

## JALLIKATTU PROTESTS AS A RAW MATERIAL FOR POPULAR MUSIC

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### Abstract

This paper aims to look at the growth of the individual music albums that gained popularity parallel to Jallikattu protests that happened in Tamil Nadu in the beginning of the year 2017. While looking at the music albums, this paper critically looks at the more than 50-year-old middle caste dynamics in Tamil cinema which eventually penetrated into these contemporary music albums. Jallikattu, the game itself sustains because of the caste hierarchy in the Tamil society. That was one of the main reason for the huge response in the form of protests for Jallikattu ban in TamilNadu. This paper tries to look at the politics behind the fact that Jallikattu sudden becomes an efficient subject matter for a large number of Tamil music albums.

### Introduction- Jallikattu protests of 2017:

The Jallikattu protests that had happened in the last few weeks in the month of January, 2017 in TamilNadu, was a new phenomenon in the state. This even led the rest of the country to turn and look at the state with curiosity. It all started on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, in Marina beach in Chennai by some college students (Sundaram, 2017). This was a reaction to the arrest of 200 protesters in the town of Allanganallur, Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, which happened on 16<sup>th</sup> January (The News Minute, 2017). This later spread to all the cities in TamilNadu. This intense protests led the then TamilNadu Chief Minister, Mr.O.Pannerselvam, to forward a drafted ordinance to the Centre by January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016 itself. And on the very same day the Centre approved the bill without recommending any changes, and all that remained was for it to be signed by the President of India (Hindustan Times, 2017). One should say that within a span of week this issue reached the Centre which was not possible with any other issue (for issues like farmers' suicide, Vardha cyclone, drought which happened at same time period) Looking at the lakhs of people coming together major political parties and even Tamil Cinema came forward to show their solidarity. This issue became nothing but very 'popular'.

### **The 'Jallikattu' fad in Tamil cinema industry:**

This issue became like a 'fad' that the Tamil Cinema Industry found this as a potential market. Some directors started scripting their upcoming movies under the major theme of Jallikattu. Tamil Film director Vetrimaran announced about his next film based on Jallikattu which will be derived from the 1958 book VadiVasal written by C.S.Chellappa. And also director Amir started directing his upcoming film, 'Sandhanathevan' starring South Indian actor Arya. The song 'Jallikattu' composed by music director Yuvan Shankar Raja with lyrics of lyricist Vairamuthu had become very popular during the 'Jallikattu season' (Ravi, 2017).

Jallikattu became a theme not just for Tamil movies but also for individual music videos. The Jallikattu protest itself being majorly a social media driven protest with a large number college going youngsters, a large number individual music videos started showing up in YouTube.

### **The trend setter:**

In the similar manner, 'Takaru Takaru' a 2015 music album, by the artist HipHop Tamizha - Adhi became popular for the second time during the Jallikattu protests. HipHop Aadhi and his research team behind his music album even became political figures during the Jallikattu protests.

This music album took up the issue of Jallikattu and explained how the corporates were involved in the ban of Jallikattu. The music album argues that the Jallikattu ban can favour the corporates as they can buy the bulls that are otherwise used for Jallikattu and send them to slaughter house. They will eventually get to take over the milk-production industry as they have the patents for artificial insemination. These arguments are being put forth parallel to the mainstream Tamil Cinema narrative which one could notice in the music video. This way, the seemingly logical argument towards the Jallikattu ban in the form of music video reached the youngsters in a smooth manner.

### **The Dravidian politics and Tamil cinema:**

It is crucial to deeply look at the whole concept of 'mainstream Tamil Cinema narrative' that I had mentioned earlier in this essay. What we call as mainstream narrative has its roots in the 1960s of the Tamil Nadu politics. That was the period when the DMK (Dravida Munetra Kazhagam) party evolved, which claimed to follow Periyar's Non-Brahminism movement. But people who critically look at this would know that DMK actually fought against Brahminism to find a place for the dominant middle caste to find an economic and political status within the casteist Tamil society. They might speak against Brahmins but would still never speak about Dalit emancipation or caste system itself, as their main goal was to take up the place of Brahmins. After Periyar, it became a misguided movement led by the DMK leaders like Anna Durai, MGR and Karunannidhi. This led to the people from other castes which stood in the next position after Brahmins like Mudaliar, Chettiar, Nadar, Gounder, Vanniyar, Thevar etc., to fight for their power (R.Muthukumar, 2009).

