sense of ‘Tamilness’ and a belonging to the ‘Indian’ nation.

### The Third Wave

In this context, something ‘unprecedented’ happened in Tamil cinema at the beginning of 2005 that offer new ways to understand contemporary Tamil cinema.<sup>30</sup> Rajan Krishnan observes from 2004 onwards there is a steady but sure failure of hero-centric mega budget films. He terms this trend as the death of the ‘type-hero film’.<sup>31</sup> Films such as *Kadhal* (Love, dir. Balaji Sakthivel, 2004), *Veyil* (Torrid Sun, dir. Vasantha Balan, 2006), *Paruthiveeran* (Valiant hero of Paruthi, dir. Ameer Sultan, 2007) and *Subramaniapuram* (dir. Sasikumar, 2008) indicate an explicit ‘new wave’<sup>32</sup> trend in contemporary Tamil cinema. They are award winning, ‘alternative’ as well as ‘popular’ productions. They are low budget films which achieved massive success.<sup>33</sup> This trend could be seen as an extension of the ‘nativity films’ of the late 1970s, where rural contextualization was treated as an ‘ideological investment centered on the rurality of its plot-events and roles’ (Kaali 168–69). This phenomenon signifies an acquiescence between ‘the commercial melodramatic genre and the realistic, art genre’ (Sebastian “Beyond Old Kollywood”). In fact, directors Bala,<sup>34</sup> Cheran<sup>35</sup> and Thangar Bachan<sup>36</sup> made films that portrayed rustic and marginal lives; as well as relatively ‘alternative and realistic’ depictions from the late 1990s. I would call this trend a third wave that offers new ways to understand contemporary Tamil cinema.

The heroic-subjects in the contemporary third wave films are different representations though they are extensions of the ‘neo-native’ rustic hero. They offer diverse identifications to the audience. They are not, as scholars have argued, citizen spectator identifications. They are neither like the anti-caste/non-Brahmin Tamil hero nor like the *Roja*’s urbane hero – true Indian citizen. They are a critique of these dominant wave heroes. They signify a Third Wave where the heroic subjects, like the neo-nativity heroes, are dysfunctional ‘non-heroic’ representations but they raise ingenious spectatorial address. They are different since the tragic portrayals symbolize a site of fragmentation of the homogenized citizen-subject identity (that went into construction) which is intercepted by markers of caste and criminality. Murugan (*Kadhal*), Murugesan (*Veyil*), Veera and Sevvazhai (*Paruthiveeran*), Azhagar and Parama (*Subramaniapuram*) are exemplary characters. They are represented as dangerous and deviant.

As the Third Wave signifies the recurrence of Rowdie-sheeters and ‘lower’ caste subjects as protagonists in Madurai space; they articulate and reiterate the intimate bond between region (Madurai), caste, violence, and masculinity. They raise different kinds of questions and contestations on the theoretical categories such as spectator-subject, secular-modern identity, the heroic subject, and ‘Tamil’ identity in Tamil cinema. The recurrence of conscripted heroes and the excess of casteist articulations within Madurai as a narrative space raise different questions to Indian cinema in general and Tamil cinema in particular. The film narratives, in fact, contest the construction of the homogenous ‘ethno-specific’ Tamil state/nation. If Dravidian cinema interrupted the ‘national’ cinema’s project of discursively constructing a sense of a national people through cinema; the third wave offers a different version of the ‘ethno-specific’ Tamil country.

In fact, spectacle spaces seem to mark the cinematic Madurai as an ‘other space’. I refer, particularly, to the *Oor/Kovil Thiruvizha* (Village/Temple Festival) and the cinema theatre as spectacle spaces which are represented differently from earlier films.<sup>37</sup> The village festival and cinema theatre as spectacle spaces in these films construct an anthropological gaze, where the camera participates in packaging a performative folk culture, which alienates and ruptures the homogenous, spectatorial identification that the first and second wave cinema laboriously constituted. By using the concept of heterotopia, I wish to understand how this phenomenon links with the spatial production of caste.

### Spectacle heterotopias

For instance, the village festival site is a spectacle. It is an occasion where the village collective is present in one space and time. In fact the fest is a cacophony of multiple presences. They are spaces which are linked to time in its most flowing, transitory and precarious aspect – there is no one particular place in a fest. They are unlike ‘modern’ spaces such as museums and libraries which enclose in one immobile place an accumulation of time for ever.

The village collective witnesses the exhibition of various folk cultures in a village fest. Represented by a mixture of folk songs and dances; the fest stands as a spectacle site. The folk songs ‘*Vaaroora voyarae*’ (*Paruthiveeran*) and ‘*Madurey, Kulunga Kulunga*’ (*Subramaniapuram*) portray an anthropological documentation of folk culture to the audience. The films participate in the ‘museumization’ and packaging of an ‘exotic’ culture in an ‘exterior’ space, thereby constructing Madurai.

The spectacle space signify the co-existence of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ at a given time in the same place. It offers an anonymous moment of deviation/danger – a murder attempt or violence. For instance, in *Paruthiveeran*’s opening scenes, the milieu is established through the panning shots of the village festival. *Paruthiyur* festival is marked by its prominent religious symbol: the temple and its immediate external which is signified by activities like gambling, folk performances, drinking, fights and violence. Outside the temple, amongst the villagers, a battery of policemen control, inspect and verify the crowd. The presence of the state machinery is an attempt to shield the sacred space – while, on the other hand, the village chieftain Kazhuvathevan simultaneously monitors the sacred space and the external. For instance, he stands near the temple’s deity during the *Kovil Thiruvizha*. Offerings go to the deity through him. He also scrutinizes the folk dances and the festive spectacle. Both become agencies of surveillance. One is privileged by the institutional marker, the police uniform; the other is signified by the cultural/spatial marker, the caste. Their presence mark, monitor and scrutinize the sacred and its external.

