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Resistance against ostracization: An unbiased analysis on the institutional treatment of tribal groups as portrayed in *Jai Bhim*

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Abstract—*Jai Bhim* (2021), directed by T J Gnanavel, has piqued the interest of a broader audience due to its incisively political message as well as the title. One may envisage using the iconic Ambedkarite phrase to commodify Ambedkarite politics and exploit it for corporate goals. However, a more complex and controversial perspective of the film emerges after a deeper screening. The present research applies resistance theory to the political context within the film, namely the caste-based layering. Individuals sometimes strive to denigrate or look down on persons from the so-called lower castes. Such activities are frowned upon in the film, and they should be stopped in real life as well.

Keywords—caste, law, police, resistance, tribal.

Introduction

The film *Jai Bhim*, was launched on November 2, 2021, with Suriya playing the primary lead character of an attorney. The film opens with the primitive Irula community in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district, their dwellings, internal dynamics, and life in the villages, all of which are connected to their sustenance. The subsequent section begins when there is a disagreement between the police authority and Madras High Court attorneys. The demonstration is still going on, and additional activities are taking place on the ground. The cops and attorneys

had a brief conversational battle. The opposition is being led by attorney Chandru, a former Madras High Court justice K. Chandru. He was a college activist who later became a full-time Communist Party official after becoming a communist.

Mukul Kumar argues in their essay *Caste and Crime in Colonial India* that the British Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) established in 1871 enabled the identification, tracking, and regulation of India's criminal groups and eunuchs. The mechanism for alerting criminal communities was indiscriminate, and once the tribe was labelled "criminal," the convicted would be prohibited legal representation (Kumar 4). The statement of such deviant tribes told reporters that the racial group was "addicted" to non-bailable offences at the time (Kumar 10). The first scene of *Jai Bhim* perfectly captures this colonial desire for a duplicate administrative system. Through differentiating against the Koravas in Tamil Nadu, this plays on the biases of a Brahmanical state. It persistently perpetuates the prejudices of the imperial powers whose 'western' imprint a revitalised nationalism is meant to reject.

Jai Bhim further shines a spotlight on the topic of native landholdings and rights in India. The labelling of tribals as "orphans" refers to the role they have been forced to occupy inside the country (Kumar 12). It explains how the Indian state has mostly failed to fulfil the tribal community's needs, depriving them of their identities as Indian citizens and denying them access to civic utilities such as housing, food rationing, and treatment. It is a reflection on a twenty-first-century civilization that generates a mass of people who are permitted to live in the full swing of their primitivity while being deprived of vital resources for subsistence in the midst of a contemporary nation-state. At several points in the film, we see the executive and bureaucratic apparatus wielding undue authority and exploiting the interests of India's Scheduled Tribes. Another critical problem addressed in the film is the misery of police brutality and incarceration abuse against India's underprivileged caste people. While an instance of police brutality is a recurrent subject, the invasive and cruel depiction of physical violence in Gnanavel's *Jai Bhim* is uncalled for. The gore and brutal images that are liberally incorporated into many of the scenes appear to be an attempt to rationalise and excuse an issue that is all too common. They seem to be a clandestine attempt to persuade the Savarna audience of the "reality" of India's downtrodden caste divisions (Bhalerao par. 7).

The need to have to satisfy and accommodate to the Savarna population only serves to reinforce the oppressor's guilt and provides less room for contemplation among the elite caste audience. It completely removes the agency of the individual whose lived experiences of misery and torture are used to raise the oppressor's comradeship values. However, the resistance is clear across the plot and emotive language. Though the film vividly depicts the vilification of tribal groups in India, which is plainly presented through awful visuals, it makes no mention of casteist society's role in the maintenance of caste violence. Thus, although the identity of crime survivors is made public, the perpetrators are 'casteless' State tools whose caste identification is hidden. In a disturbing setting, *Jai Bhim* presents an antagonism, a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' (Brahmanical State and the Irular society). The aboriginal girl at Rajakannu's (K. Manikandan) burial accuses

Advocate Chandu (now Justice) of being complicit for the institutionalized murder of the men from the Irular tribe. The filmmaker vividly portrays and reinforces the adversarial connection between tribal people and the Brahmanical state, of which Advocate Chandru (Suriya) is a member:

This transforms into a rescue effort aimed at freeing the 'other' from the oppression of caste. Finally, a critical point to consider is whether films like *Jai Bhim*, which graphically depict caste crimes and are portrayed as epitomes of 'justice,' are genuinely important in holding Hindu society accountable for the realities of caste in India (Bhalerao para. 9).