During the period of late 1970s and early 1980s the dominant middle castes in the name of DMK were in their peak. They had power and economy with them. The film directors from villages of these middle castes started depicting villages. They claimed to depict village in a realistic manner. They called it realistic cinema (*Yedhartha Cinema*). Their village reality was the representations of their own castes. They would often talk about their caste pride. Director

like Bharathi Raja of that period from the dominant middle caste Thevar spoke about his own caste in his movies. These films even claimed to hold the nativity. The nativity that they spoke was nothing but the things like status, power, manner in which they protect their women and caste pride that they had within the villages. One could see this in movies *Chinna Gounder*, *Thevar Magan*, *Vedham Pudhidhu* etc., (Rajangam, 2016) All these movies never questioned Brahmins. They would either project Brahmins as the purifiers of their barbaric culture or dalits would be portrayed in a demeaned manner. In the same line, there were other movies that would assert their caste identity by showing their conflicts within their caste. The hero and villain would be from same caste (*vattaram*) (Rajangam, Vattaram Ennum Mayyam, 2016). They would fight for power and status. The native cinema became a 'brand name', that many cinemas started emerging under the similar theme speaking through the eyes of certain particular dominant middle castes.

This trend has been thriving till now that all the contemporary famous Tamil film actors like Rajini Kanth, Kamala Haasan, Vijay, Ajith Kumar, Vickram, Surya, Dhanush, Simbu and Karthi would have definitely taken up a movie that represents these castes. Some of the movies like *Thirupaachi*, *Red*, *Dhool*, *Vel*, *Aadukalam*, *Kaalai*, *Paruthi Veeran* etc., reached the people in a great manner. These movies did not have any distinct stories but all these movies repacked the same old middle-castes realities that became the common sense of the Tamil audience.

### **Traces of the Dravidian politics in the Tamil music albums:**

When HipHop Aadhi walks into the camera by flaunting his big moustache in folded sleeved shirt and white dhoti, he re-asserts the caste identity spoken from late 1970s onwards. The lyrics like '*Meesaiyathan Murikikittu Povom, Ethirikoottam Sedhari Ottam Odum*' which means, 'When we flaunt our moustache our enemies tend to run off terrified' evokes the same masculine element that dominant castes tries to project through the movies. The style of language, aggressive fight, body language, projection of their culture in a rich manner, their wealth, their status in the village, their pride while they speak about their relation with the bull and what Jallikattu means to them – all these could be seen in 'Takaru Takaru' music album.

Even for the six month research which HipHop Aadhi claims to have done, he has approached people like P.Rajasekaran – Tamil Nadu Jallikattu Federation, Karthikeya Sivasenapathy – Kangeyam Cattle research Foundation, Rajesh- Veera Vilaiyattu Meetpu Kuzhu ( Organization for the protection of Valorous Games), who were powerful businessmen with political background from same dominant middle castes. In fact, when the people protested for the Supreme Court to make the law permanent after the grant of ordinance from state government, they slowly withdrew from protest calling the protesters as anti-social elements.

Jallikattu itself is the sport of the people belonging to certain dominant middle castes. This game itself speaks about the pride of the men who belong those castes. Goundars play it in the northern districts, Vanniyars play it in the Western districts and the Thevars play it in Southern districts. The man who wins the bull will bring pride to his caste. The bull which is strong and that is qualified for Jallikattu will be symbol of their pride. And dalits strictly don't have a space to participate in this game. In that manner, the regional games like Jallikattu, Silambattam and Seval Sandai etc., were being played by the dominant castes. While representing these castes, these games were already being shown in Tamil cinemas since late 1970s (Rajangam, Vattaram Ennum Mayyam, 2016).