The fest illustrates the village collective as not a homogenous, bound entity. Fissures infest the village collective as violence is masked and anonymous in the spectacle space. For instance, the ‘profane’ henchmen of *Subramaniapuram*, in anonymity, direct their vengeance on the committee chairman, on the celebratory night for his ‘noble’ hypocrisy. The anonymity of violence in the village fest makes it insecure – surely to individuals like *Gusti* Vaathiyar and Mokkaismy. In fact the police officer, at *Paruthiyur* village, reasons that a huge police force was necessary at the village fest because the occasion is vulnerable to violence.

Perhaps, the village fest as a spectacle space is anonymous as well as masked. For instance, the mysterious presence of transvestites who perform folk songs and dance at the fest irks Kazhuvathevan in *Paruthiveeran*. The authority to permit their mysterious presence is shrouded by his dominant caste marker within the spectacle space. The fest is an excellent example to understand that though the village stands as a collective the fissures and differences constitute it; especially when dangerous, profane individuals populate Paruthiyur and Subramaniapuram. The caste excess and the intermittent violence that is associated with it mark the festival within the rustic as an ‘Other space’.

Cinema theatre is another spectacle space that recurs in these films. The cinema screen is capable of juxtaposing in one real place several different spaces. *Veyil* and *Subramaniapuram* project films within a film. Hence, the spectator is made conscious of his/her identification with the film. They depict scenes that portray fan culture and performative cine publics within/around the cinema theatre. The films capture the cinema theatre as containing bodies that are performative and which form a collective. For instance, in *Veyil*, Rajini Kanth’s fans as a collective turn hostile towards Murugesan and Thangam. As a collective, their excessive demonstration<sup>38</sup> disturbs the couple’s private-romantic affair. The performative fandom disrupts their personal space. Moreover, similar to the village fest, the fanfare at the cinema theatre is prone to fissures and disruption. For instance, the henchmen in *Subramaniapuram* pick a bloody fight at the cinema theatre. The cinema theatre is prone to group clashes. It is never a homogenous fan-collective.

However, the spectacle spaces also constitute a ‘double bind’. Apart from being prone to fissures and violent disruption, they also act as sites of economic sustenance and anonymous security.. For instance, Murugan and Aishwarya spend a night at a cinema theatre in Chennai, when they find no place for a safe accommodation. The *Kannappa Cinema Theatre* is an alternate home to *Veyil* Murugesan. He works as a projectionist there. The village fest is a source of economy to Douglas in Paruthiyur as he runs various hawking businesses. The group clash at the Subramaniapuram festival is primarily over an economic deal.

The spectacle spaces, in fact, recur as, what Foucault would call heterotopias<sup>39</sup> that mark these films. They provide meaning as an ‘Other space’ as they contain the expressive bodies of subaltern/‘lower’ caste and rowdies within the spectacle spaces. They are spaces that signify ‘decentralized despotism’. The films imply that the familial space ought to be ‘barricaded’ from the dangerous/deviant individuals who comprise the caste and criminal spaces.

However, though these films destabilize dominant spectatorial address, their tragic ends attempt a shift towards the security of the familial space. Their erasures seem to recover the lost familial space back to the ‘modern’ Indian State. Though the films dislocate the domestic familial space – for instance, the helpless, ‘lower’ caste Murugan in *Kadhal*; a displaced, vulnerable Murugesan in *Veyil*; an orphan/criminal/out-caste Veera in *Paruthiveeran* and the careless rowdy-sheets in *Subramaniapuram* – the deaths

relocate the systemic (casteist) structure back in place, thereby reproducing the caste spaces intact. They do not destabilize the caste order within the narrative space. These movies' tragic ends, suggestively, uphold the structure of casteist patriarchy, and, preserve the absolute control and purity of the familial space in the social-imaginary, that it represents. Hence though these films seemingly destabilize caste and criminal spaces by portraying them, they, however, indirectly protect and reproduce them.

For instance, *Veyil*'s opening scenes depict the villain rearing pigs in a pen. This is in contrast to Sivanandy Devar's (Murugesan's father) vocational space. He is a butcher who sells goat meat. Though both spaces depict an occupational association, the cultural connotations they raise are caste-conflict binaries. *Veyil* contains villainy in a culturally 'lower' caste space. This recurs in *Paruthiveeran*. Kazhuvathevan supplies goat meat to hotels, wine shops and festivals. His domestic space is also an occupational space. Whereas, the *Kurathi*'s (the *Kurava* tribe grand-mother of Veera) business is stamped by her outcaste/exterior status. The policemen mark the ascribed identity over her crime. Her domestic space is signified by the presence of pig pen and gambling toddy drinkers. Profanity seems to be contained in her space as a contrast to the caste spaces – *Ooru*.

Kazhuvathevan's business network is depicted as an 'upper' caste network. This is similar to the business and governmental network of Aishwarya's father in *Kadhal*. The actuality of Madurai space appears to be marked by caste identity in these Madurai films. *Paruthiyur* and *Subramaniapuram* as rustic spaces appear to entail caste purity. The fact that the 'profane' subjects are erased violently from/in the narrative, seem to consecrate the rustic space.

