

**A Tale of the Triumvirate: Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural  
Violence in Mani Ratnam's *Aayidha Ezhuthu***

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in partial fulfillment  
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## Certificate

Certified that this is a bonafide report of the project entitled *A Tale of the Triumvirate: Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural Violence in Mani Ratnam's Aayidha Ezhuthu* done by Parvathy G. (Register No. 180011002141) for the fulfillment of the requirement for the M.A. degree in English under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2018-2020.

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## Declaration

I, Parvathy G., hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *A Tale of the Triumvirate: Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural Violence in Mani Ratnam's Aayidha Ezhuthu* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Thara Gangadharan and Ms. Lissy Kachappilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

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**Synopsis**

This Project, titled “A Tale of the Triumvirate: Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural Violence in Mani Ratnam’s *Aayidha Ezhuthu*,” probes in depth into the traces of Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural Violence in the respective movie. Being one of the foremost nonlinear narratives of Tamil Cinema, *Aayidha Ezhuthu*, within a political milieu, looks into the lives of three men whose mutual encounters and repercussions collectively bring about the obliteration of the corrupt administration.

Introduced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Strategic Essentialism refers to the tactical usage of a shared aim(s) for political motives. Womb Envy, put forward by Karen Horney, comes under Feminine Psychology and is interpreted as a neo-Freudian evaluation of Penis Envy. Structural Violence which was highlighted by Johan Galtung, brings up the noticeable and the subtler levels of social inequality.

The first chapter of this dissertation deals with the multi-starrer movies of Mani Ratnam, ranging from *Agni Natchathiram* to *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam* whereas the second chapter delves deeper into the aspects of Strategic Essentialism, Womb Envy and Structural Violence. The third and the fourth chapters scrutinize the movie in the light of the three concepts respectively. The concluding chapter, by picking out the inner layers of the narrative, asserts that the movie offers enough scope for critical approaches grounded on diverse theoretical frameworks.

Parvathy G.

## Chapter 1

### Mani Ratnam and his Multi-starrers

Akin to the word ‘Politics’ and the numerous layers of meanings imbedded in it; the genre of Political Cinema embodies such stratum as well. It has, constantly, denied minimizing its array with documentaries and masala-packed entertainers where, predominantly, the former is intended at the educated, ‘elite’ class and the latter, at the third-class audience. Even in the twenty-first century where ‘neo’ narratives are the trend, traditional ‘old wine in the new bottle’ types of films are also preferred by the moviegoers. As we synopsise, the wide-ranging genre of Political Cinema offers enough room for viewership, criticism as well as research. Platforms like IMDb provide lists of top-rated and favourite political movies where the latter, undoubtedly, varies within viewers.

Indian Cinema, certainly, contains political storylines which extend from narrower accounts on (quasi) political parties and their activisms along with elections (at times, featuring the glimpses of a romance such as in *Aandhi* (1975), directed by Gulzar) to broader ones that deal with diverse kinds of power politics. In the context of Bollywood, the 1970s amplified the ‘Angry Young Man,’ whose circumstances or choice, more often both, has paved way to his nonconformity; being a true copy of the youngsters of that generation, the character was admired exceedingly.

The resentment of an Angry Young Man was particularly with regard to the discriminations toward, within or [occasionally] beyond the familial space, examples being: 1. Prakash Mehra’s *Zanjeer* (1973) – where the protagonist becomes a Police Officer and thrives to avenge the murder of his father, 2. Yash Chopra’s *Deewar* (1975) – in which the central character, whose father was written off as a thief, opts to

become a smuggler and 3. Yash Chopra's *Trishul* (1978) – wherein the conflict between an illegitimate son and his father gets resolved before the latter's death. In addition to the above, biopics—frequently, embellished—of political leaders and activists also preserve a considerable viewership in the nation; *Kammara Sambhavam* (2018), written by Murali Gopy and directed by Rathish Ambat, sought to decode historiography through the 'saga' of a fictitious freedom fighter named Kammaran Nambiar. As Shoma A.Chatterji describes,

