

Article

Reflection of Marxist Ideologies through the Film 'Asuran (2019)'

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A B S T R A C T

This research study focuses on the analysis of reflection of Marxist ideology through the Asuran film (2019), which is directed by Vetrimaaran. The contemporary marxist film is observed contextually through the historic literary work of Karl Marx. The attributes derived from the literary works of Marxism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels from their books- The Communist Manifesto (1848), Das Kapital (1867) and The German ideology (1932) have become the core marxist principles for this study. Among them, the core concepts of Marxism include - class conflict, base and superstructure, false consciousness, class consciousness alienation, materialism, and Capitalistic society are chosen as variables. In borrowing those marxist ideas the researcher has observed and analysed it through thematic, characteristic and symbolic representation in the Asuran Film. This research gave findings of how to understand film through marxist approach. The researcher did understand the relevance of marxism in storytelling, how marxist elements can be used in building story and what all should be present to consider a movie is oriented to marxist ideology.

Keywords: Alienation, Base and Superstructure, Class Conflict, False Consciousness and Marxism

Introduction

The gaze of an individual in which he perceives and interprets is the outcome of the ideology that the individual believes in. Even the basics, what we eat and what we wear aren't just individualistic choices, the role of ideologies is responsible for propagation. The views on the 'right' form of government, freedom, equality, rights, other opinions of society are determined by the ideology that we are surrounded by. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels defined 'Ideology' as 'false consciousness. In the book 'The German ideology (1932), they meant ideas are the ruling ideas of the ruling classes, they are a set of sociocultural beliefs formed by the oppressors to serve their notions and justify their privileged positions. Through this understanding,

ideologies were the set of manipulative convincing beliefs that made the proletariat deceive, which is called false consciousness, The German ideology (1932). The history of revolution is not out of the subjection of ideologies, The Communist Manifesto (1848). Ideologies became a driven force of constant change in political and social evolution. This Marxism represented the political ideology of class conflict, between the Bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the Proletariat (working class). Marxists did narrow down the relevance of class oppression that exists from past to present. The role of modern Industries and privatising capitalistic (liberalism ideology) reforms adversely grew Bourgeoisie as oppressors over the oppressed Proletariat.

When they adjoin the films, they speak stories which

represent society, culture and communities within it. Irrespective of whether they are fictionalised, animated, fantasy or super heroic still those stories belong to the human. Even if they are animated characters still do carry the emotions which humans exhibit in real life. In parallel to visual story they do perceive certain ideas to the viewer. Pablo Larraín, Filmmaker states "Cinema is always a political art, at the end". Similarly, *Asuran*, as an outline of the story it's about a protagonist and his family from a weaker section of the society who are bound to face class and caste conflicts against the elites or upper caste. While how they face and fight for their rights, dignity and freedom is the plotlines of the movie. This sums up what the *Asuran* movie is all about.

Review of Literature

The root understanding of marxism ideologies is influenced by 'The communist Manifesto' (1848), written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This represents the political ideology of class conflict, between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. This book narrows down the relevance of class oppression that exists from past to present. The role of modern Industries and privatising capitalistic reforms adversely grew Bourgeoisie as oppressors over the oppressed Proletariat. This book along with *Das Kapital*, written by Karl Marx, in 1867 dealt with highlighting class struggle and class consciousness in economical considerations. Karl Marx structured the capitalistic society to Base and Superstructure, where he related base as the economical status of the society and superstructure as social institutions of the society. The relationship between these two, where who owns the base will operate influence of ideologies on the superstructure and those ideologies legitimise the base. Further, Karl Marx (1848) mentioned the machine made them isolated, which Karl Marx termed it as alienation. He meant the capitalist reforms in the mode of industrial production have tended workers into isolation where they have become dehumanised and separated from the products, production process, finally even from other workers and self. In the communist Manifesto (1848), Capitalism is the socio-economic system that has given birth to class struggle for the labour force and created private ownership where only a few (the Bourgeoisie) control the means of production.

So, these literary works together constitute the basic principles of Marxism. The study of these three books helped the research to segregate core Marxist ideologies as class conflict, base and superstructure, false and class consciousness, alienation, materialism, Capitalist society and its relation is chosen as variables to study its context in films.

Objective of the Research

To explore the reflection of marxist ideologies in the

characters, themes and symbolism of the *Asuran* movie (2019).

Research Methodology

The study is the qualitative understanding of the presence of Marxism Ideology in the film *Asuran* (2019) by director Vetrimaaran. The researcher has chosen Marxist theory to contextually understand through *Asuran* film. It's the analytical understanding of social, political, economical problematic nature under capitalistic forms. Which is derived from the principles and philosophical thoughts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engle. The core concepts of Marxism-class conflict, base and superstructure, consciousness, alienation, materialism, Capitalistic society are chosen as variables, are carried out through an understanding of the characteristic representation, the thematic representation, the symbolic representation.