Changing the attention to the film's plot, one discovers that the loss of oppressed lives is a precondition for a Savarna conception of 'justice.' In this scenario, Rajakannu's prison killing becomes a foundation for Sengini (Lijomol Jose) to seek 'justice' and a reality of persuasion for the Savarna guardians to feel that the Irular family is deserving of 'justice.' Consequently, we have seen over and again that bureaucratic and custodial killings of the downtrodden create conditions for summoning and enhancing the moral awareness of a casteist culture. It is also critical to recognise that seeing an isolated example like the one in *Jai Bhim* as a beacon of freedom for the downtrodden would be a major mistake. The real-life episode presented in the film is an outlier in a system skewed against the oppressed. Furthermore, we can see that neither Rajakannu nor Sengini, who are on the receiving end of society, are given much agency. However, we witness a lot of satisfaction attached to Advocate Chandru's labour at the expense of Rajakannu's life and Sengini's poor situations. While the film's biographical attention on Advocate Chandru's efforts is welcomed, balancing it with an obscene depiction of violence against the Irular group deprives them of control over their actual circumstances. It translates into a salvation effort aimed at freeing the 'other' from the oppression of caste. Finally, a critical point to consider is whether films like *Jai Bhim*, which graphically depict caste crimes and are portrayed as epitomes of 'justice,' are genuinely important in holding Hindu society accountable for the realities of caste in India.

Resistance from Ostracisation; when the Guardians are Corrupt

The study investigates the parameters of discourse of contemporary tribal movements, with an emphasis on the rise of new left groupings. These movements' new areas of activity encompass a reiteration of identity, a battle to reclaim control over resources, a reassessment of the political sphere, and a reinvention of development. The concepts of development, nation formation, and human (individual) rights have been the primary contributors in the increasing disintegration of tribal peoples' survival methods. The growing ideas within ethnic movements indicate a shift away from opposition and toward ethno-development. The role of judiciary is important here; as *Jai Bhim* (2021) rightly explains: "It doesn't matter if it's seven or seven thousand. Everyone has the right to seek justice, regardless of the number of victims. And this court has the authority to provide them with justice" (*Jai Bhim* 01:14:51 - 15:10).

When tribal people stand up to battle and fight despite repression and subversion, their courageous resistance serves to emphasise the tribal people's horrible conditions. This is the result of official policy, constructive alienation,

facilitated enslavement, and indulgence in genocide. In some conflicts, they are at the vanguard; in others, they are an integral part of and in the leadership of larger formations of workers, displaced people, landless people, and migratory workforce. Non-party left groupings lead some tribal struggles. Some are represented by political group fronts, while others are represented by issue-based mass unions or non-profits. The great diversity of tribal conflicts reflects differences in material conditions, forms of production, social structures, levels of domestic and foreign communication, mass base, and their seeming confined nature. This does not subject itself to easy categorization. Tribal uprisings, like peasant movements, are found to be consistently local, confined, and tied to a dominating tribe or set of tribes during this stage of social formation. However, in the last decade, we have seen the emergence of nation-wide tribal activities. The similarities in the objectives and the underpinning surface of these battles indicate that they are situated in the same socio-political basis. This reflects a shared sense of poverty, estrangement, and humiliation. It demonstrates all of the tell-tale indicators of rising economic and political isolation within the framework of hegemony mixed with aristocratic tyranny, pointing to the basic unity of all tribal movements. The same is reflected in "Protest, Resistance and Ethno-political Movements" from *Block-4 Contemporary Issues*:

We express our opposition to the prevailing political, economic, or social framework in a variety of ways. Mahatma Gandhi donned a loin cloth to indicate his opposition to materialism as reflected by the former British India government's economic policies. A friend of mine from a Brahmin community is so opposed to Brahminism that he once took away the sacred thread he was wearing. Many educated modern women do not wear vermilion or kangan as a symbol of defiance to patriarchy in our society (Khirood 2).