If politics propagates a point of view, then every film is political because a film expresses the aesthetics, the political philosophy and the ideology of a creative artist that dominates his mindset at a given point of time. ... It presents the artist's bias for or against something. (99)

Encompassing an immense number of 'one man show' sort of narratives, Tamil Cinema has hardly shed its politically dramatic scenarios. The recurrent tales presenting a hero, i.e., a common man, migrating to an alien land—repeatedly, in search of employment—have sporadically been effective in their reworking of the milieu. The setting is enriched by some gangster(s) who, in turn, is 1. accompanied by umpteen numbers of subordinates, 2. shielded by the cops and 3. dreaded by the lower classes.

The male lead who is on his way or 'Thani vazhi,' as the popular culture of Tamil defines it, is intruded either by the thug or his sidekicks whom he has to combat against and prosper, assuring an unobstructed existence for the residents, similarly for himself. Through the confrontation and competent overpowering of the attackers—often, singlehandedly—and caring for the people as well, the leading man becomes an ideal 'Thalaivan' (leader) or 'Thala' (head) and an embodiment of strength. In a



nutshell, an archetypal Tamil hero ascends as an ‘Aayirathil Oruvan’ (one in a thousand) from a ‘Kootathil Oruthan’ (one among the crowd).

An actor being inclined to the dominion of politics is normality in Kollywood; only few among those who tested their luck in the pitch have succeeded. The indestructible bonding between Tamil Cinema and Tamilnadu politics prolongs to be the talk of the town with the rapid and the proposed entries of Kamal Hassan and Rajnikanth respectively. Whilst the former has already launched his party and started to claim himself as an Actor-Politician, the latter persists by giving hopes to his fans regarding his way in. Certainly, there are rumours about both of them contesting in the upcoming polls. As far as the initial stage of the closeness between Tamil Cinema and politics are concerned, S.Theodore Baskaran observes that,

The Congress party first started using cinema as an instrument for political propaganda and the Dravidian parties that came later onto the political scene harnessed the popularity of film stars rather than use the medium of cinema to propagate their ideology. (127)

In spite of being a Malayali, Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran or M.G.R, is identified as a Tamilian, precisely, the ‘Puratchi Thalaivar’ (revolutionary leader), owing to the role of Tamilnadu in facilitating him attain the highpoint as an actor and a politician. Although his early attachment with the eminent writer cum politician M.Karunanidhi was later lost out of disparities, it did not harm his fame. The stories about M.G.R’s philanthropy still exist among the commons and he prospers to remain as a figure of admiration even now. As concluded by Baskaran, “It appears to be the dream of all star-politicians to pull off an M.G.R.-like metamorphosis, from powerless elite to political power machine” (133).

Mani Ratnam, right through his career, has been an explorer of notable incidents extracted from the actuality of India in addition to the nuances of human relationships. His creations span from intense love stories and family dramas to action films; most often, Ratnam's movies exhibit amalgamations of genres. Being a recipient of V.Shantaram Award for the Best Director in 1985 for his *Roja*, Ratnam has constantly been an inspiration to viewers, budding directors and even film critics. As clarified by Baradwaj Rangan,

because to us he wasn't just a film-maker, and he didn't just make films. ... he was a zeitgeist-defining showman who propped up in front of us mirrors into our selves—our young, urban selves. No one, just no one, had put on screen what we thought, what we felt, what we dreamed the way Mani Ratnam did. (xiii)

*Agni Natchathiram* (1988) can be counted as Mani Ratnam's first multi-starrer movie, having Prabhu and Karthik portray the half-brothers, Gautham and Ashok respectively. The narrative deals with the rivalry between the two men and their "games of one-upmanship" (67). The very film established Ratnam as a mainstream filmmaker and also preserves its cult status till date. *Thalapathy* (1991) is a reworking of *Mahabharata* in such a way that only Duryodhana perishes, not Karna. As revealed by Mani Ratnam himself, "my film was specifically about Karna. ... I didn't even consider the original option, where Karna dies" (104 and 109). The clash between the Kauravas and the Pandavas are turned into that between the gangsters (the counterparts of Kauravas- Duryodhana and Karna) and the district collector (the counterpart of Pandavas- Arjuna) who wants to abolish their violent deeds.