Like HipHop Tamizha – Aadhi’s music album ‘Takaru Takaru’ many songs emerged during and after the Jallikattu protests itself. The classical music singer Anuradha Sriram wrote and composed the music album ‘*Manavan Da*’ in which she dedicates the song to students who were the majority of the population that took part in the protest. She calls the Jallikattu protest a revolution led by students of ‘Tamil community’. While Anuradha Sriram being a Brahmin sings about this protests as an assertion of homogenized tamil community some composers speak about Tamil Nadu itself as a land of rich culture. The composer Karthick Iyer uses Manonmaniam Sundaranar’s lines to come up with his music video ‘*Tamizhanange*’. In the similar manner, the famous music director of *Kabali*, Santhosh Narayanan released the trailer for a seemingly similar kind of music album, ‘*Thai Engal Tamil Nade*’ came in the time of Jallikattu protests (Nath, 2017) (Ravi, 2017). ‘*Tamizhanange*’ and ‘*Thai Engal Tamil Nade*’ did not speak about Jallikattu itself, instead spoke only about Tamil Nadu. These two songs in a way made Jallikattu as a part of all whole Tamil Culture, which many youngsters in the protest arena were claiming.

Like this many more songs kept coming. As this particular protests had people from middle class urban people, many music videos in YouTube became popular. The assertion of the Jallikattu by the youngsters was an important phenomenon. But this same crowd never came down to the streets for any other issues. The college students from many of engineering colleges generally study in a very apolitical atmosphere where they questioning the administration or speaking about the social issues was not tolerated. These engineering colleges were in fact ran by wealthy businessmen from the same dominant middle castes (Hebbar, 2017). So the students from their castes tend to come there and study. So when they now finally come to streets and raise their fist, their questions become very superficial. Their cause itself becomes very vague.

### **Fad that became the fodder:**

Ravikumar, the anti-caste activist and General Secretary of Vidudhalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK- Liberation Pathers’ Party) argues that the youngsters of the Jallikattu protest were basically in the celebration mood. This middle caste urban population never spoke when national anthem became compulsory in cinema theatres. But now they have come to the extent of criticizing the Prime Minister Modi and burning the national anthem. This is possible for them only in a celebration mood. This is a fad and it will fade away soon. (RaviKumar, 2017).

This protest was an essential raw material for the commercial popular culture industry as it had only uncritical emotional elements in it. Thol.Thirumavazhavan, president of VCK supports the Jallikattu issue, as the assertion of the culture is important. But he says, speaking only about culture becomes a food for clever politics. When the youngsters emphasize only on the issues like beef eating, jallikattu, love jihad, they are in a way falling into the trap laid by parties like BJP, that makes people ignore larger politics (Thol.Thirumavalavan, 2017).

Like RaviKumar said, it was a fad and it had the capacity to trigger instant emotions among the people. Eventually, it became the subject for popular culture media that often sustains on the various social constructs. While the mainstream tamil media is dominated by the Brahmins and the other dominant middle castes, the subsequent political conditions which is inturn dominated by the same castes becomes a convinient subject matter of the media. Their perspectives and opinions are being affirmed and reaffirmed. Which are nothing but the intentions to hold the caste system. Caste is being passed on through various sources and in all

forms. One needs to critically look beyond a music video or a film to question the constructs and to encourage more real and egalitarian art forms.

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### AUTHOR'S BIO NOTE

The author, Adhvaidha Kalidasan, is from Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She had completed her graduation from National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai in Bachelor of Design in Knitwear Design. Being a design graduate she realized the importance of knowing the social perspective of art. So, she joined in M.A in Media and Cultural Studies in Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. While being a Cultural studies student she has not failed to understand that art doesn't have an end within itself but it comes out the materialistic realities of a society. Therefore, in these two years, that had been a launching pad for her larger aims, she had engaged in the areas of art, culture, fashion, design pedagogy, caste, political economy of cultural goods and media and communications.