



Hunger Beyond Food: Exploring Class Hierarchy Through Kaaka Muttai

¹Dharshini N, ²Meera Kumar

¹ Student, ² Assistant Professor

¹ Department of Languages

¹, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Abstract: The Tamil film *Kaaka Muttai* (2015), directed by M. Manikandan and produced by Dhanush and Vetrimaaran, is a powerful story of two young boys from a Chennai slum who dream of eating pizza. This paper uses a qualitative and close analysis of film form. A simple childhood wish slowly reveals the deeper social truth of class difference and inequality in Indian society. This film shows how the desire turns into insecurity due to their appearance. This small moment clearly shows how social class still decides who belongs and who does not in the growing cities of India. Marxist theory, which explains how society is split between the rich and the poor, is used in this study to examine *Kaaka Muttai*. The movie illustrates how consumer society makes luxury (Pizza) seem accessible to some but unattainable for others. The dream of the poor and the comfort of the wealthy are symbolized by the pizza. Also, a postcolonial perspective enables us to understand how Western concepts and lifestyles, such as fast food, affect Indians' conceptions of modernity. *Kaaka Muttai* is more than just a movie because of its plot and characters. It serves as a societal mirror that challenges inequality and serves as a reminder that true progress is only possible when everyone is treated with equal respect and opportunities.

Key Words: Desire, Class Hierarchy, Inequality, Poor, Society

Introduction:

Kaaka Muttai (2015), directed by M. Manikandan, is a beautiful film that captures the everyday life, dreams, and struggles of two young boys from a Chennai slum. The movie clearly portrays the lifestyle, language and daily experiences of the people in the society. The small desire to taste pizza slowly develops into a clear picture of how class, poverty, and societal judgment impact people's lives. The boys look around them with innocence, and a passion to eat pizza made them realise how society sees and handles them. The turning point occurs when they save money to buy pizza, but are still not allowed to enter the store due to their appearance. The security and the supervisor easily abuse them just because they are from the slum. This was captured by one of the boys from that area and was released on the internet. This incident illustrates the profound impact of the class hierarchy in India. The boys' desire for pizza gradually lessens, not because it has vanished, but because society refuses to accept them.

A Marxist interpretation helps to reveal how the film shows the class hierarchy generated by capitalism. In the film, pizza is used as a metaphor of capitalist luxury, which the rich take for granted but the poor can only dream about. Even though the guys have saved money, their class identity prevents them from entering the pizza store. Their appearance, clothing, and language are used as "markers" of poverty by society to reject them. This represents Marx's claim that economic class determines who receives respect, opportunity, and mobility.

Using Postcolonial theory, the film explains how the presence of Western goods, such as pizza, develops desires in the lower classes. These desires are normal, but those in positions of social and economic power have control over their fulfilment. Postcolonialism made Western products become a part of everyday life in former colonies, mainly in India, yet only certain groups are permitted to consume them freely. The children's inability to enter the pizza store, despite having money, demonstrates how colonial power

systems continue to shape societal divisions. Western foods may be available everywhere, but the poor are not allowed to enjoy them due to the class hierarchy.

This paper studies *Kaaka Muttai* as a cultural and social text that highlights class inequality, innocence crushed by reality, and the everyday struggles of marginalised children.

Literature Review:

It is difficult to distinguish between films about children and films for children when we look at the whole corpus of Indian cinema. (Maity and Dey 5). So, *Kaaka muttai* clearly belongs to this category, using the innocence of childhood to expose class-based barriers, caste prejudice, and the social restrictions created by globalisation. The pizza shop happened to open near the place in their area where they used to play. Seeing the construction that was growing along with them clearly introduced a sense of belonging and a desire to explore the place and taste pizza. The society that created desire stopped them from enjoying it. In the class hierarchy, Children are more affected than adults. Their innocence is repaid by society with discrimination and detachment in their own spaces. The director M.Manikandan wants to project the injustice forced on the culturally and economically poor people. (Subradeeppan and Rabiyaath 216). When the movement like Marxism, colonialism, neorealism, realism, etc... happened in the world, film are the great media to bring it to the eyes of the audiences through its story. Now a days, many films are produced with good theme and reached the audiences very easy. (Subradeeppan and Rabiyaath 218).