Jai Bhim is founded on the actual incident of an Adivasi lady seeking to uncover her husband's whereabouts. He was wrongly accused of stealing, brought into police custody, and reported missing. *Jai Bhim* is a soul-stirring movie that exposes the terrible face of caste discrimination, police violence, and the unaccountability of judicial systems to ordinary people: "Thieves refuse to disclose their crimes until the cops proudly display their batons" (47:27 - 28). Poor families are waiting for the return of their family members from prison in the very first scenes. To their sorrow, all men from the poorest parts of the population are separated on the grounds of their low caste position and scattered around several police stations, where they are charged with fake cases as the police fail to apprehend the genuine criminals within the time limit. Police had falsely charged Twelve persons. One of their families, with the assistance of a Communist official, files an appeal with the court via a lawyer, Chandru, played by actor Surya. As a result, the battle to establish their innocence and expose the bogus allegations and unscrupulous authorities involved is begun.

Advocate Chandru, a rebel and Communist, leads public protests for numerous topics and stands in courtroom for abuses of human rights. Sengeni seeks him to trace her missing spouse. She is accompanied by an adult literacy programme teacher. The film documents the proceedings in court and, in the process, unravels the mystery surrounding Sengeni's spouse Rajakannu's disappearance, and seeks justice for Rajakannu's prison torture and execution. The film is unique in that it highlights the predicament of Adivasis, who are denied

fundamental rights, opportunities, and amenities. Even the most fundamental right to life is not secured for the poorest members of society. Everyone appears to have indisputable ability to exploit, discriminate against, and mistreat them. The simple, nomadic group, known for capturing rats and snakes and nursing snakebites, is subjected to harsh types of maltreatment at work, in the suburb, and in government offices.

The screenplay broadens and alters the prosecution's backdrop into a chronicle of many challenges of oppression and exploitation experienced by disadvantaged groups, as well as a lack of agency and justice for the community. The clip shows the horrible practise of criminalising a whole tribe by placing fraudulent accusations on them via Sengeni's tragic and unyielding battle. The film is merciless in its depiction of 'third degree' torture in police stations to pressure individuals into acknowledging criminal acts they did not commit and, as a result, facing prosecution. If the victims refuse to accept the bogus allegations, the harsh tortures result in incarceration, like in the instance of Rajakannu, and scare the entire town under the guise of their escape from the police headquarters. Another tactic is to subject women to sexual torture in order to force males to confess to similar crimes.

From the start, the picture maintains that the case of Rajakannu is not an isolated instance of police overkill, but rather that the Adivasis are often accused on bogus accusations. It is clear in the open discussion where Adivasis are usurping before IG Perumalsamy that they are significant victims of police brutality. A lady describes the agony of custodial sexual abuse perpetrated on her in order to subject her husband to false accusations. Pachaiyamma, Rajakannu's sister, is stripped naked and raped in front of her brother and cousins at station. Sengeni and Pachaiyamma are both sexually abused by the cops. Furthermore, the police violated the law by detaining a lady (Sengeni), who was in full term pregnancy at the time, and physically abusing her. The film reinforces how police brutality is gendered.

To illustrate the nature of resistance in *Jai Bhim*, lets see what Congress leader C. Rajagopalachari said during the Vaikom Movement on July 27, 1924. As individuals from disadvantaged castes protested using public highways to reach the Mahadeva shrine in Vaikom, tensions erupted among the ruling castes. Rajagopalachari said as he travelled and addressed the favoured classes:

Let not the people of Vykam or any other location fear that Mahatmaji wants caste eliminated... Mahatmaji does not advocate for the abolition of the caste system, but he does advocate for the abolition of untouchability... Mahatmaji forbids you from dining with Thiyas or Pulayas. What he wants is for us to be prepared to touch or be near other humans in the same way that you would approach a cow or a horse... Mahatmaji wants you to regard so-called untouchables in the same way you regard cows, dogs, and other innocent creatures (Jeffrey 13).