*Iruvar* (1997) has its focus upon the duo- M.G.R and M.Karunanidhi and

chiefly, upon the former's struggles growing into accomplishments. The acting as well as the political careers of M.G.R (Aanandan in the film) is depicted together with his personal life. As Rangan demarcates, "it's these men, always, who are each other's soulmates" (161). *Raavanan* (2010)—as the title makes it evident—is an interpretation of *Ramayana* assuming Raavana as the hero. The film offers a neo-noir approach towards the personas of Raavana and Rama unlike the original epic where the former is represented as the 'villain' and the latter, the 'hero.' The entire story is converted into a war between the tribal groups led by Raavana (Veera in the film) and the police officers commanded by Rama (Dev in the film).

Mani Ratnam's latest multi-starrer release was *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam* (2018). Frequently mentioned as an Indian adaptation of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* franchise, the movie introduces three brothers who combat against each other for the possession of the riches owned by their father. As deconstructed by Trish K, "You never know who's side to take, because every one of them has an ulterior motive for their actions" (Web). Mani Ratnam's upcoming release also is a multi-starrer film titled *Ponniyin Selvan*, an adaptation of the acclaimed novel by Kalki Krishnamurthy having the same title. It is supposed to be filmed in three parts and the first of them is expected to reach the theatres in 2021.

Taking into deliberation the multi-starrer movies of Mani Ratnam from *Agni Natchathiram* to *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam*, all of them have multi-hero subjects, thrusting upon the quarrels involving them. Therefore, female protagonists are virtually absent in the plots and instead, there are 'heroines' who are mere 'love interests' and also 'supporting' female characters. Besides that, these female characters share a similar pattern which comprises of: 1. powerless mothers- *Agni Natchathiram*, *Thalapathy* and *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam*, 2. dejected wives- *Agni*

*Natchathiram*, *Thalapathy*, *Iruvar*, *Raavanan* and *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam* and 3. glam dolls- *Agni Natchathiram* and *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam*. In conjunction with this pattern, *Thalapathy* contains female characters that are restricted to choose their lives. While the stories come to an end, these characters, primarily, conclude as status quo and are rarely ‘granted’ an appearance in the last frame.

Suggestive of the three dots, Ratnam’s *Aayidha Ezhuthu* (2004) unveils the stories of Inbasekhar, a goon, Michael, a student activist and Arjun, an indifferent youngster. Inbasekhar is used by the corrupt politician Selvanayagam to thrash Michael with the intention of keeping him away from social activism and Arjun, being an eyewitness of Michael getting shot by Inbasekhar, joins the strife totally unanticipated. The rest of the narrative includes Selvanayagam enabling a power play amongst the trio for his own merit; Michael in company with Arjun, literally strikes back Inbasekhar, consequently Selvanayagam and finally, flourishes as a do-gooder irrespective of the challenges.

The succeeding chapter, titled “The Essentialist, the Envious and the Violent,” delves into the tenets of Strategic Essentialism, which is a concept under Postcolonial Theory developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Womb Envy, which comes under Feminine Psychology and was brought forth by Karen Horney and Structural Violence, elicited by Johan Galtung respectively.

## Chapter 2

### The Essentialist, the Envious and the Violent

There are, undoubtedly, differences of opinion between people who share a sense of belonging. The bonding between two opposing groups of people stemming from a common factor can be called as Essentialism. When this is adopted as a method for one's own merit, it becomes Strategic Essentialism and the term was introduced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, notable Postcolonial theorist. As elaborated by Chithrakala Babu,

It refers to a political tactic that minority groups, nationalities, ethnic groups, employ on the basis of shared identity to represent themselves. While strong differences may exist between members of these groups, and amongst themselves they engage in continuous debates, it is sometimes advantageous for them to temporarily “essentialize themselves” (245)

Though this concept was replaced into the realms of gender and queer studies and also commonly misinterpreted, it remains as a path breaking area. She explores the elements of essentialism within common people which are exploited by the politicians. As elucidated by Spivak, “I would read it, then, as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (214).

