

“Popularizing Patriotism: A study of the role of Vijayakanth’s films in popularising the theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema”

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Abstract

This study has been undertaken to investigate the role played by Vijayakanth’s films in popularizing the theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema. In order to validate the claim and establish the hypothesis, eleven of his films depicting the theme of patriotism has been studied / scrutinized. The study also attempts to provide a brief overview of theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema.

Key words: Tamil Cinema, Patriotism, Films, Vijayakanth

Introduction

“... with the myriad changes that India has seen in the years post-independence,... cinemas depiction of patriotism has not remained static either...”. (Mahadevan: 2008).

The projection / depiction of the theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema manifest itself through individual films. There are individuals who have played a pivotal role in popularizing / publicizing / immortalizing patriotism on the Tamil celluloid screen. The research paper is an attempt at documenting the contribution of the leading Tamil actor Vijayakanth who has popularized patriotism through the roles he has played.

Tamil Cinema and patriotism

Tamil Cinema has an extensive and prolific relationship with patriotism. The portrayal / depiction of the theme of patriotism in Tamil films during the British rule was predominantly achieved through a symbolic or

embedded/ allegorical message, in order to be 'safe' from the British censorship rules. During the British rule several Tamil films had successfully championed the task of depicting the theme / sentiments of patriotism through the plot structure, encoded dialogues and embedded actions / settings in the background.

Patriotism is often portrayed in popular culture as one of the greatest virtues a person can possess. Quite often, this notion of national pride, of unflinching devotion to one's country, of pledging oneself for the sake of the country has been enforced through drama, films, music and art. The idea of patriotism is ever evolving and so is its portrayal in mass media over the years. (Shekar: 2018)

Since its inception in 1916, Tamil Cinema has been projecting / depicting the theme of patriotism through the films eulogizing the freedom fighters, rebelling against the corruption /corrupt, religious harmony, fighting terrorism / terrorists and taking the reins of the corrupt / inept / discriminatory / undemocratic government in one's hands.

The projection / depiction of the theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema manifest itself through individual films. There are individuals who have played a pivotal role in popularizing / publicizing / immortalizing patriotism on the Tamil celluloid screen. The research paper is an attempt at documenting the contribution of a leading Tamil actor who has popularized the theme of patriotism through the roles he has played.

As an actor Vijayaraj Alagarwami popularly known as Vijayakanth, in his career spanning over forty years has donned several roles representing the patriotic fervour in a series of films. Vijayakanth, in a good number of films has defended the nation's security / sovereignty and honour through the characters of an army officer, Indian Police Service officer, Indian Administrative Service officer and a common man disgusted of the corrupt and their corruption taking law in his hands for the larger benefit of the nation. "Vijayaraj Alangarswami aka Vijayakanth is known for making films on patriotism in Tamil." (Rajguru: 2020)

"In the 90s, Vijayakanth made a conscious decision to include patriotism in his films which resulted in commercial success". (Janani: 2018) Films like *Captain Prabhakaran* (1991), *Sethupathi IPS* (1994), *Thayagam* (1996), *Ulavuthurai* (1998), *Vallarasu* (2000), *Narasimha* (2001), *Vaanchinatham* (2001), *Ramana* (2002), *Thennavan* (2003), and *Arasangam* (2008) stands testimony to how Vijayakanth through his films has popularized the theme of patriotism in Tamil Cinema and has become equivalent to Bharat

Kumar (Manoj Kumar), the actor, director and producer who popularized the theme of patriotism in Hindi Cinema.

Captain Prabhakaran (1991) directed by R K Selvamani is a story of Captain Prabhakaran, an Indian Forest Service officer, who is heading the task force formed in order to nab the notorious Veerabhadran from the forest of Sathyamangalam. Prabhakaran saves his wife and son from Veerabhadran when he tries kidnapping them. He arrests Veerabhadran who is later killed by his own accomplices. Eventually, Veerabhadran's accomplices, one police officer and another a collector are killed by the Captain Prabhakaran. He fights a legal battle in the case of killing two high-ranking government officials and is finally released. The film through the portrayal of an honest, fearless and efficient Indian Forest Service officer and his devotion towards duty and nation creates an atmosphere of patriotism. This film earned him the sobriquet "captain" in Tamil Cinema.

Sethupathi IPS (1994) directed by P.Vasu is a story of Setupathy, an Indian Police Service officer who belongs to family of officers / administrators who have served the nation in one capacity or another. Sethupathi in the film saves the life of the Prime Minister of India by catching Sivasubramaniam, a dreaded anti-national who has hatched a conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister of India upon his visit to Chennai. Likewise he successfully completes a series of missions and encounters to save and defend the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

Thyagam (1996) directed by A.R Ramesh is a story of Sakthivel who through his selfless and life threatening effort exterminates the terrorist whose only objective in life was to destroy India. The film begins with three dreaded criminals escaping from the jail and hijacking a plane. They force the pilot to take the plane towards Pakistan. The pilot negates it and lands the plane in mountainous region in Kashmir.

The passengers and the crew members are captured by the local dreaded terrorist who demands the secret / miraculous drug from one of the passengers who is a scientist named Abdul Salim. He threatens to kill everybody if he is not provided the life saving drug which stops / clots the blood from the cut /wound. The pilot and a passenger, a professional boxer attacks the terrorists and becomes successful in exterminating

most of them. The pilot, the boxer and others successfully escape the trap laid by the dreaded terrorist. Unfortunately, the boxer lays down his life at the time of an ambush attack, saving the life of the pilot and his co-passengers. Sakthivel and Abdul Salim's daughter Shakeela reach the site of the plane crash.