The visual exemplifies the difficulties of evidence-based judicial trial in a surprising way, through litigation process. Everything must not only have proof, but it must also be tested in court. Is it any simpler for victims or their families to oppose the authorities that be in institutional killings and false charges, where the keepers of law themselves are the culprits of the offense and have legitimate

authority and the backing of political authority? Even a known lawyer devoted to people, like as Chandru, had steep difficulties in pursuing the case and had to go to unusual lengths to establish the murder and bring Sengeni punishment. What would have occurred if it hadn't been for the help of IG Perumalsamy?

In other ways, the film, despite demonstrating police misconduct and incompetence, leans on the same institution and attempts to re-establish faith in it. T. Gnanavel, the director, claims that this is a success of legitimate means of fight. However, the fact is that it is not as straightforward as it appears. The dangers of this constitutional method for Adivasis, or any common people for that matter, are just too great. How often victims can knock on the court's gate? How many people have met a committed advocate like Chandru? How many people can endure this agonising and lengthy struggle? These are major unknown variables. However, within the constraints of feature films, the film tries to be truthful in depicting the role of the Communist Party through struggles, court proceedings, and helping the advocate-cum-Communist in finding the relevant paperwork and bringing the case to the forefront, even as it portrays Chandru as the ringleader behind this expedition of fair trials. As noted in the film: "We must speak the truth. "We shall be saved by the truth" (01:10:28 – 29).

Nobody can really deny that the film overtly identifies Chandru as a Communist by portraying him demonstrating alongside others carrying red flags. Not to mention hanging posters and handing out booklets with the hammer and sickle emblem, mingling with individuals wearing red shawls, even sitting in front of the Communist Party headquarters or demonstrating in presence of the Toilers' monument on the seashore. Photographs of Karl Marx, Ambedkar, and Periyar hang in his workplace. While he listens to Sengeni's narrative, Karl Marx's figure is beside him, and the video ends with Lenin's monolith. The film portrays Communists positively by demonstrating their passion and loyalty to the people's struggle. Apart from that, even though Chandru's persona is depicted to be vital, the film is anti-idolatry, as demonstrated in a scene where people bring bouquets to Chandru's house and he exhibits the sign that states "There is no God here, therefore do not send roses and scarves" (38:52 – 55). Chandru's austere lifestyle - modest dwelling, self-cooking, congested train or motorbike travel, eating and sipping tea in little shops, and hosting Sengeni and kid in his house - all speak to his Communist manner of life. His allegiance to Communism is undeniable. Any films starring such individuals are uncommon in popular cinematography.

Aside from the subject of custodial killing, the video addresses other Adivasi local concerns such as pattas for land, compulsory labour, low-wage factory work, illiteracy, and humility. The film promotes a pro-labor and anti-establishment position via various examples and protests, such as those of Aavin workers who were fired for requesting a salary raise. At various times, the video gives the idea of khaki uniform vs red shawl, and it is a homage to Marx and Ambedkar. Overall, there is a small red spark that alleviates Sengeni's and the Adivasi group's anxieties of being abandoned even if they are slaughtered.

Conclusion

To those still living in India's major cities, racism in the West and the BLM protest are far more popular subjects of conversation than any social injustice occurring in our own nation. The city-bred generation is most likely blissfully oblivious that the notion of untouchability has always been a part and parcel of everyday society, rather than some old concept that was followed during our Vedic society's existence. This is where a film like *Jai Bhim* is so important. Equally crucial is the fact that a celebrity like Suriya is supporting it.

Even if it is accurate in its most basic form, promoting this film as a narrative of a lawyer's quest to win justice for a tribal lady is deceptive. It should only be advertised as a documentary of Justice K Chandru. In the first example, the picture suffers from a saviour complex. In the second situation, it turns a film about a true-life hero who ought to be known around the world. However, it remains a film about Suriya in the position of liberator. The prologue dives directly into Irula people's everyday routines and chat with a boisterous festive tone that tries too hard to make the notion that the cinematic events and mannerisms are expected to be handled routinely. It is a way of life; hence, it is acceptable from a sociological standpoint. Instead of treating it as normal, the film shows it as normal, and this projected normalcy instantly infantilizes its subjects. You can comprehend them from a distance. A superior plane is imagined from which your eyes downcast on them with sympathy and tenderness, which only appears when power hierarchy gets unsubtle and disrupts your idea of equality as a fundamental human right. After being socially ostracized, the individuals work under rigorous archetypical character constraints.