Further, This study concentrates on understanding only the protagonist and antagonist of the film, which includes Sivasami, Vadakooran, Vishwanathan. Whereas used Robert Mckee's story (1997) book for theme studies and sub categorised as cause and value to understood scenes from the *Asuran* (2019) movie which contrast marxist representations. Where the symbolic representation is carried on by choosing ten symbols from the *Asuran* movie (2019) to understand marxist principles, this includes - the lamp, electricity, kutchra and pucca house, electricity fence, dog, chair, electric motor, decapitation and slipper. Among them, the core concepts of Marxism-class conflict, base and superstructure, consciousness, alienation, materialism, Capitalistic society are chosen as variables to study its context in films. This is used to focus what marxist elements are found in the *Asuran* movie, how is Marxism as an ideology used in Cinema to tell the story and relationship between the marxist politics and cinema.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Base and Superstructure

Asuran is not the single person, it's any people who rise against the discrimination. In the movie, this discrimination takes caste system as a factor to it. From the movie, the one who runs the production process and holds dominance in raw materials is the Vadakooran family. They do own more land than any of the family in that village. Along , they do run prominent economic sources of that village - Cinema hall, coal factories, fertiliser shops and an ongoing cement factory development. This contributes to the dominance of the ecological base of the village. In the ideological superstructure they do hold control over Cinema Hall, Police, Court, Village head mens. In this way, the base is the production force which represents the goods and products which society needs and the resources and materials required to produce this. This base holds a strong relationship in domination over superstructure,

where it influences ideology, culture, art, norms, religion, media, education. For Karl Marx, this structure didn't happen naturally, the dominant group predominantly used superstructure to hold their position in the base. This can also be said as one who owns dominance on base will hold influence in structuring the superstructure based on their need.

Alienation

If we analyse about alienation, which is the capitalist reforms in the mode of industrial production have tended workers into isolation where they have become dehumanised and separated from the products, production process, finally even from other workers and self. In the Asuran movie, Vadakooran put an electric fence. While openly Vadakooran states it in a dialogue, it is to keep like those people (proletariat) out from his land. The houses of Proletariat people are made out from the main centre of the village, they stay out from the village centre or away from Bourgeoisie people.

Even the other proletariat in the Sivasaami's house have sold their land to the pressure of the Vadakooran acquisition. While Sivasaami, the one who refused to sell his three acres among others. He is found alienated from other proletariat.

He is the only who still fighting against the class discrimination and oppression. When Sivasaami's elder son Murugan is killed by the Vadakooran's people. The whole village people, including other Proletariats do know about who is the guilty for the mysterious death. But none join hands with Sivasaami and help it out. Even though he is conscious of what is happening because of the Vadakooran's oppression, he still alienated himself and tried to ignore all those by drinking alcohol. Chidambaram, his son always had the understanding that his father was a drunkard and didn't keep responsibility for the family.

Class Conflict

There is presence of class conflict in the film, the oppressors seized power and dominated the oppressed in terms of mode of production. The story is foremost concentrated on

land acquisitions. The big landlords do hold most of the land in the village, not just land they do own major industries like fertiliser, cement, alcohol business and coal factories. Also, Bourgeoisie live in houses built through bricks and even the connectivity of roads, electricity and other basic needs. While Proletariat live in the kutch house which is made up of bamboo and coconut tree products. We could also notice the dominance of the proletariat when Pachaiyamm quarrels with the Vadakooran family while they drain the ground water source by adding motors. She raises her concern that if all the water they do drain what do they do for irrigating their small three acre farm. This would result in violent conflict. In another scene when Sivasaami's lover Mariyamm goes wearing a slipper to her school. Vishwanathan's family member Pandiyan humiliates her, by asking to borrow that slipper on her head and walk across the village till to her home. It's not just that, Adv. Venugopal Seshadri says in the movie, they (bourgeoisie) will hit you when you send proletariat children to school, they hit you when you draw water from the village well, hit you if we build houses and buy lands. Altogether, they will hit you (proletarians), if you prove you are equal to them (Bourgeoisie). First, the landlord lays an electric fence to alienate proletarians to enter their farm and have any access. Second, he with the help of police does arrest Sivasaami's elder son Murugan and forces the family to sell their land using caste panchayat village head mens. Later, in third, he pumps and drains the water from the common ground water source (to his land) using a motor pump instead of sharing water with other farm land owners. In fourth, he uses paid assassins to kill the elder son. After then, When Chidambaram kills Vadakooran in revenge for his brother's death, the family then go on a run to save their life. At last after running out of any possible options, they then agree to sell their land to save their son. The Dalit family persistently fights back in all these stages. However, the class, caste, its associated power play a role in the Vadakooran family as the dominant group of the village. This timeline that proletariats do undergo class conflicts and oppressions represent the conflict is not once or twice, it's periodic.