Till today, India is under the influence of Colonialism, which makes people adapt to Western culture, especially in food. *Kaaka Muttai* is one such film where the two boys try to taste Western food and are discriminated against by society. The boys are doubly marginalised: by the colonisation and by the society. The pain of the two brothers is not loud or dramatic but quiet, constant, and deeply affected. Their suffering begins with small humiliations that society forces on them simply because they come from a slum. So, *Kaaka Muttai* reveals how postcolonial societies create a desire for Western products but decide who gets to enjoy them and who remains excluded. The scenes are treated as narrative material that helps reveal how society creates desire but restricts access based on class and background. The methodology uses a basic but detailed analysis of events and emotional signals to demonstrate how *Kaaka Muttai* acts as a visual narrative that exposes everyday inequities encountered by marginalised children.

Analysis:

In *Kaaka Muttai*, the entire narrative unfolds through the innocent experiences of two young brothers from a Chennai slum, whose simple wishes expose deep layers of social inequality. The boys' wants, such as their desire for a watch or their curiosity about pizza, reflect how childhood desires are shaped by the world around them. The excitement when kids first find pizza, their attempts to copy what they see in advertising, and their positive mood reflect a world of purity unspoiled by social hierarchy. A police officer even shouts at their father when he tries to have a conversation with his kids, demonstrating how authority treats slum families with disrespect. Their grandma attempts to fulfil her grandsons' desire to eat Pizza, illustrating how poverty pushes parents to protect children with minor lies. In a scene, a tree where the two boys used to eat crow's eggs is cut down to build the Pizza shop; the falling of the trees also symbolises the falling of hope of the boys. The boys' desire for pizza becomes the centre of the film's conflict. Despite collecting money, saving coins, and following the rules, they are still restricted from entering the shop simply because of their appearance and background. The pain of being rejected, even when they have enough money, reflects how society decides who belongs. Their innocence resurfaces again when they attempt to steal but fail, demonstrating that poverty has not eroded their sense of right and wrong. The death of the grandmother is the turning point. The younger sibling, who previously wet the bed, suddenly matures after experiencing poverty, grief, and the cost of dying. He stops wetting the bed and becomes emotionally mature overnight. Their desire for pizza decreases with time, not because it was childish, but because life has forced them to grow up. Their final taste of pizza loses all value since the cost of humiliation outweighs the pleasure of desire. What remains is the fact that in a class-divided society, even the most basic yearning of a child becomes a war against systems that refuse to treat them equally.

Insights:

Kaaka Muttai offers a powerful and sensitive portrayal of how class hierarchy and postcolonial influences shape the everyday lives of marginalized children. Through the simple desire of two young boys wanting to taste pizza, the film reveals how society creates

dreams but also builds barriers that prevent the poor from fulfilling them. The boys' repeated rejection at the pizza shop, the violence they face, and the political manipulation of their suffering show how class decides access, dignity, and opportunity. At the same time, the constant presence of Western food advertisements reflects how global culture enters local spaces while remaining inaccessible to those at the bottom. Their grandmother's death and the boys' sudden emotional maturity underline how poverty forces children to grow up too soon. In bringing together Marxist and postcolonial perspectives, this study shows that the film is not just about desire, but about injustice that shapes childhood itself.

References:

- [1] Kaaka Muttai. Directed by M. Manikandan, produced by Dhanush and Vetrimaaran, Wunderbar Films, 2015.
- [2] S.R. Shree Subradeeppan, and S. Saleema Rabiyyath. "Kaaka Muttai: The Reflection of the Society." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, vol. 6, no. 6, 1 June 2019, pp. 218–220.
- [3] Maity, Tias, and Sayan Dey. "The Aesthetics of Childhood Hunger and Dreams in Contemporary Indian Cinema: Representation of Children in Sahaj Paather Gappo, Kaaka Muttai and Stanley Ka Dabba." *Studies in South Asian Film & Media*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1 Apr. 2025, pp. 3–19.