For instance, *Kurathi* lives outside *Paruthiyur*. The illicit toddy business happens at the outskirts. *Kadhal* Murugan as an 'other' caste is ideally enclosed in his actual presence at the *Cheri*. His house is coded with an ambedkarite blue. He is thrashed like a stray dog in the outskirts. *Kurathi* is also killed outside the *Ooru*. Veera's parents are also killed in an accident in the outskirts. Veera is beaten to death at the village periphery. Azhagar and Parama are murdered outside *Subramaniapuram*.

These films apparently construct the defying 'profane' subjects to eliminate them and construct the rustic space as a caste 'pure' space.<sup>40</sup> Apparently, these films seem to 'implement *Manu dharma* treatment to the caste defying subjects in these spaces'.<sup>41</sup> (Tha. Chandran) The films protect caste purity by repudiating the mixture of blood between caste defying individuals. The camera acts as a cultural apparatus that profess the security of property through caste marriage alliances. For instance, Murugan and Aishwarya; Murugesan and Thangam; Veera and Muthazhagu; Azhagar and Tulasi: their love affairs are punished horrendously. Their tragic ends are bloody mutilations as they are linked to the articulation of caste norms as an actual culture in the Madurai genre.

The depiction of caste norms, as the actual culture of Madurai, in many recent films has drawn wide criticism.<sup>42</sup> These depictions of Madurai culture seem to be caste characterizations. They, apparently, center on a particular caste culture as cultural capital, which feeds on then to socio-political assertions in the everyday. The cinematic cultural markers such as festival, marriage and conflict, depicted in these films, are conceived as cultural practices of a community imaginary. These films, by using the narrative tropes the earlier films offered, appear to account caste as the actual culture of Madurai. Hence, contemporary films on Madurai protect the caste norms in its representation, as they produce wider political repercussions of caste violence today. This is revealing if one studies critically women's portrayals within the spectacle spaces.



### Contesting heroines

The women protagonists, in these select films, seem to intervene in the casteist patriarchy. Yet, in their individual struggles, they fail to the dominant structures of the social collective, portrayed in these films. The films represent them as failures of an individual woman's aspiration against a casteist patriarchy.<sup>43</sup> The portrayals of strong, expressive women intercede with patriarchy only at moments. For instance, Muthazhagu (Priyamani, in *Paruthiveeran*) expresses her love strongly and is not portrayed submissive. Having been saved by her cousin at a young age, she decides to marry him. She is not at the service of Veera. She addresses him insistently. She questions him adequately about his careless life. She demands what she wants from him. She insists on marital sexual intercourse with him as a virgin. The aggressive episode with her father and mother represent a tenacious 'rustic' heroine, different from the 'upper caste/middle class', Hindu wife *Roja*. The characterizations, though overlapping, are extensions of the neo-nativity heroines. Muthazhagu's character signifies explicitly the problem of an 'upper' caste woman's desire which is caught between casteist patriarchy and impulsive love towards a dangerous rowdy-sheeter outside her caste.

Aishwarya (Sandhya, in *Kadhal*) expresses her interest in Murugan and elopes with him. The casteist forces violently repress her aspiration to live with a 'lowly' man of her choice. The dominant collective responds violently to the subjectivity of Aishwarya. Violence is inherently portrayed as the dominant caste's prerogative on screen. The dominant caste structures suppress the individual aspirations of Aishwarya. She, at the end of the movie, is the only embodiment who signifies the memory of Murugan. She becomes the only agency to revive Murugan back to normalcy. Aishwarya also wields an individual response/responsibility to the problems caused by the dominant casteist structure towards Murugan. Her characterization signifies the efforts of an individual woman against casteist-patriarchy.

Thangam (Priyanka, in *Veyil*) bears the 'burden of virginity' in her body that secures the casteist structures. She is subject to consensual pre-marital sex; however, the movie marks her as a victim of structural violence. This is apparent in her death. She commits suicide at a critical moment. Her death saves Murugesan from the rampant bigotry he is subjected to by the dominant collective. Individual aspirations towards sexual liberty against dominant bigotry are suppressed in the films. The camera erases the aberrations, nevertheless it records them. Muthazhagu's death by rape, Aishwarya's submission and Thangam's suicide signify a significant rupture. Individual women who contest caste and patriarchy are subsequently erased. In fact, the tragedy commences with their erasures.

The portrayals of these women importantly signify anomaly and submission. Aishwarya, Thangam and Muthazhagu exhibit freedom of choice towards selecting a partner outside the caste binaries. However, caste and patriarchal violence suppress their individual aberration along with the suppressed hero. Aishwarya's plea on behalf of Murugan goes unheard. However, when the symbolic knot is untied, Murugan is spared. Caste violence is symbolically expressed. Thangam's suicide and Muthazhagu's murder are symbolic erasures which signify a dogmatic presence of caste bigotry in these films. Their elimination substitutes the presence of intense opposition to aberration as well as insistence on submission towards caste purity. These film narratives attempt to protect the sexual limpidness of the woman constructed by/within casteist patriarchy. Hence, though the women play intervening roles, the film narratives construct them as failed, individual aspirations within the casteist, patriarchal paradigm. The contesting heroines

seem to be erased violently in this tirade against/for caste cultures. The dominant caste women's voice and presence, in their active desire for 'outcaste' men, are mostly erased and invisibilized in these spectacle spaces that produce caste. In fact, the other minor characters intercede and play a critical role, and offer us representations to discursively read the casteist refrains made on the honour of caste women.

