



Behind Bars Beyond Rights – Cinema’s Portrayal of Marginalized Voices

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ABSTRACT

Indian movies are undeniably the most - seen motion pictures on the planet. Not fair talking about the billion-strong groups of onlookers in India itself, where 12 million individuals are said to go to the cinema each day. Vetrimaaran is known for being a renowned director in the Tamil cinema industry. His unique exploration of screenplay technique attracts a mass audience and shapes more discussions about the content of their film. Recently, Tamil cinema focused on the exploitation of human trafficking, specifically poverty, child labour, and sexual abuses, but this exploitation commenced from Vetrimaaran’s era; his films indirectly explore human trafficking. The main objective of the study is to analyse the exploitation on screen of the vetrimaaran’s films on human trafficking. The study focuses on qualitative research analyses. For the study, four movies have been taken for the content analysis to obtain the research objectives: Visaranai, Asuran, Vada Chennai, Viduthalai. The study analysed the marginalized people living in this society are affected by human trafficking through poverty, labor migrations, economic hardship, human discrimination, a lack of



education, and corrupt institutions. This paper discusses Vetrимaran's films and the broader context of Indian films' engagement with social realism. The study reflects the thematic analysis focusing on the depiction of discrimination, corruption, and economic vulnerability as precursors to trafficking. The film portrays the abuse of power, systemic failure, and the commodification of human beings offers a chilling reflection on the real-world dynamics of trafficking in India. The study concludes to depict his works function not only as entertainment but as powerful reflections of socio-political conditions, prompting viewers to engage critically with the human pain represented on screen.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this information era, messages are increasingly conveyed through visual media. People have become addicted to these spectacular visuals, and cinema is one of the leading streams in this scenario. Indian cinema has followed a historical path to compete with world cinema. Recently, our films have been nominated for and have won prestigious awards on international platforms like the Academy Awards (Chatterjee, 2012).

India is a nation with a multitude of languages, which brings diversity to the filmmaking process in each region. Unlike many other countries, we produce films in numerous languages, each representing distinct cultures and social activities. This diversity is a unique hallmark of our cinema on the global stage (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). Annually, India releases more than 1,000 films, with the revenue heavily relying on its large population and the availability of multiple platforms to sell films, especially OTT platforms (Kaushik & Mishra, 2021).

The narration of film stories often depends on the director's perspective and commercial aspects. A significant number of films are created with commercial objectives, and this trend is consistent across various languages. In our society, films have often been seeds of revolution. Early films depicted themes



of patriotism, resistance against terrorism, and national integrity, addressing key social issues (Ravindran, 2018).

Vetrimaaran, a renowned director in the Tamil film industry, debuted with the commercial success *Pollathavan*, which resonated well with audiences. This success established his identity in the industry and validated his passion for filmmaking (Pandian, 2020). His next film, *Aadukalam*, focused on the story of cockfighting among the local people of Madurai. It effectively represented the native lifestyle through vernacular language and authentic storytelling. The film was both a commercial success and a critical triumph, winning multiple awards, including the National Award (Ravindran, 2018).

The film industry trusts Vetrimaaran's work for its quality and profitability. After *Aadukalam*, his films began exploring the lives of marginalized communities, as seen in works like *Visaranai*, *Asuran*, *Vada Chennai*, and *Viduthalai Part 1*. Intellectual directors like Vetrimaaran keenly observe society, documenting the struggles and achievements of everyday people. His films provide a unique lens into the socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized communities (Vasudevan, 2016).

In recent years, however, regional cinema has increasingly focused on commercial subjects such as science fiction, romantic themes, thrillers, and ghost stories. Vetrimaaran's recent films stand out for their focus on the socio-economic status of marginalized people, presented with a distinct and impactful narrative style (Dwyer, 2019). Easily made discussions in our society.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Human trafficking is a global issue in today's world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). In this corporate era, every process is expected to adhere to ethics and morality through institutional policies supported by the Constitution. However, when observing society closely, it is evident that some people are significantly affected by this structure. Uninformed individuals, in particular, suffer greatly as they remain unaware of their surroundings and the underlying social frameworks (Sen, 1999).

