

Captivating Tale of Resilience in Mari Selvaraj Bison Movie

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Abstract

Actors from all socioeconomic backgrounds now look forward to parts in movies helmed by Dalit directors such as P. K. Ranjith and Selvaraj. Ignoring these historical and modern realities and focusing only on the "fair" female leads in their films is part of an elite plot to subvert Dalit-constructed political ideologies. One of Mari's films, *Bison*, subverts the conventional patterns, methods, and aesthetics of mainstream filmmaking to create a counterpublic discourse. The heroic depiction of Dalit iconography, symbols, gods, and belief systems is at the core of Mari's film-making approach, and this is not an artistic limitation. In actuality, these stories contradict the long-standing use of epistemic violence in cultural representation in mainstream film. By titling the movie *Bison*, or *Kaalamaadan*, Mari Selvaraj is definitely undermining the sarvarna gaze. Based on actual events, the movie is set in southern Tamil Nadu in the 1990s against the backdrop of social developments. It is described as an intense and emotional film that uses elements of violence, *Kabaddi*, and social issues to tell a powerful story. It discusses the Dalit protagonist Kittan's survival, tenacity, and victory. Selvaraj employs athletics as a motivator in the movie to help the protagonist move past this dilemma and toward more ambitious goals. This study examines Mari Selvaraj's *Bison Kaalamaadan* by analyzing its plot, characters, symbols, and discussions about society and politics. It also examines how the film alters the typical production process of Tamil films by drawing on concepts from Dalit discourse, film studies, and criticism of caste-based culture. By looking at how sports, memories, and fighting back are used to show dignity and stand up for oneself in films that are against the caste system of which *Bison Kaalamaadan* is a part, the paper contributes to the conversation about how Dalits are depicted in films.

Keywords: Dalit Cinema, Cultural Representation, Tamil Cinema, Caste Politics, Narrative Analysis, Sports and Resistance, Anti-Caste Discourse.

Introduction

This need for communication across opposing groups, no matter how utopian, distinguishes Selvaraj's cinematic vision and remains crucial. Through his genre of storytelling, Mari Selvaraj makes a fascinating attempt to understand the everyday caste violence experienced by the Dalit group in rural Tamil Nadu, where even a tiny act might cause a fight with the ruling castes. In his recently released film *Bison Kaalamaadan*, Mari plays a young Dalit man (Dhruv plays Kittan) who is divided between becoming a national-level *Kabaddi* player and taking revenge against caste violence. The complicated terrain of caste violence is a reality of his life. The protagonist avoids conflict when it is not his struggle, but he is frequently provoked to choose retaliation. Mari Selvaraj's direction for layering the story, making it more than just a sports film. It delves into themes of caste, class, and power, and offers a realistic portrayal of a rebel's journey without filters. The film is set against the backdrop of an ongoing conflict between a dominant caste leader, Kandasamy (played by Lal), and a Dalit leader, Pandiaraja (played by Ameer).

Pasupathi's portrayal of Velusamy, Kittan's father, is driven by his passion for Kabaddi and his concern that Kittan would become involved in caste warfare. The film demonstrates how easy it is to become involved in caste conflicts by picking up knives. Pasupathi's dread highlights the necessity of restraining her impulse to exact revenge. Through endurance in Kabaddi, Kittan, a fiery and determined child, attempts to overcome this conflict and his condition.

In his films, Selvaraj emphasizes that Dalits should be treated with dignity, regardless of their credentials or accomplishments. Dalits are often forced to "achieve social acceptance" through education and economic progress. In this situation, a dignified existence must be earned through education, work, lifestyle modifications, and financial mobility rather than being given freely. However, how can we describe their lives in the absence of these conditional credibilities? This is not a discussion of what emancipation constitutes. One of the best ways for Dalits to assert themselves is still through education. However, the fundamental tenet of anti-caste politics and its battles is that every life is equal, regardless of external indicators.

Selvaraj's films depict the layers of people's lives that might not have socially enforced mechanisms of legitimacy. He stressed the significance of recognizing their challenges and lived experiences, which is a political statement in and of itself.

