



REPRESSIVE STATE APPARATUSES (RSA) AS PORTRAYED IN THE TAMIL FILM ‘VISARANAI’

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ABSTRACT

Any State in the world, whether democratic, communist or monarchical will have its own apparatuses to control and regulate the subjects and their behaviour, ideologically and repressively. Whereas the control of people is carried out through ideological state apparatuses (ISA) that include religion, educational system, political system, family, trade-union, media and culture, the control through repressive state apparatuses (RSA) is executed by police, court and prisons. Applying media content analysis of the Tamil film ‘Visaranai,’ this note tries to bring out the issues and themes treated there in under the mask of RSA. In the process, it is understood as to how a state apparatus, the police department uses repression as an excuse to justify its excesses, extra judicial killings, human rights violations inflicted upon the vulnerable subjects tilting the balance towards people of dominant ideology.

Key Words: MEDIA CONTENT, REPRESSIVE STATE APPARATUSES, IDEOLOGY, TAMIL FILM VISARANAI, SYSTEM, POLICE.

1. Introduction

The State has got many wings under its governance. It has got many apparatuses to control and regulate the behaviour of its citizens. These apparatuses always try to be in favour of the dominant sections of the population resulting in an imbalanced power structure. The State will always claim that it is neutral to all its subjects but in reality people in the bottom, the subaltern and the voiceless are at the receiving end.

According to Louis Althusser (1971), there are two main state apparatuses that a State uses against its own people, ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses. The former is applied using ideologies and the latter is applied using repression as tools of governance.

In this scholarship, the Tamil film '*Visaranai*' is analysed, as to its contents with a specific focus on issues and themes, keeping in mind the two repressive state apparatuses of the government, police and court. Through the prism of police as a repressive state apparatus, the media content in the film in question is analyzed and discussed for its issues and themes. This study probes how police force as a repressive state apparatus is used to crush and subdue, its own subjects, using brutality and violence, thereby denying them justice and legal protection. These excesses and extra judicial maneuvers that are ultra vires in the eyes of law are justified in the name of state apparatus.

2. Review of Literature

Governments in power are using many apparatuses in governing and administering their subjects. Though they claim to be just and neutral to all people irrespective of class and creed, their actions are falling under either ideological state apparatuses or repressive state apparatuses. Althusser (1971) opines that RSA is used mostly when individuals and groups poses a threat to the dominant order. There are two kinds of classes in a society, the affluent or the dominant and the voiceless or subaltern. It is an established fact that the governments are always standing on the side of dominant group, because the government apparatus is tilted towards the affluent.

Since dominant group is consisting of rich, powerful and aristocratic sections of the population, the state is more concerned about them and their interests. Their pressure will have to be given more preference. Hill (2009) says that as threats to the dominant order mounts, the state turns to increasingly physical and severe measures; incarceration, police force and ultimately military intervention are used in response. The more the pressure of the ruling class, the harder the repressive acts inflicted upon them. Althusser (1971) concurs that the RSA helps to maintain the powers and interest of the ruling class through exploitation of the labor power of working class.

While studying media content, it was found that media content analysis was developed as a research methodology in mass communication studies and social sciences with the arrival of television and it has been a primary research method for studying portrayals of violence,

racism and women in television programming as well as in films. Along with this, there is no bar on the part of researchers to include issues and themes as content to be studied.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The data taken for analysis is the Tamil film '*Visaranai*' on which a media content analysis is done for the issues and themes dealt with in the film. While the focus is directed towards listing out and analysing major issues and themes found in the film, other technical aspects like lighting, cinematography and editing were not considered. In a nutshell, media content analysis of issues and themes in the light of theory of repressive state apparatuses is the specific area of study. Neither the views of audience nor of the creator is taken into account. Lasswell, Lerner and Pool (1952) says that content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time.

Neuman (1997) opines that content analysis is a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text. The 'content' refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. The 'text' is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication.

Althusser (1971) thinks that the ideological state apparatuses (ISA) refer to social institutions such as the family, language, the education system, trade unions, church and mass media, whereas Repressive state apparatus (RSA) refer to public institutions like police, army, court and prisons. What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function 'by ideology'.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 '*Visaranai*' and Police as Repressive State Apparatus.