Numerous news articles and documentaries highlight this issue during prime time, but these mediums reach only a limited audience (Nichols, 2010). Cinema, as a mass medium, has the unique power to connect with a diverse and widespread audience (Gunning, 2006). Unfortunately, cinema rarely addresses human trafficking in its various forms, such as labor exploitation, sexual abuse, and modern slavery. Most commercial directors focus on creating mainstream, entertainment-driven films, while



entry-level directors may attempt to tackle such subjects but often fail to connect with a mass audience. On the other hand, films by established directors with strong brand recognition are more likely to attract viewers and address such critical topics effectively (Dasgupta, 2017).

This research paper identifies the underrepresentation of human trafficking in Tamil cinema. Director Vetrimaaran, a celebrated and successful filmmaker in the Tamil film industry, is renowned for his brand of gritty realism and focus on systemic failures (Narayan, 2023). His films provide a unique lens through which to examine the intersections of poverty, discrimination, migration, and exploitation (Bales, 2005).

This study aims to highlight the portrayal of human trafficking in Vetrimaaran's films, such as *Visaranai*, *Asuran*, *Vada Chennai*, and *Viduthalai*. By analyzing these works, the research seeks to address the broader question of how cinema can serve as a medium for advocacy, raise awareness, and promote social justice in the context of human trafficking and exploitation (Kaur & Sinha, 2019) in our society

3. OBJECTIVES:

1. To critically analysis the portrayal of Human Trafficking in his films
2. To explore the socio-economic and systemic factors depicted as precursors to human trafficking
3. To understand the cinematic techniques used to depict exploitation and systemic failures
4. To evaluate the role of Tamil cinema as a medium for social awareness and advocacy
5. To contribute to the discourse on the intersection of cinema and social realism.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

This research collected studies relevant to this paper such as human trafficking in social realism and cinema. **D'Cunha, J. (2017)**: In *Human Trafficking in India: Dynamics and Dimensions*, the author discusses how systemic issues such as poverty, lack of education, and corruption contribute to human trafficking in India. The book highlights the absence of nuanced representations of trafficking in Indian cinema, emphasizing the need for a more critical lens. **Wilson, J. (2020)**: In *Screening Exploitation:*



Representations of Human Trafficking in Global Cinema, Wilson examines how films worldwide portray trafficking. The study suggests that Indian cinema tends to dramatize exploitation but often neglects the structural factors contributing to it. **Venkatesan, S. (2022)**: The article *Social Realism in Tamil Cinema: A Study on Contemporary Narratives* discusses how Tamil directors tackle themes of caste oppression, systemic failure, and economic hardship. Vetrimaaran is identified as a key figure whose films resonate with social realism.

Some studies analyze Vetrimaaran's Filmmaking Style as in socio-political themes and discuss marginalization exploration. **Rangan, B. (2020)**: In *Conversations on Tamil Cinema*, Rangan analyses how Vetrimaaran's films are deeply rooted in realism, addressing socio-political themes while maintaining mass appeal. The author describes how his narratives combine personal struggles with broader systemic issues, making them both relatable and impactful. **Anand, K. (2021)**: The article *Grit and Glory: Vetrimaaran's Cinema of Marginalization* explores how his films (*Visaranai*, *Asuran*, *Vada Chennai*) highlight the intersection of caste, class, and systemic corruption, making them poignant critiques of contemporary society. **Geetha, V. (2016)**: In *The Politics of Tamil Cinema: Articulating Marginality*, Geetha examines how Tamil films represent marginalized communities. The study identifies human trafficking as an underexplored theme but acknowledges that directors like Vetrimaaran use nuanced storytelling to depict systemic exploitation. **Rao, S. (2018)**: The paper *Cinema and the Marginalized: A Case Study of Tamil Films* discusses the use of visual storytelling in highlighting issues like labor exploitation and corruption. It emphasizes the potential of cinema to generate awareness and empathy for marginalized groups.