Womb Envy is a term which comes under Feminine Psychology, a branch of Psychology introduced by Karen Holinger. She explains that men are envious of women, particularly with regards to pregnancy. The biological ability of women to give birth of a child, in a way, develops a jealousy within men which results in the

oppression of women. As one can see,

In feminist psychology, the terms womb envy or vagina envy denote the anxiety that many men may feel caused by envy of the biological functions of the female sex such as pregnancy, parturition, breast feeding. These emotions could fuel the social subordination of women.  
(289)

Ever since human beings began to engage in collective effort and raise families, the concept of society has been there. They have had their own customs and practices and they needed a common language(s) to communicate; every society possesses all of the above and considers them to be unique or rather sacred. Societies tend to interact and mingle with each other, but, the actual problem arises when they start considering themselves as superior to the other. Societies have their own way of dividing between themselves in terms of class (nature of labour), race, caste, gender or nationality. When the division gets into such an extent where one particular category within a society finds it difficult to cope with the rest of its members and their way of oppressing them, revolts arise.

Structural Violence refers to the idea of crushing a particular group of people based on the persisting structure of the society; as far as India is concerned, the nation still comes under the category of 'Developing Countries' mainly due to the financial crisis which is prevalent. People are divided, knowingly or unknowingly, officially as well as unofficially into upper, middle and lower classes based on their economic status. As Akhil Gupta explains,

The usual answer to this question is that it must be because the poor are excluded from national projects of development, democratic

politics, and cultural citizenship. Agamben suggests that exclusion is the basis for violence in states of exception. For example, the killing of Jews, homosexuals, and gypsies in Nazi Germany was possible because they had been legally excluded from the German state and reduced to “bare life.” (6)

## Chapter 3

### The Passionate One

The strategic essentialist part in Inbasekhar can be explained in connection with the illiteracy and poorer economic state that connects him with the corrupt minister Selvanayagam and Gunasekhar. Both of them make use of Inbasekhar's passion for becoming powerful. Inbasekhar speaks in a misogynistic tone in the very opening scene. He tells his friend Dilli that women should not be kept closer; he even remarks about meeting women occasionally and having sex. In the flashback, he can be seen approaching his wife Sashi's home after getting released from the jail. She decides to go with him without the permission of her parents. The relationship between Inbasekhar and Sashi is defined by Baradwaj Rangan as "a complicated romance with a difficult man" (Web).

In the very next scene featuring the couple, a rough sexual act is shown. Sashi screams, with joy. Probably, women of her class are used to such harsh sexual intercourses with their respective angry young men. She finds it difficult to make him listen to her words and he listens to her only while they are having sex. Inbasekhar's male chauvinism reaches its peak in the scene in which his brother Gunasekhar comes to his home. He repeatedly ignores Sashi's words and continues speaking to Gunasekhar and his friends who have come home to play poker.

As the scene proceeds, he clings onto Gunasekhar's words and decides to take up the 'job' of thrashing the student activists who are classmates of Michael, the student leader. When Sashi speaks against it, Gunasekhar tells Swaminathan that in Inbasekhar's home, there is a role reversal as far as genders are concerned. This very dialogue makes it clear that Inbasekhar has inherited the misogyny from his brother



or probably, their father. After the departure of Gunasekhar from her home, Inbasekhar slaps Sashi twice and drags her out of 'his' house. He expresses his entire anger for the society towards his pregnant wife. Though, at that particular point of time, he was unaware of her pregnancy, he as such is a man with the dominance of a beastly nature.