### Critical interventions

Pandiamma (Shriya Reddy, in *Veyil*), Stephen (Sukumar, in *Kadhal*), Douglas (*Ganja Karuppu*, in *Paruthiveeran*) and Dumka (*Subramaniapuram*) are critical interventions in these films. Characters such as these could be, perhaps, called 'critical subjects'.<sup>44</sup> They intercede with the casteist patriarchy which works within the secular-modern, social-imaginary. They are not mere comic interludes; their representations dislocate the 'popular' Tamil sidekick.<sup>45</sup> Some even displace the heroic subject in the cinematic narrative. They signify the emergence of the industrious, working-class subject against the dominant, casteist patriarchy. Pandiamma's (*Veyil*) portrayal as a bold, single mother is a lucid contrast to that of Murugesan and Thangam. Her individuality is not bogged down by the reins of 'tradition' - submissive norms, the societal consensus compels. She, as a destitute mother, works in a match-box factory and supports her child. Her relationship with Murugesan is special and one of a kind. She embodies accordance to individual desire and self-respect. She provides a space for peace and care in the village to the deviant Murugesan.

Similarly, Murugan's school friend Stephen (*Kadhal*) critically displaces the popular Tamil sidekick. Stephen's portrayal signifies the emergence of a participant within a seemingly caste-invisible, displaced, working-class collective in the urban space. He works in Chennai city away from his native Madurai which is caste-stricken. He carries out his own business as a street hawker in the city. He dwells in a *mansion*<sup>46</sup> along with a group of displaced working men. He stays as an extra member in their room. The room is symbolic of the diverse, dislocated identities in the urban space. The room hosts men who work, variously, as a service boy at 'Domino's Pizza', a sales representative, and an assistant director in the cinema industry. Each one aspires to gain entry into the urban workforce. Apparently, their forceful depiction as a migrant collective, in the film, suggests that they represent an aspiration to participate in the liberal economic-modern.

For instance, when Stephen comes to Madurai, he is a fragment of the 'modern-economic-urbane' marker; embodied by 'branded' shirts, pants and goggles. His demeanour symbolizes remarkable/marketable differences from Murugan, who is marked by dirt, greased outfits, over-grown nails and unruly hair. The movie depicts a spatial binary on screen: i.e., Chennai as the urban pedestal of 'modern' governance and Madurai as its 'Other space'. Chennai city creates a working-class collective for Stephen unlike mechanic Murugan in Madurai.

Stephen's character exemplifies incessant industriousness in the city, just like Murugan in Madurai. However, his subaltern aspiration towards 'modernity' is continuously mocked at. For instance, the roommates scorn him as his pretensions do not go down well with them. However, his representation signifies a positive approach towards 'modernist' aspirations. The movie interestingly portrays that Stephen, unlike Murugan who is devoid of a working class/caste collective in Madurai, could commune with the migrant collective in Chennai. His subjectivity is mutually constructed and mediated by the urban, displaced, working class, mansion-dwelling men. It is he along with his friends, at the mansion, who help Murugan and Aishwarya. Murugan gets a job as a

mechanic in the city through them. Stephen's character is critical in the cinematic narrative. Though used for a structural comic relief, Stephen also offers a counter to the heroic subject; thereby he deconstructs the popular notion of a sidekick as well.

Douglas (*Paruthiveeran*) signifies a relentless attempt towards economic mobility. Veera and Sevvazhai bully him regularly and shove his vocational ventures towards a crash down. The film narrative constructs him as a sidekick to Veera and Sevvazhai. However, Douglas embodies a drive towards life which is in contrast to Veera. He shifts from one job to another through failures. The movie portrays him working in the temple festival before being caught by the police who accuse him of being an accomplice to the criminals. He works in a tea shop then; Veera and Sevvazhai intimidate him there as well. Later he decides to invest in cattle; Veera and Sevvazhai play spoilsport to this plan too. Then, he joins a folk troupe which is eventually interrupted by them. Lastly, he sells candy floss which is again disrupted by Veera. His mobility from one job to another reflects a relentless effort towards stable economic reliability. He invests in small-scale businesses relentlessly and jumps from one job to another flexibly. This signifies a critical intervention. His characterization implies a critique of the caste bigotry the *Paruthiyur* village symbolizes.

Douglas stands out as a critical subject within the film narrative, who aspires towards mobility and constant change, in contrast to Veera. His fleeting jobs signify the business potential in serving the 'senses' of other people. His aspiration is symbolic of hope against a violent, sadistic environment. At once, Douglas embodies resistance and change. Each of his transitory attempts resists aggressive suppression. However, the movie portrays him as a 'comical' victim to the structural brutality that is inherent in *Paruthiyur*. Though Douglas' aspirations mete out failures, his incessant attempts towards livelihood makes him different from the heroic subjects.

Dumka (*Subramaniapuram*), a portrayal of a physically challenged orphan among a group of henchmen at *Subramaniapuram*, is also a similar representation. Dumka, the movie depicts, is an active member of the rowdiness that Azhagar and Parama practice. However, he is never a part of their sojourn to the prison. His 'dysfunctional' leg is seen by the police as a reason to not arrest him. However, he takes care of Azhagar's mother in his absence. He visits Azhagar and Parama in the jail regularly. He works for his money. He even helps Kasi get bail. The movie ends with Dumka in a regular job. He wears a Khaki shirt. The movie converts his physical 'dysfunctionality' into an opportunity for survival. Though Azhagar, Parama, Kanagu and Kasi – all functionally able-bodied – perish to hatred, revenge and betrayal in the gory drama, Dumka limps to 'functionality' on screen.