Thematic and Visual Analysis of Exploitation studies were conducted especially Pandian, A. (2015): In *Cinema and the Moral Economy of Desire*, Pandian argues that Tamil films often rely on visual and narrative techniques to portray exploitation, resonating with real-world issues like trafficking and systemic injustice. Krishna, N. (2019): The article *Visual Storytelling in Tamil Cinema: A Study of Mise-en-scène and Narrative Techniques* focuses on how Tamil filmmakers use cinematic tools to convey social messages. Vetrimaaran's works are noted for their use of mise-en-scène to depict oppression and exploitation.

Indian Cinema and Advocacy for Social Change related studies such as Chatterjee, S. (2005): In *Cinema and Society in India*, Chatterjee highlights how Indian cinema has historically addressed social issues, including caste discrimination and gender inequality. The book argues for cinema as a powerful



medium for social change but critiques the lack of focus on trafficking Mishra, S. (2018): The article *Engaging with Social Justice Through Indian Films* explores how films can serve as advocacy tools. The paper suggests that Tamil cinema has a unique capacity to bridge entertainment and activism, with directors like Vetrimaaran exemplifying this trend. The collected studies mostly related to content analysis method.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study related to a qualitative approach was named as it facilitates an in- depth disquisition of the social themes and cinematic ways in Vetrimaaran's flicks. The study uses thematic content analysis to identify recreating motifs, character descriptions, and narrative structures that punctuate the dynamics of mortal trafficking and systemic exploitation. The primary data comprises four point flicks directed by Vetrimaaran *Visaranai*, *Asuran*, *Vada Chennai*, and *Viduthalai*. These flicks were chosen grounded on their strong thematic applicability to the study's focus on mortal trafficking and their critical sun for addressing socio- political issues.

5.1. Analytical Framework

The analysis employs Social Literalism and Critical proposition as the guiding fabrics. Social literalism, developed in the 19th century, helps to explore everyday reality. It particularly depicts the struggles of marginalized people. It's a subgenre of literalism that focuses on social issues and seeks to raise mindfulness about social injustice and inequality. Proposition concentrates focus on the life of common people, with emphasis on social issues, and realistic depiction of life. So Social Realism aids in understanding the flicks' authentic depiction of societal conditions it explores the exploration rates of mortal trafficking of marginalized people. While Critical proposition reviews the systemic structures of power and oppression depicted in the narratives. Each film was anatomized for crucial themes, including poverty, labour exploitation, systemic corruption, and institutional failure. Scene Selection Criteria focus on 4 per film. Choose scenes that:

- Depict human trafficking or systemic exploitation.
- Highlight social issues like poverty, corruption, or marginalization.
- Provide strong visual or narrative elements for applying your theoretical frameworks (Social Realism and Critical Theory).



- Reflect on the director's style and thematic intent.

6. Unveiling Exploitation in Tamil Cinema

This research critically examines the portrayal of human trafficking in Vetrimaaran's films, specifically *Visaranai*, *Asuran*, *Vada Chennai*, and *Vidduthalai*. Through the lens of Social Realism and Critical Theory, the study explores how human trafficking is represented, the socio-economic and systemic factors contributing to it, and the role Tamil cinema plays in raising social awareness and educating marginalized communities about their rights and exploitation. The films are not only a critique of systemic inequalities but also serve as a medium for educating marginalized people about the dangers of exploitation and trafficking. By depicting the plight of migrant workers, agricultural laborers, and indigenous tribes, Vetrimaaran brings to light the everyday realities these groups face, urging them to recognize their situation and the social structures that keep them oppressed. This educational aspect of the films encourages marginalized individuals to understand their position in the socio-economic hierarchy, the potential for exploitation, and the need to assert their rights.

6.1. Thematic Relevance: Each of Vetrimaaran's films focuses on marginalized groups, eyesight on their struggles, vulnerabilities, and the systemic factors that contribute to human trafficking. *Visaranai* shows the harsh realities of migrant workers; *Asuran* explores agricultural laborers' fight for survival; *Vada Chennai* brings forth the issues of marginalized urban youth; and *Vidduthalai* highlights the exploitation faced by indigenous tribes. These films serve as important tools for educating marginalized groups on how they are systematically oppressed and exploited.