He screams that he does not 'need' or instead 'want' Sashi and Sashi is saved by Dilli's wife. Later, when he cries out her name, Dilli's wife yells at him for treating a woman, that too a pregnant one with such atrocity. There is a unique bonding between Sashi and Dilli's wife that deconstructs the traditional notion of two women can never be friends. Inbasekhar, surprised and shocked, rushes to her and makes her slap him back. He is least bothered about his mistakes and never makes an effort to apologize for his bad deeds. Like every other time, Sashi forgives him and they reconcile. He even says that he prefers to have a daughter like Sashi and that too with dimple chin.

The succeeding "Sandai Kozhi" song is a celebration of female sexuality. It unveils her identification with the rough sex and contentment with their way of life. Both of them dance and hug, expressing their love for one another. Sashi stands superior as far as the sincerity in their relationship is taken into consideration. Gradually, Inbasekhar is allotted the gas agency business by Selvanayagam and he names the agency with Sashi's name and makes her inaugurate the venture. In the "Dol Dol" song, the couple can be seen hanging out and a "happily ever after" kind of a false impression is given to Sashi. They dance and even have fun at the beach.

During the song itself, Inbasekhar brings home a considerable amount of money and eventually, he gifts Sashi a gold earring. In the same scene, she notices a

bloodstain in his ears and he ignores her questions regarding the stain like every other time. She even gets a new saree from him as a gift. Unlike the popular scenes where the husbands waits for the wife to come back after changing the new cloth which was gifted by him, here, he disrobes her, takes out the saree from the cover and throws it on her body. It is clear that Inbasekhar tries to satisfy Sashi with materialistic aspects, but what Sashi prefers is an emotionally bound and a spiritual relationship.

When Sashi realizes that Inbasekhar is the one who has shot Michael almost to death, she rushes to Gunasekhar's home and asks him her husband's whereabouts. Though devalued and insulted by Gunasekhar, she tells him that she will continue reaching out to him in order to gather information about her husband. Eventually, by thinking that Michael has passed away and her husband has become a convict, she aborts her child.

Inbasekhar's womb envy engulfs the very existence of his child. He breaks down and is advised by Sashi to shift to a new life. She speaks about the emotional side of him and orders him to get train tickets so that they will be able to migrate soon. Although he obeys her order and tells her to go to the railway station, he reaches out to his brother to return the gun. In the scene inside the train, Sashi blames that all men are the same. Her desperate hopes for getting her husband and his goodness back, fails. As Mani Ratnam elaborates the scene,

If he is trying to get out of certain way of living, returning the gun is his resignation letter. It represents his wanting to come clean and lead a straight life. The gun has always been an issue between him and his wife. The moment she found the gun, she knew that he was on the wrong path and that he was more dangerous than ever before. (243-44)

## Chapter 4

### The Brute and the Brutality

The very introductory scene of *Aayidha Ezhuthu* unfolds the violent nature of Inbasekhar. He is “basically someone who is really at the lower end of the social spectrum” (241). The movie opens with its recurrent motif, the bridge where the fast moving vehicles are shown as a symbol of the fast-paced city life. A car is shown in which Inbasekhar, one among the three, sits next to his friend Dilli. Inbasekhar’s posture having one of his legs placed at the front glass of the vehicle makes it clear that he is ready to beat up anyone who crosses his path. Michael, who is about to drop his lady love at the institute in which she teaches French, is followed by the duo.

The visual of some other car approaching Michael’s bike is shown twice, foreshadowing Inbasekhar’s entry into the scene. Inbasekhar is almost tension free unlike Dilli and pays less attention to what Dilli says. Eventually, Michael gets shot by Inbasekhar and falls down to a river; when Dilli refuses to stop the car, Inbasekhar points his gun at him. The very scene foreshadows Dilli’s death in Inbasekhar’s hands. Throughout the flashback of Inbasekhar that follows the opening scene of gunshot, Inbasekhar can be seen supported or helped by Dilli, he uses Dilli whenever he needs assistance.