Pandamma, Stephen, Douglas and Dumka are alternative portrayals in that they are critical subjects within the film narrative. They critically intervene into the representation of dangerous/deviant figuration of the Madurai hero. They intercede with the construction of the popular sidekick. Their subalternity strongly engages with the dominant casteist patriarchy as well as 'modernity'. They represent the emergence of a working-class subject who is pro-life and pro-livelihood. These characterizations are an extension of the neo-native rustic figurations as well as they are critiques of popular type-heroes. In fact they offer a different vantage point to understand caste and its implications, in the social world, as it is represented in the visual medium. These critical subjects offer hope, in that their subaltern characterizations rupture the caste-infected heroic portrayals.

Hence, the 'alter-native' aspect in the 'new Madurai genre' articulates caste as an 'other' of the Indian modern; at the same time, it protects the casteist norms in their

recurring narratives. This ‘othering’ is so overlapped that murders, honour killings, political caste alliances, and activities are considered normal and general today; so much so they seem to be produced through cinematic cultures, inadvertently. Perhaps it is by reading these films against the grain, against itself, that one finds the currency for resistance and intervention within. *Heterotopias*, as a concept, was used to analyze such recurrence of spectacle spaces in the construction of Madurai, and the production of caste in contemporary films. In this pursuit, it was used to interrogate and critique the implications such spatial discourses arise.

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### Notes

1. A series of killings in the name of caste and community has affected Tamil Nadu recently, even as sociologists and social activists now wrestle its reappearance in a chillingly different form, as the shocking murder of a 24-year-old youth Sivakumar of Sivaganga district in July 2015, who dared to marry the girl he fell in love with, shows (M.R. Venkatesh) or the gruesome kidnap and murder of a Dalit engineer Gokulraj of Salem district in June 2015: (S. Ramanathan “Caste Gestapo in TN” and Senthil Kumaran “Dalit death turns out to be a murder”).
2. The incidents that followed the Dharmapuri caste violence – where a mob rampaged through Natham, Kondampati and Anna Nagar, all Dalit colonies, where it set ablaze over two hundred houses, damaged at least fifty others, and allegedly looted valuables and cash worth lakhs of rupee – were widely reported and discussed in the Tamil Nadu public sphere. Later Dr Ramadoss and his leading PMK men, who made news, were arrested, in January 2013. For further information on the same see B. Kollapan’s “Ramadoss consolidates intermediate caste groups against Dalits,” K.S. Duraiarasu’s “Ramadoss’s caste cauldron,” S. Anandhi and M. Vijayabaskar’s “Where buying a motorcycle can spark a riot,” and MSS Pandian’s “Caste in Tamil Nadu II.”
3. For an incisive analysis of the same read Hugo Gorringer and D. Karthikeyan’s “A New Churning in the Caste Cauldron”.
4. Plot summaries are given in the Appendix, with production details in the Filmography.
5. Incidentally, *Kadhal* and *Veyil* were produced by the famous director S. Shankar. Balaji Sakthivel and Vasantha Balan, the directors of these films, worked as assistants to Shankar in his earlier films. These films were Shankar’s premier productions. *Paruthiveeran*’s producer K. E. Gnavelraja is related to actor Karthi’s family (Karthi is brother to better known actor Surya and son to veteran actor Sivakumar). The movie was dropped many a time before it was completed. *Subramaniapuram* was produced by its director Sasi Kumar. All four films were not produced by big, established production houses but by relatively new individuals. The film production aspect of the ‘new wave’ trend – where film industry’s roles become fluid be it director, actor, or producer – would be an interesting, but altogether a different, phenomenon to study from the 2000s.
6. The mythological films such as *Avaiyaar*, *Poompuhar* and *Thiruvillaiyadal* depict Madurai as a center of literary activity and temple town in the 1950s; in the historical films such as *Madurai Veeran* and *Madurayai Meeta Sundara Pandiyan* M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) acts as the Madurai hero who secures and protects it as a separate region from external forces. Later ‘Dravidian’ cinema uses Madurai as a narrative space for political articulation. Director Barathi Raja in the 1980s set Madurai village as an actual rustic space to narrate his stories. The Madurai-based popular films after *Devar Magan* (1992) such as *Gilli* (2004), *Red* (2004), *Virumaandi* (2004), *Kadhal* (2004), *Veyil* (2005), *Sandaikkozhi* (2006), *Paruthiveeran*