Your sympathy grows, and the film coerces you into believing in the victims' honesty. This, although accurate, is fatal to their subtlety as beings. The hero might be described as a noble truth-seeker with no materialistic ambitions. His subjects, on the other hand, are a never-ending stream of desperate individuals without money or access. Again, as an absolute fact, this is unproblematic; nevertheless, in film, every bit of information exists audio-visually. For example, if one says that Irular people are desolate and oppressed but the lawyer is wealthy, neither party is silenced. However, if I portray it in its diluted version, the lawyer's heroism takes the spotlight away from the oppressed victims and strips them of their nuanced individuality. The dominant tribes have had the benefit of ignorance, which has allowed them to pass judgement on the downtrodden castes with a paternal or master's glare. The simplest method to elicit pity is to portray the victims as benign, naive, and weak beings with basic attitudes and no agency. When compassion is aroused in this way, i.e., by emasculating them or comparing them to innocuous beasts, the liberal despot is able to usurp their agency under the guise of charity for his own self-interest.

The policemen here are the personification of malice. The cop who is upright and truthful is otherized. Tribals are the victims. The saviour is the hero. The prosecution is vicious or incompetent, with comedic demeanour. And the film is a tapestry of torturous scenes and foul play that, like *Visaranai*, are less bothered with portraying a harsh reality and more interested with deceiving the audience into a combination of wrath and despair while also satisfying their inquisitive

attention. The trouble is that a narrative about horrific violence against tribal people and a man's ground-breaking victory against the state should inspire discontentment in the fortunate caste-class groups, but all it handles to do is elicit ephemeral anger for three antagonists and a sharp rise of pity and compassion or empathy for the four victims, purely within the film's world. In the end, *Jai Bhim* is relegated to a collection of triggers designed to jolt its viewers out of their complacency while avoiding any type of contemplation.

History cannot be monopolised by a few community members. They also cannot be reserved. Only encounters, however, can define how those events will be portrayed in a documentary. The only way to cross this experiential gap is to take an ethnographic approach to retaining the complexities of events, whether legal or geopolitical, and presenting them as they transpired. In the preconceived ideas, all of the agents, such as performers, contributors, researchers, technologists, and so on, revolve around the narrative. *Jai Bhim* is one of many tragic situations in which the storyline is shaped around its actor in order to raise the gravity of his cinematography.

Based on their efforts, the initiatives reject the state's role as a protector of marginalised people and reassert the importance of struggle as their true bastion against the institution. The focus of these activities has switched from the acquisition of political authority in a rigorous formalistic sense to the proclamation of the desire to govern. Many have restored traditional systems of self-government, but with essential reforms to make them more gender equitable. As a result, they return governance to the public sphere, that is, to the people, in which they are the primary players, creating an independent domain whose survival is guaranteed by the masses. Their language, customs, and ideals empower rather than subjugate their inhabitants (Guha and Spivak 19). As a result, the organisations' practise investigates participatory, non-hierarchical, non-dominant social spaces, dispersed modes of strategic planning, and non-differentiated communal realms. Despite their commitment to economic, cultural and political unrest, these movements place a premium on developing places that facilitate the production of meaning. As a result, the movements attempt to establish a live link between the institutional, interpersonal, and political problems within an encompassing literary field, and even in its financial, ideological, and cultural struggles, the move maintains that it will not abandon the struggles for interpretation in regular activities.

The uprisings rejuvenate and work on various people's existing knowledge as viable systems in their efforts to draw on people's understanding of history and the historical accuracy of their actions. Tribals in strife become the focal points, constantly constructing and replenishing subjugated culture. They struggle to create their own conscious space in order to re-establish knowledge that represents their factual freedom and self. In resurrecting historical consciousness, movements rejuvenate suppressed knowledge deemed outdated by the intrusion of dominant knowledge systems, and attempt to make such information relevant in the current fight. In other respects, their personal and communal struggle shapes their way of thinking, and conversely. The rising awareness reflects the tribals' ambition to gain not just socio-political autonomy,

but also the ability to define themselves, their goals and the developmental framework.

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