Inbasekhar’s story has its own shades of violence and passion. As Ratnam elaborates, Inbasekhar is the one “who thinks you can use society for what it is” (Rangan 230). He can be seen playing the game of Kabaddi ferociously with his jail inmates and they desperately attempt to crush him. The jailmates reflect the society’s attitude towards people like Inbasekhar; the ruling class tends to crush the lower middle class ones in order to ensure their dominance. Inbasekhar’s attempt for an

uprising fails and he screams. He sits alone, marginalized. While he dispassionately watches the rest of the game, he gets a bail. When he is released from the prison, the Police Officer can be seen stealing an amount from his earnings. The very act points at the corruption in India. Though it was a meager amount, Inbasekhar asks for the same and gets it back. He addresses the Police Officer as “Unakku” instead of “Ungalukku,” which makes it evident that he lacks the refinement which is demanded by the society. When he is asked for his signature he simply asks “Autograph, eh?” His craving for power and money can be traced out from the very piece of dialogue.

He comes back with advocate Swaminathan, arranged by his brother Gunasekhar to get him out of the jail. When the lawyer talks to him about the breeze of freedom outside, Inbasekhar corrects him by saying that the same breeze is there within the prison, mixed with the prisoners’ fart. Inbasekhar and his fellows do not suppress their feelings for the sake of a pseudo-polished persona. “Indha erachal kekkaama ore sokama pochu,” he says. He advises the lawyer that only fear can conquer the world (“Bayathala mattum than ulagatha aala mudiyum”); he throws the lawyer out of the auto, makes it evident that he would throw anyone who messes with him out of his life.

As requested by his father-in-law, Inbasekhar meets the officials of a printing press where the insufficient wage offered for safekeeping the expensive machines offend him; he imitates the officials’ way of wiping the phone before speaking. His mockery is targeted at the false sophistication of the self-proclaimed superior class. The implication of structural violence reaches its peak during the telephone conversation between Inbasekhar and the higher official where the former’s face is shown as a mere reflection on the glass door of the room in which the latter is sitting. It shows how the upper class literally uses the effort of the lower classes for their own

prosperity. He primarily uses the words Anna or Sami to address the self-professed superiors.

Inbasekhar's elder brother Gunasekhar rushes to Inbasekhar's house while he is busy playing cards with his friends. Guna has arranged for the bail only to make Inbasekhar involve in the 'issue' with student politics, particularly to crush Michael- a student leader; "He has to get himself out of some issue for which he needs my help, is that it?" ("Ivar matter engayo maattikkichu, adithadikku aal thevai, sarithaane?" he asks. Inbasekhar expresses his anger for his unaffectionate brother as well as the society towards his wife and eventually throws her out of 'his' house. "The society has closed his doors for people like me," Inbasekhar screams.

Inbasekhar, accompanied by Dilli and umpteen numbers of thugs, thrash Michael's friends at the canteen of University of Madras. As part of making arrangements and supplying crowd for minister Selvanayagam's speech, Inbasekhar addresses an empty stage without audience. "Vote for Inbasekhar," he screams; the desires of the lower class get thwarted by succumbing to the false promises given by the leaders for grabbing votes. Selvanayagam's pointless comparison of the geographical size of South India to its shrinking economy during his speech receives applause from Inbasekhar's clan.

In between his conversation with Selvanayagam and Guna, Selvanayagam orders Guna to let Inbasekhar take over the gas agency which is in the name of Guna. Selvanayagam says that Inbasekhar will survive ("pozhachukkuvaan") instead of prosper. It makes it evident that he wants people like Inbasekhar to remain at their inferior positions. Even if they make an attempt to become powerful, he will suppress them by violent means. The power politics between Guna and Inbasekhar is infuriated

by the minister; at one point, Inbasekhar confesses that he cannot speak in English (“English vara maattenguthu”).