- (2007), *Subramaniapuram* (2008), *Vennila Kabbadi Kuzhu* (2009), *Goripalayam* (2009) and *Aadukalam* (2010) predominantly narrate and depict a particular caste culture as the actual culture of Madurai.
7. Films like *Devar Magan* (Son of a Devar, 1992), *Chinna Gounder* (The Younger Gounder, 1992), *Kizhaku Seemayile* (In the Southern Country/Territory, 1993), *Saami* (God, 2003), *Gilli* (Risk-Taker, 2004), *Madurey* (2004), *Attakasam* (Defiance, 2004), *Virumaandi* (2004), *Kadhal* (2004), *Sanda Kozhi* (Fighting Hen, 2005) etc., have dealt with the southern region of Tamil Nadu.
  8. Rajan Krishnan studies the place of the South during the genesis of colonial modernity where ‘the south presented an administrative problem to the British’ (“Imaginary Geographies” 148). Secondly, the history of caste clashes in the 1990s, in the South, which were widely reported in media, ‘caught the imagination of urban public’, leaving an indelible impression of the South as a place of primordial violence. Thirdly, historically the South in Tamil cinema became the place where the ‘rustic’ attained new authenticity which, he argues, came to be positioned against the ‘modern’ Chennai. For instance, Krishnan draws that the film *Kadhal* makes Madurai, a narrative space, where caste determines one’s identity. The spatial binaries are constructed as Chennai and Madurai as they come to stand for different temporalities. Chennai city is peopled by deracinated/decasted, free individuals policed through law and orchestrated by rules; whereas Madurai is populated by the ‘pre-modern’ castes, clans, and kinships. Krishnan argues that constitution of the geographical identity in Tamil Nadu is a metonymic extension of the caste identity of *Mukkalathor* or *Devar* in the south. He suggests the particular figure of the *Devar* (a dominant intermediary caste, which is designated as one of the “backward castes” by the state in Tamil Nadu) becomes the best epitome of the undying ‘essence of caste’.
  9. Krishnan argues that the colonial British rule, in the late eighteenth century and early twentieth century, created Madras as a seat of modern governance in south India. The south-in-opposition to Chennai begins with the Poligar wars and later with the recalcitrance of the Kallar dominions. He cites Anand Pandian’s detailing of how the south presented an administrative problem to the British. Krishnan infers from Pandian’s narration that the history of consolidation of caste identities in southern districts and the anti-modern position the *Kallars* and *Devars* occupied from the early days of colonial statecraft. See Rajan Krishnan (“Imaginary Geographies”) for further information.
  10. Films such as *Pudhupettai* (2006), *Chithiram Pesuthadi* (2006), *Pattiyal* (2006) and *Anjathe* (2008) deal with gangsters in Chennai who populate the slum that is portrayed as criminal and therefore ‘exterior’ to the ‘modern’ urban space. Films such as *Vasool Raja MBBS* (2004), *Thirupaachi* (2005), *Arinthum Ariyamalum* (2005), *Billa* (2007), *Pokkiri* (2007) and *Polladhavan* (2007) deal with dons and mafia-dom who criminalize the urban space. They account for a different kind of an ‘exoticization’ of Urban Chennai which is different from the makings of the South.
  11. For instance, Krishnan argues *Paruthiveeran*’s ‘ethnographic realism’ deconstructs the type-hero, by portraying an actual rustic environment that intercedes with the characters: Krishnan (“Kathanayaganin Maranam” 11) terms it in Tamil as *ina varaiyiyal edhartham*, i.e., ‘ethnographic realism’.
  12. Films such as *Velaikari* (Servant Maid, 1949), *Mandhirakumari* (Minister’s Daughter, 1950), *Parasakthi* (Goddess, 1952), *Madurai Veeran* (Soldier of Madurai, 1956), *Sivagangai Seemai* (The Land of Sivagangai, 1959), *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* (The Hero Kattabomman, 1959), *Parthiban Kanavu* (Parthiban’s Dream, 1960), *Pavamannippu* (Forgiveness of Sins, 1961), *Kappalottiya Thamizhan* (The Tamil who launched a Ship, 1961), *Thangarathinam* (Precious Stone, 1960), *Engal Thangam* (Our Beloved, 1970) and *Agraharathil Kazhuthai* (A Donkey in the Brahmin enclave, 1977) reflected the theme of caste and language. For further details see Chadda 71.
  13. For instance, Theodore Baskaran states that the film *Velaikari*, which was an adaptation of a play by C.N. Annadurai, was released with ‘the founding of the DMK party’ and supports the main tenets that are laced with ‘anti-caste, anti-religious and socialistic rhetoric’: Baskaran *The Eye of the Serpent* 105.
  14. Velayutham and Devadas (162) refer to the works of Hardgrave, and Dickey, which documented the use of cinematic medium to affirm the hegemony of Dravidian culture. See Devadas and Velayutham 162.

