

Cinematic Sense of Place as a Window to Politics of Dominant Ideology, materialism and Morality in Tamil Cinema: A Case Study of the film 'Madras'

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Abstract

In the theoretical conceptualization of contemporary space, cinema not only focuses on story telling but also provides a window to the cultural and traditional practices of the place and people. The armamentarium of the transitions of Tamil cinema after the 1970's to date has shown an upward swing in the conscious use of sense of place as part of the visual narrative. This article studies the anatomy of place as portrayed in the Tamil film *Madras* (2014) against the backdrop of the reality and ethos of the slums of North Madras. The Wall – the main protagonist in the film and the power and value given to it, is the fulcrum on which the sense of place is established. This article takes the North Madras community's sense of place as a window to the politics of dominant ideology and materialism infused with morality, as articulated in the film.

Keywords: sense of place, Madras, Tamil cinema, ideology, materialism, morality

Introduction

'Madras'- A Curtain-raiser

Madras (2014), directed by Ranjith, P. is set in the slums of Vyasarpadi, North Chennai¹, having a predominant Dalit population. The film celebrates the underbelly - lives of the urban poor made up of a medley of people to whom Vyasarpadi is home - lower middle class society of IT professionals, unemployed youth, anti-social elements, labourers, die-hard sports fans and the like.

The film brings out the struggle of the Dalit youngsters striving to free themselves from the clutches of the political parties that see them as vote banks. The story revolves around the character of Kaali, an IT professional, who is out to avenge the murder of his friend Anbu, by his political enemies. The main site of conflict in the entire film is a thirty feet Wall that is simultaneously a symbol of pride, political domination and oppression. The Wall has gained its importance through the clashes of two political factions, claiming ownership over it. The Wall currently bears the painting of a late political leader of one faction led by his son Kannan. The other faction threatening the status quo is led by Anbu, the political underling of Maari, who

wants to “conquer” the wall. This turf war leads to politically opportunistic ego-clashes and loss of lives. We see political ideology emptied of its liberatory ideals, until the Wall becomes the symbol for education, an emancipatory tool.



Fig 1: The Wall

Tamil cinema is known for its ideological dominance and idiosyncrasies. But, in director Ranjith, P.'s (2014) own words:

“It has taken almost a hundred years for a Dalit director to portray Dalit politics in Tamil cinema. This class has been most neglected amongst the society and films as well. Tamil films have shown khaddar clad freedom fighters, activists and different kinds of ideologies. As far as the Dalits’ imagination and representation is concerned, to portray them in-situ with their place has always remained a dream. Dalit characters portrayed in earlier Tamil films were either stereotypical or not worthy of mention. What is refreshing about *Madras* is that the characters speak the ideologies of Dalit intellectuals like Iyothee Thass², M.C. Raja³ and Rettamalai Srinivasan⁴.”

This article studies the anatomy of place as portrayed in the film against the backdrop of the reality and ethos of the slums of North Madras. The Wall – the main protagonist in the film and the power and value given to it, is the fulcrum on which the sense of place is established. In this article, we attempt to visualize the North Madras community’s sense of place through a window to the politics of dominant ideology and materialism infused with morality, as showcased in the film.

Sense of Place – Varied Dimensions in Literature

The concepts of space and place are about the “where” and “how” of things (Agnew, 2011). In this sense both words have been used interchangeably in this article.

In his narrative account of places, Entrikin (1991) explicates place as a human construct - an individual’s sense of time and space. The personal and social aspects of place, according to Entrikin lend a specificity and limitedness to its otherwise abstract meaning, giving birth to individual and collective identities.

According to Coleman (2005), Tönnies (1887) asserts that predominance of the *Gezellschaft* (society sustained through instrumental goal) over the *Gemeinschaft* (community formed through essential will in which membership is self-fulfilling), where the notion of place is better defined, and is characterized by collective ownership of land.

Low's (1992) concept of sense of place is rooted in anthropology – it gives a cultural preconception of the place and the individual's understanding and relation to that environment. According to Steele (1981), in environmental psychology, it could be the experience of a person in a particular setting; the characteristics that give the feel of the place or the immediate surroundings such as trees or people. Tuan (1974a) looks at sense of place from a geographical view, the connectedness between the geographical place and an individual, which he calls *topophilia*, while Jackson, (1994) defines it in terms of landscape architectural history - the history of the place, in terms of its narrative antecedents, and people's subjective opinion about the place.