The 2016-theatrical released Tamil film '*Visaranai*,' meaning Interrogation, is directed by Mr.Vetrimaran and has premiered in the Horizons section of the 72nd Venice Film Festival, 2015. The plot events are as follows:

Pandi, Murugan, Afzal, Kumar are Tamil labourers who are working in a provisional store in Brindavan colony area at Guntur, Andhra Pradesh and are living in a nearby park unable to hire a rented house. The lives of the four labourers take a turn for worse when they are taken into police custody, beaten and tortured brutally in the lock-up for a theft they did not commit. The local police inspector wants to falsely implicate them in a high-profile robbery

case so that the case can be smoothly closed. In spite of heavy and violent torture the four refuse to confess but are somehow forced to confess in the court. But on the fateful day in court they backtrack and narrate their horrible custodial torture and are helped by a Tamil police inspector Muthuvel who vouches for their good behaviour. The judge sets them free. Out of gratitude and without realising the consequences they help Muthuvel to kidnap and secure the unlawful custody of a white collar accused, a high-profile auditor K.K who has been handling the black money for the opposition political party in Tamil Nadu. Except Kumar who is dropped in the middle, all others arrive at Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The three men are asked by Muthuvel to clean the police station and in the meantime they are exposed to another chilling drama of K.K's custodial torture and murder. The kidnapping was masterminded by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (D.C.P), under directions from the ruling party of the state, to use K.K in court so that the opposition party's political image can be tarnished. Meanwhile, the Assistant Commissioner (A.C.P), who is on the payroll of the opposition party, convinces the D.C.P to play a double game and get 3 crore (30 million) rupees from the opposition party for dropping the case. In the melee between D.C.P and A.C.P playing on behalf of ruling and opposition parties respectively, K.K. dies. Unable to save K.K from death, Muthuvel, under whose custody he was in, is subsequently frustrated and is not falling in line with other police officials.

But the other top police officials decide to cover up the death as suicide, which they suspect the three men must have overheard. Acting on a suggestion by a junior cop, they decide to frame Pandi and his friends as convicts in a pending Automatic Teller Machine (A.T.M) robbery case, and eliminate them under the cover of an encounter. Muthuvel, who pities for the three men, is fed up with the corruption and immorality of the events that have transpired and initially refuses to cooperate, but he is coerced into fall line due to his involvement in K.K's custody and death. During the staged encounter, all the three are killed. On the secret orders of D.C.P, Muthuvel is also eliminated on the premise that he may turn out to be an obstacle in future. A sudden plan is made for the press coverage of Muthuvel's death on duty, alongside photographs of his family to draw the attention and sympathy of the public towards the former. With an arrangement of a TV debate on the topic 'On-duty Security concerns of Police,' the film concludes.

4.2 Repressive Police and Issues and Themes in ‘Visaranai’

Though there exist many repressive state apparatuses such as army, police, courts and prisons in India, only two apparatuses are dealt with in the film, namely, police and court. Since the court scene is only one and short in duration, it is not elaborately taken for discussion. Throughout the length and breadth of the film, portrayal is about the repressive state apparatus, the police and hence it is justified that enough space is given for it.

The film gives an elaborate picture about the police station in Andhra Pradesh, where the custodial interrogation of four innocent men takes place. The police station in Tamil Nadu, where the white-collar criminal K.K is kept and tortured is shown to be somewhat clean and decent. But the mindset, modus operandi, behaviour, cunningness, and the white lies of the policemen in both the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are similarly placed and identical in comparison.

The inhuman treatments in the form of violent torture meted out to four men in Andhra Pradesh, and to K.K in Tamil Nadu are similar and can be applied to all police stations in both the states. The ambience of police station and lock-up rooms which are going to inflict torture in violent and inhuman ways, people both the torturers and the tortured, the murderers and the murdered, the repressor representing the state and the repressed representing the subjects and the repressing devices and tools starting from pistol to handcuffs, are clearly establishing, beyond doubt, that these are in fact resembling the death chambers of yester years’ calamitous concentration camps.

The unheard cries of the voiceless poor men and the vulnerability of them as subjects offered at the altar of their own bureaucratic and political masters working for and in the system of criminal investigation have been given a complete thought-out treatment in the narrative structure of the film.

The issues to be covered-up for which repressive acts are justified by the state apparatus include falsely implicating a person in a case, thrusting upon a new case on somebody, bribery and corruption, manipulating political deals, extra judicial killings, human right violations, lawlessness, mechanical adherence to system, getting a favourable post-mortem report, covering-up the deaths, favouritism, casteist considerations, blackmailing, media maneuvers, and stage-managing fake evidences. All these issues are closely reflected in the day today affairs of the department in reality. Nothing is exaggerated. The newspaper reports in India are the clear evidences that the film talks about real issues.