Before the “Dol Dol” song, Inbasekhar can be seen speaking in English. During the song, Sashi Gas Agency is inaugurated by Sashi herself and Inbasekhar is seen wearing a suit and sunglasses and posing for pictures. He throws the old stove out of their home, hoping for a promising future. In the scene in which Inbasekhar is called by the minister to his home, the marginalization can be clearly traced out. Inbasekhar can be seen standing and not being provided even with a cup of tea.

Geethanjali, Michael’s girlfriend, teaches French and in her classes, there are elders who have joined for a pastime. It is a paradox that the villagers of Neikkarampatti are not even exposed to education and Inbasekhar and his fellows do not even know to speak in English although being residents of a city. There is indeed, a privileged class in the society like that of Selvanayagam. Selvanayagam, by offering a scholarship for Michael for being a bright student, tries to suppress his spirit of being a do-gooder, but, Michael, on the other hand, is a huge slap to the corrupt way of looking at things.

From the flashback of Arjun, it is clear that he leads a life which Inbasekhar can only dream of. Arjun saves Michael from Inbasekhar’s attack, thus, gets beaten up by Inbasekhar at the hospital. Inbasekhar, realizing the consequences and in the urge of becoming powerful, kills Guna and eventually Dilli. After the climax fight between the three men, Inbasekhar is shown in the jail, merely being an audience to the kabaddi game played by his fellow jailmates. He is being advised by the jailer to hope not to get a capital punishment. Inbasekhar’s story can be titled as “Crime Doesn’t Pay” (Web).

## Chapter 5

### The Three Dots

At the outset, *Aayidha Ezhuthu* is distinctive from other political movies of Tamil Cinema as a result of a few aspects. Firstly, it holds a narrative structure that is nonlinear in nature, the opening of which exposes the three men at three separate points of proximity to the same bridge [of life]. The post-gunshot segments resort to the preceding months in the lives of Inbasekhar, Michael and Arjun correspondingly, where emphasis is attributed to events which had steered the trio to the “connecting device” (Rangan 230). The stories of the first two men are imparted to the viewers before the interval; subsequently, the third man becomes the focal point and, “finally, the unification and culmination of these three stories” transpire (238).

Secondly, there is an apparent colour symbolism in the film where Inbasekhar, Michael and Arjun are ascribed the colours red, green and blue respectively. The shades are suggestive of their personalities- red signifying passion, green denoting optimism and blue referring to carefreeness. On top of the costumes, the settings also assist in complementing the temperaments of the threesome. In his examination of the colour symbolism in *Aayidha Ezhuthu*, Kishor views red as fire, green as earth and blue as water. Pertaining to the character arc of Inbasekhar, he deduces that,

He starts off with black like coal and changes to red, showing his burning desire for power. And as the desire consumes him, he truly becomes fire incarnate and we see his costume is red, surrounded by yellow, just like an actual fire. Finally, when he is burnt out, he is just smoke and that is shown by him wearing white at the end of the film.

(00:01:36-00:01:56)

Lastly, there are no elements of trivialization, more accurately, objectification of women in the film, which is quite uncommon insofar as political narratives are taken into contemplation. The monotony of having a dance number previous to the action-packed climax has been the norm, roughly since the time of *Sholay* (1975), directed by Ramesh Sippy, up to the present time, for instance, *Lucifer* (2019), a film by Prithviraj Sukumaran. *Aayidha Ezhuthu* has mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends and even friends and promising leaders who are female, certainly not prostitutes or item dancers who, “are simultaneously looked at and displayed” (Mulvey 19).

Straightforwardly, the three heroines of *Aayidha Ezhuthu* can be classified into: 1. the initiator- Meera, for being the stimulus for Arjun in adhering to Michael’s vision, 2. the supporter- Geethanjali, for participating in all the humanitarian ventures of Michael and 3. the opposer- Sashi, for vehemently resisting Inbasekhar’s inclination towards the wrong path. Ultimately, as Karthik Shankar expounds, Mani Ratnam’s “female characters are seldom objectified and he is always sympathetic towards them. ... This isn’t to say that Mani Ratnam has a blemish free record in portraying women” (Web).