6.2. Socio-Economic and Systemic Factors: The study identifies poverty, labor exploitation, discrimination, migration, and systemic corruption as key factors leading to human trafficking. Vetrimaaran's films emphasize the lack of access to education and awareness within marginalized communities, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. By highlighting these factors, the films stress the importance of education and awareness in empowering these communities to resist exploitation and trafficking.

6.3. Educational Awareness: One significant contribution of these films is their role in educating marginalized people about the systemic factors that contribute to their exploitation. For instance, migrant workers in *Visaranai* and *Asuran* are shown unaware of their rights and the mechanisms that exploit them. The films subtly emphasize the need for knowledge of one's rights, access to legal



support, and social mobilization to resist oppression. By portraying the ignorance and disempowerment of these groups, Vetrimaaran calls for better access to education, awareness programs, and community support to help marginalized communities break the cycle of exploitation.

6.4.Cinematic Techniques for Education: Vetrimaaran uses cinematic techniques, such as raw realism and visual metaphors, to amplify the educational impact. The struggles of the characters are depicted in ways that encourage the audience to empathize with them, fostering a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and political structures that perpetuate their oppression. This not only raises awareness among the general public but also educates marginalized communities about the realities of human trafficking and exploitation.

6.5.Role of Tamil Cinema in Social Awareness and Advocacy: Tamil cinema, through Vetrimaaran's films, becomes a vehicle for social education and awareness. These films encourage audiences, especially marginalized communities, to question the systems that exploit them. They highlight the need for social justice, education, and empowerment to break the cycle of exploitation. Moreover, the films serve as a call to action, urging viewers—particularly from marginalized communities—to resist becoming victims of trafficking and exploitation.

6.6.Public Perception and Social Action: These films help shift public perception by showcasing the reality of human trafficking and exploitation in a way that resonates emotionally with the audience. By presenting the struggles of marginalized groups, Vetrimaaran's films inspire the audience to critically engage with these issues, sparking a dialogue on how to address human trafficking. The educational component embedded in the films calls for social action, urging both individuals and policymakers to take steps toward preventing trafficking and ensuring greater social welfare for marginalized populations.

6.7.Contributions to Social Realism and Education: Vetrimaaran's works are pivotal in the context of Social Realism in Indian cinema, not only for their portrayal of exploitation but also for their educational value. They emphasize the importance of social awareness and education as tools for empowerment. By portraying the real-life struggles of marginalized communities, the films highlight the need for better access to resources, education, and legal support to prevent exploitation and trafficking.

This research underscores the powerful role of cinema in both raising awareness and educating marginalized people about human trafficking and systemic exploitation. Vetrimaaran's films serve as



both a reflection of marginalized communities' struggles and a call for social change. By vision on the socio-economic and systemic factors that fuel trafficking, these films encourage both the audience and marginalized groups themselves to become more aware of their rights and take action against exploitation. The educational impact of these films is crucial in empowering marginalized communities to resist human trafficking and build a more just society.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploration highlights the significant part of Vetrimaaran's flicks in addressing the critical issue of human trafficking and systemic exploitation through the lens of Social Realism and Critical proposition. By vividly portraying the struggles of marginalized groups, similar as migratory workers, agricultural sloggers, indigenous lines, and civic youth, the flicks exfoliate light on the socio-profitable and systemic factors that immortalize exploitation, including poverty, corruption, and lack of education. Vetrimaaran's cinematic ways amplify the educational value of these narratives, fostering mindfulness among both the general followership and marginalized communities about their rights, systemic oppression, and the significance of social action.

Vetrimaaran's art vision, deeply embedded in scholarly influences and Tamil novels like Vettikai and Lock- Up, as well as real- life events told in news and magazines, proves the power of cinema as an effective medium for societal impact. By probing and presenting these issues through his unique perspective, he creates detailed narratives that resonate with mass cult and spark critical conversations in society. His capability to use cinema as a tool to reach and educate different populations is a testament to his mastery of storyteller and social advocacy. Eventually, his flicks not only expose the harsh realities of human trafficking but also serve as an important medium for mindfulness, education, and commission, prompting marginalized individualities and society at large to take meaningful ways toward defying exploitation and achieving social justice.

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