The first issue to be dealt with is ‘falsely implicating a person in a case’. The four men under the police custody for interrogation are time and again forced to confess for a crime that they have not committed. Before filing an FIR, they are brutally beaten, tortured to the extent of becoming unconscious, by using violent and inhuman methods. But they withstand all assaults and firmly refusing to agree to the police pressure. In spite of the fact that they have borne all kinds of custodial torture and that they suffer bodily injuries, these innocent but brave men do not concede. The point to be noted here is that some high-profile house-breaking robbery case is to be closed by the local police. Through some corrupt means the police inspector arranges for money equivalent to the value of stolen property. The innocent men will have to confess that they are the ones who stole the valuables and serve a minimum sentence. In another incident the police inspector in Andhra Pradesh brutally attacks and coerces the bike thieves to confess for 52 bikes, whereas they were originally taken into custody for 2 bikes. They plead that they stole only two bikes, but relent after violent attacks by the police.

‘Thrusting upon a new case on somebody’ is another issue for consideration. The three innocent men who escape punishment in Andhra Pradesh are thrust upon a new case, ATM robbery case for which the real culprits are not apprehended. Due to pressure to close the case, these young men are fabricated in this case and money arranged through wrong means is planted in the assumed-to-be rented room. As the story proceeds we see all the three men are encountered and their murder is justified on the ground that they tried to escape with money culminating into their elimination.

‘Bribery and corruption’ are the next issues the film discusses. Throughout the film, acts of bribery and corruption are finding their due treatment. Arranging for money through corruption for the stolen property in the Brindavan colony case in Andhra Pradesh and for the ATM robbery to be used for encounter, getting three crore rupees from opposition party and bargaining for five crore rupees in the K.K kidnapping and murder case, asking the owner of the four men to supply Briyani for the accused in the police custody are the perfect examples of bribery and corruption.

The issue of ‘Manipulating political deals’ gets a decent treatment in the film. Negotiating with opposition party leaders and ruling party leaders simultaneously for deals makes one wonder whether police force can manipulate the political class. In the game of one-upmanship between ruling and opposition parties, it is understood the police can tilt the balance in favour of one side from which they can extract money and influence.

The film's main issue is 'Extra judicial killings'. The film deals with five killings. The three innocent men (falsely implicated in Brindavan colony case and ATM robbery encounter later) in Andhra Pradesh police custody namely, Pandi, Murugan, Afzal, auditor K.K (high-profile political criminal), and inspector Muthuvel (a good police inspector among the black ships). The concerned perpetrators of these killings, starting from inspector to D.C.P, neither show remorse nor feel sorry for their activities that they know these to be ultra vires. 'Human rights violation' is the issue that is central to the film. Frame to frame analysis will reveal that the film is full and full about human rights violations and it is to be noted that it is for this reason the film has premiered in the Venice Film Festival.

'Lawlessness' is a golden rule that the police has been adherently following. These police personnel are intelligent enough in not following the legal procedures. Whether in the arrests or in punishing others, they take law into their hands adjudicating justice in their own way. They commit crimes, change evidences, produce wrong persons in the court, create false records, and tell lies in the court. It is really a jungle raj and the state apparatus of police force is a criminally incriminating force. From top to bottom, majority of the policemen in the film is shown to be a lawless citizen. They are above the law and they can bend all provisions of law for their own benefit. Even their promotion is linked to unlawful and illegal activities.

The practice of 'mechanically adhering to system' is the issue about which every policeman in the film is bothered about. The main premise is that there exists a system in the government. It is bigger and greater than individuals. It is therefore the responsibility for everyone to sincerely adhere to that. Muthuvel says that the higher officials in the system order their subordinates to do certain things and everyone obeys the system. What he means is that whether one's actions or good or bad, he or she will have to serve the system. One of the state apparatuses is the police and it has got a system and everyone must work to strengthen it.

In one of the telephonic conversation, a policeman will suggest to his boss the D.C.P that they can get a 'favourable post-mortem report' from the doctor. Health department is also one of the key departments. As per the legal procedure, the government medical officer's post-mortem report is very essential to the court evidence. In this case it is suggested that after the encounter, we can bend the rules and get a report as per our wish. It is therefore the nexus or collision between two governmental arms that is to be noted. The repressive state

apparatus police system will go to any extent in the justification of its unlawful and illegal activities.

‘Covering-up the deaths’ is also one of the important issues discussed in the film. The brutal tortures and cold-blooded murders committed in the film are for the purpose of covering-up the deaths. The pattern is this. In the first place, the police falsely implicate them in a case. To cheat the courts and the adjudication process they cause deaths to the accused and afterwards, they cook up records and evidence to cover-up their crimes. Whatever the police is not supposed to do, they do and cheat the government and the public.