Review of Literature

The representation of Dalits in cinema is receiving increasing attention in academic and cultural discourse today. Earlier studies on Tamil cinema primarily focused on realism, melodrama, heroism, and regional politics. Today, scholars have begun to examine subaltern representation and caste identity. Filmmakers such as Pa. Ranjith and Mari Selvaraj make a difference by bringing caste to the forefront, not just as a background issue. Scholars writing on Dalit cinema argue that mainstream Indian films have not adequately represented Dalits. They have either ignored Dalit issues or portrayed Dalit characters as victims, comic relief, or laborers. Anti-caste filmmakers are trying to change this by focusing on Dalit struggles, language, and experiences. Films

such as *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Karnan*, and *Maamannan* demonstrate Mari Selvaraj's approach. Previous studies on Tamil cinema have focused on realism, melodrama, heroism, and regional politics. Scholars are currently exploring subaltern representation and caste identity. The makers of movies such as *Pa. Ranjith* and *Mari Selvaraj* are making a difference by making caste a problem and not a backdrop to their films.

People who have written about Dalit cinema claim that mainstream Indian movies do not portray Dalits accurately. They Ignored Dalit issues or portrayed Dalit characters as victims, comic relief, or just laborers. Anti-caste filmmakers are trying to change this by focusing on Dalit struggles, language, and experiences. Movies such as *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Karnan*, and *Maamannan* testify to how Mari Selvaraj challenges caste notions using symbols, animals, and folk traditions.

Mari Selvaraj's cinema has been written about as more than just depicting violence. They look at the mental issues Dalits face every day. They must endure humiliation, social exclusion, and survival. *Bison Kaalamaan* is a film that brings together sports and caste realities. This film, unlike sports films that only celebrate individual success, deals with athletic ambition and questions of dignity, mobility, and social acceptance.

Most studies on caste and sports in Tamil society have focused on discrimination and exclusion. Few studies have examined how sports movies reflect caste anxieties and social mobility. This study attempts to fill that gap by analyzing how Kabaddi in *Bison* becomes a symbol of resistance, self-respect, and freedom from oppression.

Scholars like B.R., Gopal Guru, and Sharmila Rege According to Ambedkar, Dalit assertion does not involve representation. It is about regaining historical agency and voice. This idea is reflected in Mari Selvaraj's film through the presentation of Dalit characters as people, not just symbols. Therefore, this study looks at *Bison* as both a movie and a socio-political statement in Tamil cinema.

Sports as an Impetus in Kittan's Journey

Mari Selvaraj used sports as a motivating factor in the movie to help the protagonist move past this

struggle and toward bigger goals. When Kittan tries to make sense of the world around him and finds himself helpless, the scene shifts to him running, which is more than just a coping strategy. He starts to run in a scene when he isn't chosen for the national team, demonstrating how running is more than just a way for him to train it's also a way for him to express himself during difficult times and deal with his inner turmoil. Unlike previous sports films, this one does not center on a particular opponent. He embodies the character, showing great effort and dedication, and his reactions often speak louder than his limited dialogue. Selvaraj does not discuss how Kittan's opponent teams or players were selected over him. He does not give his opponents any moral undertones to support Kittan's need to defeat them.

The film emphasizes that Kittan is fighting his own war against the reality of his life rather than a team or individual. He and the narrative do not care about his opponents' caste, village, or nation. As Kittan advances from his school team to the village and inter-zone levels and beyond, the movie includes multiple Kabaddi bouts. The major focus is Kittan's performance and his desire to do better. He never loses motivation regardless of the opponent. Kittan must be exceptional and consistently demonstrate his abilities to be acknowledged, established, and chosen.

It is also crucial to remember that Kittan's accomplishment was made possible by the help he received from different people at different stages of his journey. When his father asks Kittan why he returned home during a riot in the hamlet, Kittan erupts with anger and frustration. They asked me to return home. Where would I go after returning home? "Why did they ask you to go?" asks Pasupathi, leaning in with worry. Why did your name not appear on the final roster for the national team? "It could be anything – money, caste, religion, politics, anything," Kittan says, lowering his voice. It is unknown how he will react to this. Despite the riot, he will not go because he is worn out from fleeing since he was a child to be accepted as a fellow human being and to get to a place where no one can erect a fence around him. The phone call confirming his selection to the national squad was the only way to get him out of the conflict-ridden village when he was adamant about staying.