Table 1. Reflection of Marxist Ideologies in Asuran Film(2019)

Marxist Principles/ Ideologies	Reflection in Asuran Film (2019)
Class Conflict	Land dispute, landlords against the small farmers, Water dispute, issue over proletariats wearing slipper, political bias, economic disparity
Alienation	Proletariat living outskirts of the village, Bourgeoisie adding electric fence, Proletariat addict to alcohol to forget the sorrows, and fear of getting trouble from bourgeoisie
False Consciousness	Superstructure institutions supportive to bourgeoisie made proletarians believe in them, no other source of work than the ones bourgeoisie lend, also the poor education
Class Consciousness	When bourgeoisie made to borrow slipper on the head, when they force to buy lands from them, when they doesn't allow to take water from village ground water

Base and Superstructure	Base- Coal factory, Fertiliser shop, Cement factory, Farm lands, labours, Rice Mills, Alcohol business, Farm lands, labours Superstructure- Police, Government administrative authorities, Village heads, Cinema Hall, Court, Panchayath
Capitalism and materialism	Houses, cars, bikes, motors, industries

Consciousness, Materialism and Capitalistic Society

The Asuran film showcases the class consciousness in various aspects. Adv. Venugopal Seshadri represented the Proletariats as guiding lawyers and helping them to understand its illegal acquisition and that it wouldn't stand in front of law and order. He helped to understand dimensions of the class oppression that the proletariat were undergoing. But still many of them are unaware or keep themselves away from protesting against class oppression. Maariammal, when she gets humiliated for wearing sandals in the village. The bourgeoisie group makes her carry her sandals on her head and walk around the village. While people around the village would just watch the happenings without involving or questioning it. Another false consciousness among the proletariats had led them to sell their land or give up to the Bourgeoisie group. The political monopoly that the bourgeoisie used over the proletariat made them false conscious while giving them land and becoming wage workers to them.

Karl Marx (1948), do mention about revolution, its voluntary participation of the proletariat will be the only solution to fight against class division. The portrayal of revolution from the film is subject to attaining education and fighting through it. At the climax of the film, Sivasami, before going to jail, tells his son to study well. Because if they own land, they will seize it. While if they have money, they will snatch it. But they can't do anything, if they have education. if we study Pedagogy of the Oppressed Book (1970) by Paulo Freire, who is also a marxist with Brazilian educator and philosopher. He highlights the necessity of education to overthrow class division. He believed education can make the individual proletariat get class conscious and look for ways to fight against oppression. Apart from this, we find many symbolic representations from the movie representing marxist themes. These include- The Lamb as proletariat, Electricity as class deprivation, Kutcha house and Pucca house are symbols of class division. Death of a Dog as class conflict, Electric fence as alienation, Slipper as a class conflict element, class consciousness and proletarian revolution, motors as materialism - car, bike and water pump and Chair as dominant oppressor.

Conclusion

This research gave findings of how to understand film through marxist approach. Further, developed a template

to check the reflection of marxist ideology. The Marxist ideology is rooted from Karl Marx principles, to the same the research used - class conflict, alienation, class consciousness, materialism, false consciousness, mode of production to study. In the final while reflection of those principles are analysed from a movie, Asuran. It is analysed through thematic, characteristic and symbolic analysis of the visuals. As a result we could sense the relevance of marxist ideology in the Asuran film. Infact, the marxist principles which are used found correlation to term marxism as ideology. So, by default these kinds of principles can be used to analyse movies to understand marxist ideas. Also, the research gave broader understanding to what all themes to be placed on the story plots to create it as a marxist film. It can be class conflict, alienation, class consciousness, materialism, false consciousness, mode of production or even any other marxist thoughts apart from Karl Marx.

This theoretical concept of Marxism is relevant in filmmaking, it's used to create visual story, build characters and provide gaze. While there are many Marxist movies, Asuran could not be much differ from them. Because the language of class conflict is the same all over the world. But through understanding from one movie, Asuran (2019), the researcher did understand the relevance of marxism in storytelling, how marxist elements can be used in building story and what all should be present to consider a movie is oriented to marxist ideology. To future research works, this study can help filmmaking and film studies to utilise the variables used to analyse in this study to either study the film or build a story through marxist approach.

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