Cross (2001) analyzes sociological aspects of sense of place in terms of the types of relationships that show a strong bonding between the person and the place - the biological, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commodified and dependant. She defines 'place alienation' as dissatisfaction with the place, and "relativity" as attachment to many places of living. She presents a revised sense of place typology and defines the strongest type of community attachment as rootedness (cohesive – attached to a single place; and divided- attached to two different places at the same time).

Dehaene and Cauter (2008), talk of oppositions between private vs public, leisure vs work, family space vs social space, cultural vs useful space etc., in the theoretical conceptualization of contemporary space.

Underpinnings of Place in Cinema

Cinema not only focuses on storytelling but also provides a view of the cultural and traditional practices of people and the place captured within the frame, which leads to society's interaction within the film. Along with entertaining its audience, cinema allows for the analysis of the value of the place shown, and its interpretation. According to Coleman (2005), "the sense of place brings the concept for understanding the social relationships." (p. 276). Tönnies (1887) posits "land is of substantial reality, playing an important conditioning role in man's life" (p.278). There is a distinctive difference between the place and the people who dwell in that place because it is the people who bring in a certain culture and tradition to that land.

Materialism- Place as Commodity

Coleman (2005) conceptualizes the "contestation-of-land-as-property" (p. 279) in the Western films showcasing the stereotypical Native American Indian. For the Indians, the sense of place is morally and thematically associated with the land as the home and hearth – showing the relationship between community and location. The Euro-American hero was a foil to this, marked by his relationship to the land as a commodity.

Malpas (2012) posits that just because geographical locations are better defined in the western films than Native American Indian films, it does not mean that sense of place is predominantly significant in the western film genres than others. In most of the western film

genres place appears merely as a scenic background, seamlessly infused into to the film's action, giving a sense of reality to it – giving birth to the term “western sense of place”.

“The cinematic landscape may be taken as a situation’ of ‘qualitative overspill,’ a fabricated environment of encounter, resonance, and excess, what Deleuze (1986) describes as ‘space . . . charged with potential” (Massumi, 2002 as cited in Pandian, 2011).

Commodification of a place allows one to choose a place, comparing its attributes and matching that with ideal and desirable features. A person's relationship with commodified place is cognitive and physical, rather than emotional. The place is commodity to be utilized and not a part of the person's historical antecedents. The image of the ideal place also changes with time. (Cross, 2001).

Ideology - Landscapes of the Mind

Therbon (1980) states that place are pivotal in the context of ideologies of what is fair and good. People's ideological relationships with places are based on values and beliefs about the process of relating to physical places. The expounding characteristic here is a well-defined ideology about how to exist in a place, either through religious or spiritual teachings or through a sense of ethical responsibility (Cross, 2001). The ideological relationship with place reinforces collective sentiments such as belonging and sharing and acts as a tool for the protection of the members (Butz and Eyles, 1997).

According to Stegner (1980), the classic thing about western films is the portrayal the space as an empty entity wherein a line is drawn and appropriate characters are placed to act out their parts. Delilo (1985) on the other hand defines empty space as a “non-place” where the place has lost its meaning. Nichol's (1981) proposition of “sense of self” and “sense of place” as synergistic defines the ideological rooting of place.

Furthermore filmic landscapes are considered to be the ‘landscapes of the mind’ where the representation of desire and value are both materialistic and mediated. This gives a strong emotional response in which the hostile environment plays the active role by becoming the primary character.

Hutchings (2004) is of the view that landscapes are used to illustrate a rural environment denoting the heritage and identity of a nation. Iranian director Kiarostami's⁵ films document culturally specific spaces and places; provide a socio-political milieu of these places through imagery and language and provide a critical commentary of the backward, consumptive spaces. (Bransford, 2003)

Gruenewald (2003) situates cultural space within the domains of ideology and politics. This cultural space is characterized by power, struggle and resistance. In rural places for example, oppressed people may experience sense of place as a struggle due the disparate socio-cultural and economic factors.

In some films the landscape dominates i.e. it claims its victims or the land from the humans which makes it the primary protagonist of the story. It is the landscape that reinforces the nature of the human characters. The attachment to a particular place as a character can be experienced in terms of desire or the activities as enacted on screen. This desire is a powerful element in re-creating and ‘living’ the film.

Craven (2010) defines place as “like the conscious” that is neither controversial nor intrusive that it requires repression. Cronon's (1992) narrative place is analogous to the writer's

depiction of the story on screen. Therefore landscapes are implicated by making culture and tradition seem natural that gives a familiarity to the places known and shown. Most spectacles of landscape consist of localized, regionalized, poetics and aesthetics of the location which plays a major role in forging identities for both local and international consumption.