They stealthily enter into the plane, projecting themselves as passengers. Sakthivel asks the terrorist to release the innocent citizens in captivity, as he is the scientist they have been looking for. His trick works and he becomes successful in saving lives of all the citizens and exterminating the dreaded terrorist. Through the life threatening risk he took he saved a scientist / inventor of the life saving drug and many innocent citizens.

Ulavathurai (1998) directed by Ramesh Selvan is story of the Naval officer Vasanth Periyaswamy, who has been given the responsibility to investigate the mysterious death of several people in the sea. Naval officer Vasanth Periyaswamy lives in disguise as a car driver in order to safeguard his loved ones. He is doing so as his wife Meena was killed by an dreaded terrorist, who wanted officer Vasanth to release his partner / accomplice in exchange of his wife's life. Meena was killed by the terrorist and the other terrorists were released due to the corrupt officers. Since then he was working as a card driver, in order to assure his daughter's safety.

Vasanth after a long time starts the investigation and gets to know that a couple of international terrorist were hatching the conspiracy to spread chemical warfare in order to win over India. Officer Vasanth after a thorough life threatening under water investigation finds out the chemical prepared to unleash terror and chemical warfare. Finally, he nabs the foreign national and defuses the catastrophic situation. Officer Vasanth is lauded by his senior officials for saving lives of millions of Indians and bringing forth a unique conspiracy of the terrorists to destabilize the integrity / sovereignty.

Vallarasu (2000) directed by N.Maharajan is a story of Vallarasu, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, who has arrested a dreaded terrorist from Pakistan who wanted to unleash terror in India and destabilize it. After a thorough investigation and joining the links he was shocked to know that his father-in-law cum the

Commissioner of Police was working with the terrorist outfits. He takes a conscientious decision and shoots his father-in-law.

Vallarasu later on takes help of the youth who were wrongfully denied a job in the police service and exterminates few local anti-national elements. He starts his mission of exterminating Kandasamy, a rich man and Wasim Khan, who want to destabilize the country by spreading violence and terror. With the help and sacrifice of the trusted youngsters of Vallarasu, he achieves his objective of exterminating two major threats to the peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

Narasimha (2001) directed by Thirupathisamy is a story of Narasimha and undercover Army officer who is on a mission to save three Indian colonels. The film begins with Rasool Akhtar, a dreaded terrorist who wants to destroy India killing twenty Indian soldiers and kidnapping three Indian colonels. Narasimha gathers information about the dreaded terrorist and his accomplices D'Souza, Sharma, and Iranyan and exterminates them one by one.

In the concluding part of the film Narasimha finds out the whereabouts of Rasool Akhtar. He exterminates Rasool Akhtar and saves the three Indian colonels. By doing so he not only saves three precious / key Indian officials, but also averts a major threat to the nation.

Ramanaa (2002) directed by A.R.Murugadoss is a story of Professor who systematically eliminates the corrupt officers who have a caustic effect on public administration. Ramanaa with the help of his students establishes an Anti Corruption Force, with the objective of eliminating corrupt practises through vigilante acts. The group conducts a through inquiry into the corruption done by the government officials, there upon exterminate them and leave documented facts / evidence of the corruption on the dead body. Even though the film projects a kangaroo court like a mechanism which is anti-constitutional in nature, in order to punish the corrupt, it was received well by the audience. The film depicts patriotism through the extermination of the corrupt government officials and the anti-corruption wave it generated in the society.

Thennavan (2003) directed by A.M Nandakumar is a story of an Indian Administrative Service officer whose honesty and sincerity impresses the Prime Minister of India, hence he appoints Thennavan as the

Chief Election Commissioner of India. Thennavan suggests a five point agenda to the Prime Minister in order to conduct a free and fair election in the state of Tamil Nadu. Ilanthiraiyan, the present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu opposes the five point agenda of Thennavan as it will put an end to his corrupt and unethical practises. In order to gain the sympathy vote of the voters, Ilanthiraiyan plans a bomb blast in his election rally.

Upon knowing about the heinous crime of Ilanthiraiyan has committed, Thennavan stops the vote counting procedure. His act is challenged in a court where he provides incontestable evidence as a result of which Ilanthiraiyan and other culprits are sent behind the bars. Ilanthiraiyan's wife is made the Chief Minister as he is in jail. After a while she resigns from her position due to a conflict with her husband. During the campaign period Thennavan urges the voters not to vote any candidate of any political parties in order to save the state / country from the corrupt politicians and their corrupt practises. The Prime Minister is compelled to accept and implement the five point agenda and making five laws out of it.

Arasangam (2008) directed by R.Madhesh is story of Arivarasu, an Indian Police Service officer and a criminologist. Arivarasu has been roped in to investigate a case of an Anti Terror Squad officer who went on missing while he was on an important assignment related to the assassinations of key business magnets and scientists of India. An impactful investigation done by Arivarasu in multiple countries helps him to nab Martin Jayapal, the man who had hatched a conspiracy to destabilize India. By arresting a dreaded anti-national criminal, Arivarasu safeguards the national security of India.

Conclusion

Vijayakanth through his various roles as police officer, army officer, administrative officer in different government establishments and patriotic citizen wanting to save the country / society from corruption has indeed become an embodiment and mascot of the theme of patriotism and has contributed immensely in not only invoking the patriotic fervour but also popularizing patriotism / sensitizing millions of Indians about their national duties.

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