Kittan was prohibited from competing, even after attending the Asian Games in Japan. Every time the final match between India and Pakistan is broadcast, Selvaraj openly condemns this fabricated idea of rivalry. His position is still unambiguous: it is not about the opponent but rather about Kittan and whether he will be able to play after all his hardships, opening the door for others who are similar to him. Mari Selvaraj subtly conveys important messages, like how achieving basic necessities often comes with upward mobility, exemplified by Kittan's house getting electricity and a telephone as he progresses in Kabaddi

A Pursuit of Introspection and Dialogue Delivery

What forces Dalits to express who they are, both to others and to themselves? Is self-assertion different from explaining oneself? In contrast to the dominant narrative, does self-explanation support Dalit subjectivity or not? Selvaraj's writings, particularly his book *MarakkaveNinaikiren*, make it clear that he revisits his early life and experiences in order to interact with them more critically. His ability to reflect on himself is one of his greatest storytelling abilities, and this is evident in his films, as each protagonist recalls their early experiences. These recollections provide a basis for comprehending the character, demonstrating how an adult is a continuation of their childhood experiences. "Why is all this hatred and caste difference fixed on an individual even before he is born, before his father and great-grandfather were born?" He asked himself after each incident, which included seeing the first murder as a schoolboy, having his hand broken by a group of unidentified dominant caste men, being suspected of killing Kandasamy (Lal), and having his name removed from the selection list. Throughout the movie, he keeps asking "Why?" rather than making a decision or choosing a side. Kittan's questions become unconventional, critical, and compulsive. Selvaraj expresses his want for a conversation between a Dalit man and a dominant caste guy with caste pride in addition to self-reflection. He sees this interaction as a conversation between two equal people, two points of view on the same plane.

Even if such a scenario seems idealistic or even unattainable, Selvaraj is adamant about it. Even

while the caste system may not change and the concerns posed by this interaction in his films may go unaddressed, the act of posing these queries becomes crucial. Selvaraj's decision to omit any interaction between Kittan and Pandiaraja, a Dalit leader who defends the rights of his own caste group, is noteworthy. Instead, he depicts multiple interactions between Kittan and Kandasamy, the leader of the ruling caste, to portray his idea of discourse through film—exchanges that might not be feasible in real life. Conversely, Selvaraj views communication as a positive step rather than an alternative to revenge. He provides a novel paradigm of Dalit subjectivity that highlights the significance of dialogue among disputed populations. He hails from a caste-driven rural area, and made it apparent in his earlier film, *Karnan* (2021), that revenge is unavoidable and that Dalits have historically retaliated against caste violence in a variety of ways, frequently at great personal expense.

He goes one step further and asks the audience what happens when a Dalit who has experienced caste violence begins to advocate for ideological discourse to effect social change. Eradicating caste injustice's many layers requires more than just discussing it, even though dialogue remains crucial. Kittan is unable to understand why these injustices persist, but the same questions are posed to everyone constrained by caste pride, urging them to look beyond their caste identity and ask why such divisions, animosity, and disputes among people have been created and maintained. Despite its utopian nature, Selvaraj's cinematic vision is influenced by this critical desire for interaction.

Bison in Relevance with Contemporary

Tamil Nadu's socioeconomic history has been influenced by caste conflicts. Tamil Nadu's southern districts in particular are notorious for their heinous acts of brutality against Dalits. One of the most recent caste crimes in southern Tamil Nadu was the (dis)honor killing of Dalit IT expert Kavin Selva Ganesh by his girlfriend's family. The girl's parents are from the prominent Maravar community and work as police officers. Because it depicts the contemporary state of caste violence in southern Tamil Nadu, *Bison* is politically important. *Bison* is

set in the broader background of the ongoing caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu's history, even if honor killings are not mentioned. The Dalit-Nadar violence that occurred in southern Tamil Nadu in the 1990s and early 2000s is really referenced by the Pandiaraj-Kandasamy rivalry in the film. The film skillfully alludes to the disagreements, reprisals, and conflict between the Pannaiyar family and Dalit leader Pasupathi Pandian. Additionally, this story has been well portrayed through the lives and hardships of the Dalit protagonist Kittan, who was motivated by the life of Arjuna Award-winning Kabaddi player Manathi Ganesan.