Morality in Cinematic space

The term place not only denotes the physical spatial location but also the social status and moral order that arranges itself into patterns of ideology used by people inhabiting the place, in order to distinguish themselves from others (Tuan 1974b). Morality of space is led by norms of behaviour that determine its ownership. Curry (1998, p. 48) remarks: "When things are not where they belong, when they are out of place, they cannot truly be themselves." Morris (2004) defines sense of space as mirroring our ethical relationship with others and the places we inhabit.

The Western films espoused the high moral ground for man to base his accountability, responsibility and masculinity on - and his actions (often based on violence) to offer protection to the weaker in times of moral dilemma. The Westerns' role in promoting morality through masculinity and violence beyond the American frame is notable. Morality is the language of self-identity (Burke, 2011)

Examples of ideological, materialistic and moral 'sense of place' in Tamil Cinema

Prior to the 1970s, the concept of "sense of place" during this period was portrayed by the use of costumes and movies were mostly shot within the studios set-up. Camera angles were mostly at the eye level in order to have a clear connection between the subject and the audience. Most of the shots were static and since there were no high speed cameras, camera movements were slow and gradual in order to capture the reactions of the subject in detail. Only three point lighting that was used i.e. the back light, fill light, and key light.

The 1970's saw a seminal moment in the history of Tamil cinema, when it established its identity as a cinema driven by creative and independent thinking filmmakers, who moved away from stereotypical narratives in search of a realistic style of film making, experimenting with form and theme in the framing of landscapes and places. (Pillai, 2012). The manipulation of the camera served to construe the place framed by it.

Cinematographers started experimenting with lighting techniques and half-lighting came into action. The film *Padhinaru Vaiyadhinilae*⁶ (At the Age of Sixteen) was considered to be a cult classic of the time due to its ability to portray the realism of place by taking the camera out of the classical studio set-up, into the villages and natural landscapes (Rao, 2003 as cited in Pillai, 2012). The camera, expresses through rhetoric of images, the struggle of sense of place for the socially inadequate in society. It also offered a completely new angle to the ideology of Tamil nativity. In earlier films, with dominant Dravidian ideologies, it was the hero who was the narrative agency and upholder of Tamil identity. *Padhinaru Vaiyadhinilae* saw the introduction of the neo-nativity genre (Kaali & Vasudevan, 1999), where the village became the "collective-actant" and displaces the hero as the bastion of the Tamil ideology.

The 80's were marked by films high on concept, cinematic plots and action, for example the 1987 film *Nayagan*⁷ (Hero) that depicts the life and times of Velunayakan, an underworld Don of Mumbai, through poverty and the rural landscape of the poor. Velunayakan is an outsider, introduced into the world of crime by force of circumstance and proceeds to leave his mark on it.

Velunayakan's materialistic triumph is the "ownership" of Mumbai, and his morality is the protection he offers to his "subjects", albeit through violence.

In the 90's, high budget films started emerging not only to make the film a commercial success but also to give an artistic, realistic outlook to serious social issues affecting the contemporary social landscape, for example, the portrayal of militancy in Kashmir in the 1992 film *Roja*⁸ (Rose) and the 1994 communal riots of Mumbai in *Bombay*⁹ (1995). Talking about the Indian films set in Kashmir in the 90's, Bhaumik (2004) explains: "Cinema operates in particular ways in the timecodes of places like Kashmir, where life until recently was pastoral and non-industrial. Suddenly modernity comes along and seeks to discipline such a society." (p. 209)

According to Ebert (2012) in the movie *Life of Pi* (2012), director Lee uses the medium of 3-D to intensify the film's sense of places and events rather than to evoke surprises or to impress. The 2000's were the turning point in the Tamil film history where filmmakers started exploring special effects and the use of HD video cameras to identify the sense of place that had by then become an important part of film genre.

An example is *Angadi Theru's*¹⁰ (The Marketplace) (2010) realistic and hard-hitting portrayal of the lives of young migrants from the villages in Tamil Nadu to the capital city of Chennai in search of greener pastures. The film showcases the pressures of "placelessness" and echoes Foucault's (1967) definition of space as a mirror - a placeless place, one that is real in a sense that one can see oneself, yet unreal. The film has superb night effect shots of Chennai streets and realistic depiction of the interiors of the textile showrooms of Chennai's famous marketplace - T.Nagar.