The issues of ‘Favouritism and Casteist considerations’ are also mentioned in the film. One of the junior policemen will inform his boss that the Superintendent of Police (S.P) of Guntur district is his friend and college mate and he can very easily ask him to oblige. It is done. Similarly it is averred through a telephonic conversation that the officer in charge of a particular investigation is from the D.C.P’s caste and hence he oblige to him. In this ways favouritism and casteist considerations are subtly used for repressive purposes. In reality also favouritism and casteist considerations are at its peak in the police force.

‘Blackmailing’ at all levels takes place in the film. The inspector blackmails young men in judicial custody and threatens them with dire consequences if they don’t oblige and confess for the crime. The young men are warned that if they refuse to cooperate they will be killed in the police custody. In the Tamil Nadu scenario, the D.C.P and the A.C.P blackmail inspector Muthuvel to cooperate and oblige. They also threaten him that the death of K.K has taken place under his custody and if he fails to oblige he will also be arrested and prosecuted. Because of this pressurizing technique, Muthuvel obliges and does whatever he is ordered to do. The fate is that even after all his obliging activities he is also eliminated at the end.

‘Media maneuvers’ is another issue about which the film does a mention. It is a widely known fact that there is a close nexus between police and media in the film. The police who executes the stage-managed suicide of K.K, the planned encounters of three young men and the elimination of inspector Muthuvel informs his boss that ‘cover’, meaning money, can be given to press persons to change the killings into an accidental death during duty. He also suggests that news can be created to focus sympathy towards Muthuvel’s family and his sacrifice for the state along with a TV debate on police safety. In this manipulated process the extra judicial killings are converted into accidental deaths for which police men are not

held responsible. Once reported by the press with a subtle bias towards police but under the mask of neutrality, the general public can be made to believe and hope that these are normal and legal.

The issue of ‘stage-managing fake evidences’ is the last issue that is discussed. Planting currency notes inside the police set-up room of the three young men who are linked with ATM robbery case, conducting rehearsal for the Brindavan colony robbery case asking them to act according to the cooked-up case diary, and arranging for encounter as if the young men try to escape with the money are clear-cut examples of stage-managing fake evidences.

The thematic words that are expressed in the film include Al-Qaeda, LTTE, ISIS, terrorism, hunger-strike, system, ruling party, opposition party, deal, bribery, corruption, encounter, cover-up, favouritism, caste, post-mortem, lock-up, silencing, and obedience.

Since one of the young men is muslim, Afzal by name, the police asks him whether he is from Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The other one says that he is a Tamil and immediately the policeman says that he is from LTTE. In addition to branding them with respective organizations, they are linked with terrorism. In this scene the mindset of the police comes out naturally thus linking everyone whom they come across with disruptive forces.

Unable to bear with the torture and brutality, the four men resort to hunger-strike within the four walls of dark chambers, i.e. lock-up rooms. As is known, hunger-strike is a normal method of resistance and this theme is reinforced as a form of resistance to repressive state apparatus. System includes legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary. Regarding political master under whom police take orders from, the themes of ruling party and opposition party are dealt with. Between these two branches of legislature only, police department functions with the active supervision of judiciary.

The themes deal, bribery, and corruption are to be placed similarly, because of the fact that all the three are interlinked. They have a symbiotic relationship in the sense that deal is struck based on agreement on bribery and corruption. So also bribery and corruption pave the way for deal. In the film many deals are made in return for bribery and corruption.

‘Lock-up, encounter, post-mortem, cover-up, and silencing’ are the themes that have similarity and link with each other. One leads to another and through this continuity a chain is created.

'Favouritism and caste' are two themes that find place in the film. Whereas favouritism is related to friends and influential persons, caste is purely based on birth. Since caste is part and parcel of Indian social life, police department is not an exception.

The word 'obedience' is heard often in the film. The bosses remind their juniors that they should obey and do whatever is required of them. It is the obedience of unquestionable nature. Whether their bosses are legally and morally right or not, the subordinates should show utmost obedience. It can be against law or norms or even morality, obedience should be followed in their profession.

5. Conclusion

The film '*Visaranai*' in its entirety in content, deals with many issues and themes that are relevant to contemporary societal living of the subjects in a state. While the state apparatuses are claiming to bring about order in the system, in general, ISA and RSA deal with specific areas of private domain such as family, health, education and public domain that consists of police, military, prison and courts, try to control the behaviour of the subjects thereby favouring the dominant sections of the society. In its eagerness to serve the ruling elite and influential, the state resorts to violence, lawlessness and ultra vires on the subaltern and the voiceless

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