Dalit Aesthetics

The film's structure is based on the idea of Dalit aesthetics and societal nuances. Mari's filmography follows a particular pattern or predetermined formula, as numerous critics have noted. Additionally, Mari's films, especially *Bison*, have been criticized for the recurrence of these motifs. However, what does this pattern mean? Mari's cinematic approach is based on the heroic depiction of Dalit images, symbols, gods, and belief systems; this is not an artistic limitation. These are, in fact, counter-narratives against the epistemic violence in cultural representation that has been produced for years by mainstream cinema. The assimilation of Dalit socially significant animals into cinematic aesthetics and their symbolic portrayal are fundamentally political acts. It is a deliberate aesthetic of resistance and a novel technique amid the established imaginations of mainstream filmmaking, despite its frequent appearance in his films.

To create a counterpublic debate, one of Mari's films, *Bison*, challenges the conventional patterns, methods, and aesthetics of mainstream filmmaking. It challenges the morality, prevailing viewpoints, and public conscience developed in movies throughout history. Therefore, Mari's substance and politics, rather than its design, are the real problems for critics. They are also brought on by the anti-caste politics prevalent in popular culture and the public realm.

Veteran filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan has made gendered and casteist comments about prospective Dalit and female filmmakers, claiming that if they receive government funding for their

work, they should receive “special” training. Because it shares worries about the utilization of public money for underprivileged areas, this viewpoint is essentially casteist. This also originates from the idea that only members of higher social classes who are “naturally” skilled can make movies, and that members of lower social classes lack the abilities or “merit” to do so. The critique of Mari based on the “patterns” in his films is motivated by a similar Savarna perspective. This is because Mari has directed films that challenge prevailing ideologies, cultures, and political systems while also making them profitable. None of the critics would have cared about the style, subject, or quality if his films had been box office failures.

Because it contradicts the Gramscian notion of common sense, the pattern used in his films is useful from a political perspective. The new complaints ignore the identities of Mari, Vedan, Arivu, and Dhruv, who are crucial characters in the film, and instead concentrate only on the “fair” skin of non-Dalit female performers. Even the skin tones—or lack thereof—of the female actresses in Mari’s films seem to unnerve the public since they do not conform to casteist ideals. It is casteist to associate Dalits with dark bodies; why do people never ask non-Dalit directors why they do not use Dalit or dark-toned actors? Why are Dalit filmmakers the only ones to bear this burden? How can the lack of representation of Dalits and artists of color be attributed to Dalit filmmakers who joined the industry after years of hardship? The caste-ridden society at large is the source of these unjust judgments. Moreover, who determines that characters with dark complexions or exclusively Dalit performers should be portrayed?

However, why is this inquiry primarily directed at Dalit filmmakers if it is motivated by democratic concerns about the lack of Dalits or Dalit women in the film industry? Why are the top filmmakers, who have long dominated the film business, not questioned? It is difficult to understand the relationship between caste and color in India. Comparing or equating the two is insufficient to address the more significant political issue of representation. Indians have a variety of complexion tones, ranging from brown to dark.

It is impossible to identify a particular caste with so many dark brown tones. Depending on the needs of the character, a director should have the discretion to present a character in any shade of brown or dark shade. However, it is important to consider a character’s stereotypes in the context of the narrative. For example, in the Malayalam movie *Odiyan*, the upper-caste antagonist is portrayed as having a very dark complexion, which reinforces unfavorable preconceptions about individuals with dark skin. However, the situation is entirely different in *Bison*. Regardless of their socioeconomic status or skin tone, Mari believed that Rajisha’s and Anupama’s roles were suitable means of delivering his broader political message.

Dalit actors should have equal opportunities in the larger film industry and be cast as Vanniyars, Nairs, Brahmins, or characters from any social class, regardless of their complexion, using the makeup and other cinematic techniques available to them, as some Dalit intellectuals have already noted. This makes the movie more democratic and absolute as a modern art form, setting it apart from caste-color binary discussions.

The first Dalit to appear in a movie is PK Rosy, who portrayed a Nair woman. Because of her role, she was beaten by caste Hindus and had to leave Kerala. Actors from diverse backgrounds are excitedly awaiting parts in movies helmed by Dalit filmmakers like Pa and Mari SelvarajRanjith. It is an elite plot to undermine the political discourses created by Dalits to ignore these historical and modern realities and limit the discussion to the “fair” female leads in their film. Directors like Mari are genuinely challenging this kind of caste essentialism. “No one will write your name in history, but you have to write your own,” a character in the film *Bison* says, alluding to people like Pa. Ranjith and Mari Selvaraj who are bringing this philosophy to life through their films.