The politics of dominant ideology, materialism and morality within the North Madras community's sense of place in *Madras* (2014)

Shot inside actual housing board flats mostly with natural light, *Madras* has portrayed the topophilia of North Madras through the omnipresent Wall and the power and value attributed to it. The Wall is the space that provides the stage for the story to unfold.

The opening scene sets the visual mood of the film, where anthropology i.e. a cultural pre-conception and understanding the realities of North Madras's Vyasarpadi region is shown through an establishment shot. There is then the shift from a representation of space to a "representational" space. The scene is about two groups ruling over Vyasarpadi and their subsequent estrangement due to certain misunderstandings. To mirror the splitting of the rival factions, split shot and colour transitions have been used, to differentiate the areas in which they operate. All the violence and misunderstandings between the two groups is centered on a common space that both groups clamour for ownership - the Wall. This brings environmental psychology into play, i.e. a non-human character lending a feel of place. The 'Wall', which forms the pivotal theme of the film, is shown using a pedestal shot, a variation of the camera tilt. The fight for supremacy over this Wall is shown through a bird view shot showing the geography of the area - the landscape architecture and its historical underpinnings that relates to people's subjective opinion about the place. The one who "conquers" the Wall will acquire the power of dominance and jurisdiction over the area. Along with topophilia - the affective bond between the people and the Wall - stark materialism abounds, that is played out in the exploitation of the Wall as commodity as well as human relationships. This is ruminative of Gruenewald's (2003) cultural space typically characterized by power, struggle and resistance.

Vyasarpadi as representational space for Dalit ideology is shown through many examples, notable of which are the scenes showing Kaali reading *Theendadha Vasantham*" (Untouchable Spring) an important book in Dalit literature, and the noticeable use of the colour blue — usually associated with Ambedkar¹²- that influenced political parties —in many frames. Vyasarpadi is also home to highly knowledgeable, politically aware intellectual characters such as Johnny, a mentally disturbed erstwhile goon, who loiters around talking about a wide range of subjects.



Fig 2: The Wall as representational space

The film portrays the symbolic power and danger of the Wall (as an imitation of the corporeal world, it has the power to manipulate it) in its domination over humans. There is a sense of rooted cohesiveness between the Wall and the people of that area, i.e. there is a strong local identity attached to it. This is reinforced when a character from one warring faction tells the other “*Idhuenga area, engasuvaru*” (this is our area, our Wall). Kaali, on the other hand, displays divided cohesiveness to the place...he is a graduate, has a cushy job in a better part of the city that is far removed from the chaotic slum life, he not averse to spending on branded products, (at one point in the film, Anbu tells him “*Un vaazhkayevera*” (your life is very different).. Yet Kaali doesn't mind sharing space with other unemployed youth of his locality, fetching water from the local pipe for his mother or indulging in a little street romance with his love interest. He and his family live a “complete” life, preferring to stay where they are, even though they are economically liberated.

The Wall that was ‘dominant space’, is now totally ‘dominated’. There is annexation of space, in other words, organic space forcefully attuned to oblige the desires of a set of people. Idyllically, dominant and annexed spaces overlap but with dissension. This is metaphorically shown through the Wall's “thirst” for bloodshed and violence— a red blotch on the wall that keeps expanding as the murders —, showing growing human distress. When Kannan, the head of one warring group becomes the area minister he officially “acquires” the wall and paints his departed father's picture on it as a mark of respect as well as dominance. The “contestation-of-land-as-property” theory (Coleman, 2005) plays out here.

A spate of untoward incidents such as unexpected deaths, suicides, and accidents in front of the Wall follow, and people start believing that the Wall has been cursed. A dolly zoom-in is used to portray this. The Wall here is something to be feared, a bloodthirsty malefic entity that claims the lives of people who fight for it. Here materialism (seeing the Wall as a commodity to be

possessed), sets the stage for morality, that is played out by Kannan seeking to protect the people of “his area”. With Kannan’s ownership of the Wall, it now becomes a humanized space, legitimizing Kannan’s moral right to it through his performative, representational and material activities asserting his right over it.

In the first two scenes the director introduces us to the reality of northern Madras and the power a Wall has in terms of status, privilege and respect. It is through this Wall that the audience gets an insight to the landscape, people’s lifestyle, occupation and culture. The sense of place looms over the film – scenes of North Madras with its dully-lit streets, dingy narrow staircases, claustrophobic flats, peeling walls and narrow lanes. All aspects of life in a slum are highlighted: political opportunism, brutality of life, romance, friendship, betrayal, everyday conversations among women who defy stereotypes etc. The female protagonist Kalaiyarsi, the love interest of Kaali, for instance, is not a typical heroine. She is politically aware and does not leave divinity to decide her fate for her.