The movie offers room for studies grounded on Marxist Theory as well. There are indications of the character of Michael being a replica of Karl Marx himself. Both of them hail from middle-class families and there are references to Michael’s (late) father being a lawyer, the profession which Marx’s father also belonged to. Moreover, as Peter Barry illuminates, Marx and Engels “called their economic theories ‘Communism’ (rather than ‘Marxism’)” (150). Comparably, Michael too, hardly takes praises for his ideas; he tries his best, voluntarily, to convert them into collective



efforts.

The cord of strategic essentialism that unites Inbasekhar with his brother Gunasekhar—who once had abandoned him—and minister Selvanayagam, makes him ineffectual in comprehending the integrity associated with Michael. Although Inbasekhar and Michael do not descend from a similar social, cultural, economic or even ideological background, the latter is the one who possesses a clear-cut insight about the state of the people, which includes the former, who are crushed by the class(es) that governs.

The inability of Inbasekhar in realizing the ‘actual’ leader, who aspires to embolden the marginalized ones, is such that he distinguishes Michael as his rival. Even though he tells Michael that they are similar except for the sophistication of the latter, in some way, he has an aversion pertaining to the involvement of educated youth into the domain of politics. His admiration for the position held by Selvanayagam reinforces in him the feeling that politics is an arena where illiterate ones like him can prosper. Michael wanted social growth; on the other hand, Inbasekhar wanted self-growth.

Together with the categorization followed by the heroines of Mani Ratnam’s multi-starrer movies, one more stereotype can be differentiated, i.e., the ‘silent preys.’ It includes female characters that get dragged, quite often literally, into the battles between men; examples for the same are *Thalapathy*, *Raavanan* and *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam*. In *Thalapathy*, one of the fights involving Devaraj ends in his pregnant wife being pushed down and losing their child. In the climax, Devaraj also is murdered by Kalivardhan- the villain, which leaves his wife to suffer alone.

In *Raavanan*, Veera’s fellows kidnap Raagini as part of avenging the untimely

demise of Vennila- Veera's half-sister. As disclosed in the flashback, Vennila, on the day of her wedding, was unnecessarily brought into the war between her brother and the cops. Afterwards her arrest, she is sexually assaulted by the policemen; stricken with grief, she drowns herself in a well. In *Chekka Chivantha Vaanam*, the mother to the protagonists survives from a car accident—which had the father as the target—contrasting to her three daughters-in-law. Two among the three, Chithra and Chaaya, get assassinated and the third one- Renuka, gets imprisoned out of a false accusation.

*Aayidha Ezhuthu* has two women- Sashi and Michael's mother, who cling to this category. Sashi, recurrently, becomes the victim to Inbasekhar's anger for the social inequality; her act of aborting their child can be contemplated as the outcome of his womb envy. Regardless of Michael's capabilities as a leader, his mother remains disappointed by his 'excessive' concern for the nation; she is even explicit about her preference for an 'ordinary son' over an extraordinary one. Practically no words are spoken by the wives of Selvanayagam and Guna in the narrative. During their appearances, they are assigned a position 'behind' their respective men and can be spotted "always holding a tumbler of coffee" (Rangan 233).

Irrespective of his illiteracy—which is exposed in certain scenes—Selvanayagam is conscious about the supremacy upheld by him as a minister. His consensus with his nephew circuitously discloses his nepotistic approach. Selvanayagam manipulates Gunasekhar and Inbasekhar with the purpose of subjugating Michael and his friends whom he finds to be a threat to his debauchery. Undeniably, he curbs the equanimity of the men of the working class for his egotistic motives and jeopardizes their families.

Though in a roundabout way, it is none other than Selvanayagam who has

accelerated the execution of the elder brother by the younger one. Hence, it can be successfully negotiated that Selvanayagam is the deceitful force behind ruining the lives of the two men. He utilizes their longing for power as an instrument for his advantage, provides them with a fabricated impression of acquiring power and retains them at a rank which is inferior to that enjoyed by him.

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