The Animals Speak for the Land

Mari’s films are based on symbolism. The dog in *PariyerumPerumal*, horse in *Karnan*, pig in *Maamannan*, and bull in *Bison* are examples of animals that are more than just props in his films. Each creature embodies the defiance of the subaltern’s silent scream. Even love has an earthy scent, and in the midst of

violence, tender poetry is created by flowers and fallen petals. Dhruv Vikram, expressing everything through his body, becomes a living metaphor for a Maadan whose silence roars louder than words. Mari responded with quiet resolve, “Your life is different from mine,” in response to a journalist’s question that was riddled with caste prejudice at a recent press meet. I cannot satisfy everyone. I am a resident of this country. I have the right to tell the stories that affected me, my father, and my grandfather and I will tell them until my last breath.”

This powerful retort encapsulates the essence of *Bison*, an ancestral cry, an unflinching archive of pain passed down through centuries of caste oppression. The ingrained hierarchical mindset that continues to agitate and question Mari’s narratives is reflected in the journalist’s boldness. *Bison* stands as a testament to his unwavering commitment to storytelling that amplifies the lived experiences of marginalized communities. In addition to defending Mari’s right to reclaim and retell the history of his community in the face of attempts to silence him, the film asserts caste prejudice through an honest depiction of systemic injustice.

Bison A Remarkable Milestone in Filmart

Bison is held as an eccentric film which carries out the hard feelings of a young lad who is aspiring in the game of Kabaddi. In particular, the way the flick was carried out was warm and engaging for the spectators. The upholding of the Dalit society was handled circumspectly. The storyline of *Bison* is balanced between the suppression of Dalit society in sports and counter-violence between the upper and lower societies.

This film cogently shows the hierarchy of enmity that a downtrodden social sportsman faces. It lends a sturdy statement from the side of the oppressed society to emphasize the sport gut of a nation as democratic. The screenplay of the film was so gripping that it was a captivating, seat-edge, thrilling experience, and the best part is that cultivating this kind of screenplay in a sports genre flick is quite magnificent. In the arena of the directorial approach, the finest screenplay is one that connects and correlates every metaphorical element of the film that carries out the core idea of the film.

As in a typical Mari Selvaraj film, the animal reference in the screenplay, which canotates the story line, was enhanced and made reasonable both mythologically and technically. By assisting the ideology of the writer, the cinematographer K. Ezhil Arasu delivered a magnum opus from his history of works. The artists also lend their potent efforts in their acting Dhruv Vikram, Pasupathy, Anupama Parameshwaram, Rajisha Vijayan. Especially Pasupathy plays a key role in taking the story as an odd fish from the stereotypical sports flick. By summarizing the content, the flick is like chalk and cheese in the decade. All other sports films take a similar approach, but *Bison* is a remarkable milestone in the film industry.

Conclusion

Bison Kaalamaadan is an important movie in contemporary Tamil cinema because it changes the way we think about sports movies. Consequently, they become stories about politics and society. The film tells the story of Kittan. How he feels emotionally exhausted, strong, angry, and hopeful. This demonstrates the reality of Dalit communities living in a caste-based society. The movie is not about an athlete who wins; it is about the deeper struggle for respect, to be seen, and to be treated like a human being.

The film’s refusal to depict caste violence as merely a conflict between good and evil is one of its strengths. Instead, director Mari Selvaraj shows how caste affects life, opportunities, relationships, and what people want to achieve. Kabaddi is not a sport; it is also a symbol of moving forward, surviving, and being strong. Kittan’s determination shows the struggle of people who are marginalized and who are always fighting to be included.

The movie also shows how important it is to think about things. Remember the past when fighting against caste. Mari Selvaraj combines symbols, folk art, realistic emotions and criticism of politics to challenge the way of making movies. He creates a way of making movies based on the experiences of ordinary people by utilizing images of animals, landscapes, and the countryside. According to this study, *Bison Kaalamaadan* is not a film about sports or caste issues. It is a movie that says something about

who we are, about resisting, and about remembering our past. The film opens up possibilities for Dalit people to be represented in mainstream cinema and adds to the conversation about caste, culture, and social justice in India. *Bison Kaalamaadan* is a movie that helps us think about *Bison Kaalamaadan* and its impact on society. *Bison Kaalamaadan* is a movie that shows the importance of *Bison Kaalamaadan*, in Tamil cinema.

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