In the scenes during the time of elections, Mari uses the political situation by systematically promoting a culture of violence to re-acquire the Wall with the help of his right hand man Anbu. These struggles are violently symbolic as the Wall now has acquired a material value in the marketplace of social inequalities between the “blue” and “white” collar people.

Flickering of the light above the Wall shows the imminent danger that awaits Anbu and Kaali, who though initially reticent, later accepts the ideology behind Anbu’s quest for the Wall. This shot also visually depicts the distress all over that area and especially that of Kaali, whose trauma at his unwitting involvement in the gruesome murder is shown through a close-up shot. Kaali hurling a stone at the Wall showing his anger, is taken in a long shot and slowly zooming in to the Wall, while the background music portrays tragedy, sadness, anger, distress and bloodshed – all happening because of a single Wall.



Fig 3: Kaali’s initiation into violence

The scene where Mari intends to kill Anbu due to his greed and desire for money and political power brings out the true meaning of materialism. This materialism leads to the defacing of the Wall. Worm’s-eye view shot has been used to show Kaali ruining the portrait on the wall by pouring paint on it. A reaction shot showing Kannan’s response to this followed by a mixture of hard-edged shadows of Kaali towering upto the height of the Wall and a worm’s-eye view to show the hegemony of both the Wall and Kaali switching to a matched-cut to show Kaali’s next action to destroy Mari, who was responsible for Anbu’s death are all creative highlights that show the transition of space from materialistic to moral.



Fig 4: Kaali's shadow symbolically stands tall against the hegemony of the Wall

Power has now been transferred to Kaali's hands. Moral space is further reinforced by Kaali's declaration that the Wall would now be a symbol of knowledge. Kaali and Kalaiyarisi start teaching children in the building that the Wall is part of. The Wall, now with the theme of children's education painted on it, thus becomes a place where characters and spectators are forced to assume a moral position. The Wall denotes the uniqueness of Dalit's ideological claims that is based on the principles of equality, where education becomes an emancipating tool for the society.

Negotiating for a 'space of their own'

Having grown up in the colony in North Madras, a neglected, ghettoized area for the 'lower castes', Mr Ranjith had firsthand experience of the sense of place as a human construct - akin to Karalapakkam Entrikin (1991)'s explication of place giving rise to differences in individual and collective identities

The film *Madras* is all about the relationship between space and politics, opening with the politically driven exemplifications of space and its instrumentalization. The director's vision seems to be to break the mould of the inability of consumerist space to produce anything other than its own mirror image, thus go beyond merely showing space as a representation to conceptualizing it as challenging established status quo.

The film offers a glimpse of how people of North Madras dream of an individual and collective urban utopia within the ideologies accompanying the urbanization processes. According to Comolli and Narboni (1971) every film is rooted in ideology in some form or other - overt or covert. The authors typify three types of films- (a) those which define ideology in the most unsullied form (b) those that brazenly attack ideology (c) those that go against the accepted ideological norms, and whose content is covertly politicized (d) films with overt ideological content and finally (e) films that seem to be overtly ideological but in reality are not so.

Director Ranjith's film falls into the third category. *Madras* is about the Dalits' search for a "space of their own". Space here is used as a political fulcrum. Dominated by Dravidian parties, the Dalits of North Madras struggle to negotiate with the existing space that is totally 'taken up' by the Wall. As a visual narrative about contemporary Dalit politics in Tamil Nadu, *Madras* uses cinematic space to covertly extoll the ideologies of the Dalit youth. In the film, the director's

analysis of identity politics oppression culminates into the attempt to reclaim the North Madras community's sense of self through raising of consciousness.

From the director's viewpoint, 'dominated' space in the film is one that is experienced, represented by the daily life of the slums of North Madras. On the other hand, the dominant space is the imagined space that the wall creates –representations of materialism, ideology, and moral practice that are interlinked in the film. It is the conflict arising out of the dominated and the dominant space that leads to the evocation of temporality of time and space in the film through various instances– the 'present' situation being new at that moment; and the new being repeated everywhere. (whether it is the claiming of the wall for individual identity or collective social emancipation).