15. Pandian analyzes *Parasakti*'s politics and the ideological trends it represented by placing the film in the history of the Dravidian movement. He states that the film succeeded in its pro-DMK campaign as its anti-Congress and anti-religious postures went down well with the audience. He points out importantly that the film succeeded in importing into the narrative a powerful critique of the congress rule in the Madras presidency which made it an explicit DMK film. He reflects on the opposition this film generated with examples. See Pandian "Parasakthi" 66.
16. Pandian argues that *Parasakti* stood in 1952 as a sign of the entry of Dravidian movement in to parliamentary elections. He considers that this electoral aspect did not allow DMK to contest the pre-existing belief systems and cultural givens such as valorized chastity, inauspicious widowhood and the literary figure in the film. He contends that the film appropriates an element of the cultural given in the Tamil society which reproduces patriarchy. While he writes though the film carried some of the radical tendencies of the early Dravidian movement, it was also a signboard that pointed to the consensual politics of DMK: Pandian "Parasakthi" 89–93.
17. Tamil film scholars like Hardgrave, Pandian (*The Image Trap*), Dickey, and Widlund have worked extensively on this phenomenon.
18. Films such as *Nadodi Mannan* (Vagabond King, 1958), *Enga Veetu Pillai* (The Son of our Home, 1965), *Nam Nadu* (Our Country, 1969), *Adimai Penn* (Slave Girl, 1969) and *Engal Thangam* (Our Beloved, 1970).
19. Pandian's study of the MGR phenomenon in Tamil Nadu explores the various elements of the cinematic image of MGR. It analyzes the successful transference of the screen image to the terrain of politics, as it traces the relationship between the material/economic conditions of the subaltern classes and the rise of the MGR phenomenon. It dissects MGR's films to analyze the ideological functions of the mise-en-scene, characterization and dialogue that appealed to the subaltern classes. See Pandian *The Image Trap* 1–14.
20. Films such as *Mullum Malarum* (Thorn and Rose, 1978), *Thappu Thalagal* (Wrong Beats, 1979), *Naan Vaazhavaippen* (I'll sustain you, 1979) and *Billa* (1980).
21. Markers such as wearing a moustache, physical prowess, authority, sexual virility and the capacity to control women epitomize a stereotypical Tamil masculinity. Rajini Kanth's dark complexion made him unique. He broke the colorist stereotypes to become the first dark-skinned superstar that the masses could identify with. Rajan Krishnan argues that Rajini's entry into cinema also allowed another dark-hued actor Vijay Kanth to become a star. The Rajini-persona therefore embodied an 'authentic', subaltern Tamil masculinity: see Maderya.
22. Anthropologist Preminda Jacob informs that the Rajini-hero was an object of fantasy and desire for 'thousands of economically disenfranchised youths', many of whom watched the same Rajini-film a number of times over: see Jacob 138–39.
23. Kumuthan Maderya invokes anthropologist Fredrick G. Bailey to see, in the dark Rajini-persona's stylized irreverence, 'a supreme trick of identification' where the hero is not only identified as an ideal but simultaneously as one of them (referencing Fredrick G. Bailey's *Humbuggery and Manipulation*, Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 119).
24. Films such as *Roja* (Rose, 1992), *Bombay* (1994) and *Uyire* (Beloved, 1998).
25. For an analysis on the film *Roja* on the issues of masculine nation-state, citizen-subject, femininity and family, see Niranjana.
26. Films such as *Gentleman* (1993), *Kaadhalan* (Lover, 1994), *Indian* (1996), *Jeans* (1998), *Mudhalvan* (Leader, 1999), *Anniyan* (Stranger, 2005), *Sivaji* (2007) and *Endhiran* (Robot, 2010).
27. For a detailed study on hero-ness, fragmentation and construction of a new hero figure within the purview of the discourse on caste, corruption, modernity and the citizen-subject in director S. Shankar's films, see Jananie.
28. At the same time, there were also popular films that depicted the archetype of the village patriarch as the upholder of caste virtues. Films such as *Chinna Gounder* (1991) and *Devar Magan* (1992) were part of this trend. Several celebrity heroes played traditional panchayat chiefs who display their caste identities in a rural-feudal setting. These films glorified caste and became vehicles of assertion of pride of the middle castes. Cinema at this juncture reflected the developments in the political and social realms: see Anand.
29. Devadas and Velayutham refer to Niranjana (153–54), and other authors such as Kabir (2003), Dirks (2001), Vasudevan, and Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998) to note the

- conjecture of nationhood and modernity in Mani Ratnam's films in which the new citizen emerges and produces a secularism that proclaims its transcendence of caste and religion: cited in Devadas and Velayutham 166.
30. Rajan Krishnan refers to this incident as 'unprecedented'. 'On the pongal day a film called *Kadhal* (Love, Dir. Balaji Shaktivel) became a blockbuster overshadowing other films including a Vijay (heir apparent to Rajini Kanth when it comes to stardom) starrer. This film was a low budget with blunt in your face realism' (Krishnan "Imaginary Geographies" 139).
  31. Rajan Krishnan observes that the 'angry young man' type hero that was created by Amitabh Bachan in Hindi films was transferred into Tamil cinema in the form of the absolute adventurous hero in Rajini Kanth. In these films, the good and bad worked through a system of binaries such as the good/bad politician or the good/bad policeman. The systemic justice worked through the heroic rebel as the center of the film narrative: see Krishnan "Kathanayaganin Maranam" 9.
  32. Pradeep Sebastian states that these films are part of a 'New Wave' in Tamil cinema, which 'fuses the entertainment of a mainstream film with the sensitivity of an art film'; see also Anand.
  33. See Krishnan "Kathanayaganin Maranam" 6–11.
  34. Bala's films: *Sethu* (1999), *Nandha* (2001), *Pithamagan* (Godson, 2003) and *Naan Kadavul* (I am God, 2009).
  35. Cheran's films: *Bharathi Kannamma* (1997), *Desiya Keetham* (National Anthem, 1998), *Porkkaalam* (Golden Age, 1998), *Vetri Kodi Kattu* (Unfurl the Flag of Victory, 2000), *Pandavar Boomi* (Pandavar's Land, 2001), *Autograph* (2004) and *Thavamai Thavamirundhu* (In Penance, 2005).
  36. Thangar Bachan's films: *Azhagi* (Beautiful, 2002), *Solla Marantha Kadhai* (The Forgotten Tale, 2002), *Thendral* (Breeze, 2004), *Pallikoodam* (School, 2007) and *Onbadhu Roobai Notu* (Nine Rupee Note, 2007).
  37. The neo-nativity films depicted the individual subject's journey into the spectacle spaces through a narrative song. Hence, the hero/heroine's is the focal point in these spaces. Their agency is given pre-dominance over the space. For further information on this, see Kaali.
  38. One may witness some angry, impatient spectators in the guise of look-alike-Rajini Kanths as they enter the projectionist's room. They comment on the lover-couple relationship and disrupt their private space.
  39. Foucault explains the distinction between heterotopias and utopias: the mirror is a utopia because it is a placeless space; the image that one sees in it does not exist. One sees oneself in the mirror but one is not in that unreal, virtual space. But the mirror is also a heterotopia because the mirror exists in reality, as a real object, and shapes the way one relates to one's own image. It exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that one occupies. Heterotopias are absolutely real and unreal spaces at the same time.
  40. Valentine Daniel refers *Oor* as the sacred geographical space marked by the temples of a village. The term *Oor* is defined in a person-centered manner: a place is named and referred to according to the people who populate it. *Oor* is where higher castes live and therefore it is considered pure and respectable in contrast to a 'colony' or *cheri*. See Daniel 63–94 for an insightful analysis of this.
  41. Since the caste structures within the film narrative protect the women as sacred objects of caste purity they reject/refuse the women subjects from marrying 'other' caste men. Cinema participates in this discourse where the socio-political structures protect land and property through caste-marital alliance. The narrative and characterization do not disturb or displace the dominant caste structures. In fact, they recover and uphold them. (Tha. Chandran) The films offer sympathies and individual rescuers as response to this recovery. Widespread criticism on these films appears in Tamil "little magazines". For instance, Chandran comes down heavily on these films for being casteist. He equates these films to those of Mani Ratnam, Sankar, Kamal Hassan and Selvaraghavan for its ideological currency.
  42. Shrirasa analyzes the representation of Madurai in Tamil cinema screen history. He reflects how in recent filmic representations, Madurai comes to stand to signify *Devar* caste culture as the normative culture of Tamil Nadu. Apparently, he also observes that many producers and directors belong to Devar community in the Tamil film industry, which is based in Chennai.