The director also feels that the movie also contains a perception about the culture and lifestyle of the Dalit community, which in reality has been misinterpreted by people. He says, "the actual assumption about our people is that we are all violent and our ideologies are not respectful but in reality we haven't been given a chance to project ourselves to the outside world." According to him, North Madras is a place where latest trends in dance, sports and even personality development are being followed, with a fervent attempt at education and progression in life.

For the discerning audience, the film offers an in- depth account of seamless and firmly entwined associations between the semi-urban usage, construction and purpose of space for socio-political systems of today.

End notes

1. A geographic term used to refer to the northern section of Chennai city, North Chennai is assumedly the most thickly populated part of Chennai. Neighbourhoods in this part close to the sea coast (also consisting of "kuppams" or fishing hamlets) are currently considered as areas of stagnant growth in real estate. North Chennai is home to industries and the working class (organized and unorganized, skilled and unskilled).
2. An intellectual activist, pioneer of the Dravidian movement and founder of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891, Iyothee Thass (1845-1914), urged the so-called "untouchables" to give up their "hindu' status and register themselves as casteless Dravidians. He championed the cause of education, identity, human dignity, rationalism and women's rights. He set up several schools in lower caste pockets situated in urban centers.
3. M.C. Raja (1883 to 1943) was a social activist and Dalit politician, who represented the Dalits at the 1931 Second Round Table Conference held in London, to debate upon Indian Constitutional reforms, along with along with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Rettamalai Srinivasan. According to Althusser (1971), ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects. i.e., marginalized individuals who on becoming aware of their subordinate identities, attempt to challenge conformatory practices and institutions. M.C Raja attempted to reformat the Constitution with an "inclusive approach".
4. Rettamalai Srinivasan (1860 – 1945) was a close associate of Mahathma Gandhi and represented the Dalits in the first two Round Table Conferences in London (1930 and 1931). He founded the Madras Province Scheduled Castes' Federation in 1939. He believed that the depressed classes could find emancipation through political participation.
5. Abbas Kiarostami belongs to the generation of Iranian New Wave directors known for their use of poetic dialogues and allegory in storytelling. His films utilize landscape as a tool for visual communication of feeling and idea, a place for reflection and observation.

6. Directed by the then debutante Bharatiraja, *Pathinaru Vayathinile* (1977) revolves around the struggle and vulnerability of 16-year old girl, in love. By taking the camera out of the suffocating confines of the studio, into rural Tamil Nadu, Bharatiraja

6. Directed by the then debutante Bharatiraja, *Pathinaru Vayathinile* (1977) revolves around the struggle and vulnerability of 16-year old girl, in love. By taking the camera out of the suffocating confines of the studio, into rural Tamil Nadu, Bharatiraja brought the viewers closer to their rural roots and introduced them to a new genre of village cinema, where the rural attained a new authenticity of place.

7. The film was inspired by *The Godfather* and the real life story of Mumbai don Varadarajan Mudaliar. The famous Dharavi slum area of Mumbai was meticulously recreated by the Art Director of the film P.C. Sreeram for director Mani Ratnam, in Chennai.

8. Co-written and directed by Mani Ratnam, filmed in the mountainous landscapes of Himachal Pradesh, rather than Kashmir, this film addresses the question of militancy in Kashmir. Mani Ratnam brings in overlapping representation of national (Indian) vs local (rural and urban Tamil Nadu) space; spirited free space (the rural southern countryside and the wild mountainous beauty of Kashmir) vs occupied space (militant and army camps)

9. This film is the most significant example of censorship in the 1990's. A Mani Ratnam film, it talks about the romance between a Hindu man and Muslim woman set against the backdrop of the 1994 communal riots of Bombay through the eyes of a common man. Here gendered nation-spaces are discussed within the secular and religious dimensions of identity.

10. Critically and commercially acclaimed as a landmark in Tamil films, *Angaadi Theru*, directed by Vasanthabalan, portrays the depressing reality of the lives of the salespeople of the textile showrooms located in Chennai's main market in T.Nagar.

11. Initially penned in Telugu as *Antarani Vasantam* (2000), the book was translated into English (*Untouchable Spring*, 2010) and Tamil (*Theendatha Vasantham*, 2004) by G. Kalyana Rao. This chronicles the plight of Dalits within the confines of a caste-based society where social class takes precedence over knowledge and inherent skill.

12. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was independent India's first law minister and the main architect of the Indian Constitution. He pushed for major reforms against "untouchability" and oppression of the lower classes of society. His statues/busts generally represent him in a light blue three piece suit. The colour blue thus symbolically represents propaganda adopted by the backward classes and political parties that share his ideology.

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