43. The 'upper' caste women actively desire the 'lower' caste men in these films. Some of the addresses which are conventionally casteist are turned into an erotic, romantic address. For instance, the heroine would lovingly address the hero as *Karu Vaya* (dark man) in the film *Veyil* or *Azhukka* (dirty man or boy) in the film *Kadhal* and so on. So it might be interesting to suggest that here is a new alliance between the subject of feminism ('upper' caste) and the dalit male: in a conversation with Dr Deepa Srinivas.
44. Phrase used by Lyotard (13); Ansari uses the category to signify the 'criticality' of Muslim subjectivity in India (18).
45. For a detailed analysis of the constitution of the popular sidekick against the popular hero in Tamil cinema, see Jananie 36–60.
46. I use the word *mansion* here 'not' to denote its usage in its 'english' sense, i.e., to refer to a large impressive house which is an eighteenth-century country mansion. *Mansion* – especially in the neo-liberal, urban Indian context – signifies a group of flats or hostels where working class wo/men and students temporarily rent rooms. The English term *mansion* is retained in Tamil usage; however, it connotes a different contextual meaning.

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## Appendix

*Kadhal* (Love, 2004) is a tragic-romance about an inter-caste love affair that is set in Madurai city. The film captures the travails of runaway lovers and their 'secured' return, homeward. The narrative constructs Madurai as an entity steeped in caste conflict and violence. The slang and cultural practices portrayed differentiate this film from other contemporary films. *Kadhal* also attempts to naturalize itself by proclaiming that it is no make-believe but a real story. This naturalization is also more effective as a new cluster of actors, unfamiliar and unknown, add 'authenticity' to their roles – reportedly, some of them were just picked off the street.

*Veyil* (Torrid Sun, 2005) is a tragic-romance set in a village near Madurai. The protagonist and narrator Murugesan highlights the historic changes that have undergone over a period of time in the place he lives in. Unlike other popular films, this one distinctively presents the narrative of a wretched, prodigal son's life through a confessional mode. The film presents Madurai as a bloody locale of violent business deals. The police and systems of justice are shockingly absent from the whole narrative. The experiments in the narrative mode, such as childhood memories as flashback and 'unusual' characterization, mark this film as different from others. The film depicts cinema theatre as a spectacle space.

*Paruthiveeran* (Warrior of Paruthiyur, 2007) is a tragic-romance set in Paruthiyur, a village near Madurai. The film portrays the love affair between the daughter of the village chief – a dominant caste patriarch (OBC) – and her cousin, a seasoned rowdy who is of a mixed birth. The village is represented as a space of caste/clan violence, bigotry and a brash slipshod indolence. The folk performances within the film are famously rendered in a 'documentary' mode further signifying the rustic difference from an urban lifestyle. Combined with the flash-back narrative mode, it is an excellent example of 'ethnographic realism'.

*Subramaniapuram* (2008) is a racy thriller that recounts the tragic encounters of three young rowdy sheeters. The film depicts the Madurai town of 1980s and the party politics that individuals and families are caught up in. *Subramaniapuram* portrays the lives of five henchmen who are used by their powerful acquaintances and friends. The new shades in characterization of these henchmen clearly distinguish them from the type-heroes earlier popular Tamil films created. Cine-fan culture and village fest recur as spectacle spaces. The narration is predominantly through the flashback mode.

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