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# A Discourse Analysis Of Tamil Film Content: Reference To Sports Concepts

# Dr. Padmanabhan. T, Mr. Suneesh. K. S, Mr. Poovarasan. G

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, College of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu (Dist.), Tamil Nadu, India.

padmanat@srmist.edu.in

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, College of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu (Dist.), Tamil Nadu, India.

sk7552@srmist.edu.in, pg7885@srmist.edu.in

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# **ABSTRACT**

Cinema is the most powerful form of art in the present world. It can help people understand themselves, society, and culture. Tamil Nadu has a rich tradition of producing movies across various genres, and the current state of this industry is highly commendable. This study focuses on the impact of Tamil sports movies on society, comparing the viewpoints of sports and non-sports audiences, and identifying the factors that influence them. We conducted this research with ten individuals from non-sports backgrounds and ten athletes using an unstructured interview methodology. People generally believe that sports movies encourage young people to play sports. However, the truth is that sports movies do not influence individuals to participate in sports; instead, they serve as a source of motivation. Dialogues, positive climax, and conflict-solving methods are some of the elements that create such motivation.

Keywords: Cinema, Sports Movies, Cricket, Women Sports, discourse analysis

## **Introduction:**

Cinema is a popular form of entertainment that has an impact and influence on society. Society also exerts an influence on this medium. McQuail (2005, p. 50) describes the 20th century as the "first age of mass media." Tamil cinema has always been a part of the Tamil audience's lifestyle. From the silent era to the present period, Tamil cinema and its actors have been a casual topic of discussion. The influence of Tamil cinema on society is enormous. Chief Ministers such as M.G. Ramachandran, K. Karunanidhi, and J. Jayalalitha influenced their audiences through cinema. Costumes, dialogues, accessories, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc. have influenced audiences or fans to re-use them in their daily lives. Taking it a step further, numerous Tamil movies have been produced to raise awareness among the general public whenever a significant issue has gained importance since independence. The movies are mostly questioning inequality, the elite's dominance, the caste system, education, poverty, and women's freedom. Likewise, the modern Tamil movie directors have made some movies notable in history; it reflects the corrupted political system even in the department of sports and its selection process committees. Furthermore, the films have clearly portrayed how talented people go unrecognized in various sports fields.

One of the new trends in filmmaking involves creating biopics and sports-based films aimed at educating people about their favourite sportsperson or sport. As we all know, India is a sports hub, where many famous sports personalities emerge by shining on the international stage. In most cases, Indians consider many sportspeople to be their idols and try to copy them. The famous sportspersons in India command high respect from the people, and this craze makes them more popular among the masses. Therefore, the production of sports-based films in India has become a trend that garners the highest level of appreciation from the public (Farha Yashmin, 2019).

In sports movies, Tamil industry filmmakers aim to establish a fictional relationship between the audience and the sport, providing them with a deeper understanding of the sport and a visual representation of it. Fans can follow their favourite athletes in a film, which helps them connect and entertains. Without a doubt, "Iruthi Suttru, Bigil, Jeeva, Sarpatta Parambarai, and many other sports-based Tamil movies" have influenced Indian society and culture for a long time, serving as the most vibrant medium for telling stories to the general public. Films take the form of stories of success, struggle, sacrifice, nationalism, and pride to spread, influence, encourage, and promote goodwill among the audience.

#### **Review of Literature**

The study found that various research scholars analysed biopic films. Even film critics and experts have highlighted the importance of biopics. The studies conclude that biopics offer viewers a chance to delve deep into a personality, also piquing their curiosity to go beyond aspects presented on screen. One can't expect movies to go full throttle with the detailing and explore different dimensions, given the three-hour span that limits the filmmaker. However, the positives are significant. The fascination for biopics has become a starting point for many to dig into books to understand the individual on a holistic level before/after the movie release" (Srivathsan Nadadhur, 2018).

The directors' preference for young champions over faded, fabled, and forgotten heroes stems from the growing interest of viewers in real-life heroes who continue to influence popular culture, a topic that the movies about them delve into. "Since fans are happy to get every update on their stars through social media, it is logical for the filmmakers to delve deeper into their lives via biopics." (Divya Pal, News18, July 19, 2018)

Sports biopics are big. Not only do they captivate the audience's imaginations with strong, inspirational stories, but they also set cash registers ringing. They began with 'Chak De India,' a true story inspired by the life of Mir Ranjan Negi, the coach of the Indian women's hockey team, who led a team of girls from the hinterlands to soaring heights. It was critically acclaimed and did decent business, paving the way for films in the genre." (India Times, Jan. 28, 2017).

The driving force behind "life picturing" is the generic plot of 'national identity'. In India's sports biopics, we clearly portray the lives of its sporting heroes—Tendulkar, Dhoni, and Azhar—as national lives, with their work and play embodying the nation's interests. The biopics focus on the effect generated when the cricketer on screen scores or is out: the nation mourns or celebrates accordingly. In the title of the Tendulkar biopic, "A Billion Dreams," he embodies the dreams of the entire Indian population of one billion. The biopic portrays the athlete as a crucial "national symbol" (Berlant 155). (Pramod K. Nayar, 2017)

Rachel Dwyer (2012) tracks the growth of the genre in the Indian context and mentions that the biopic genre has been relatively unproductive in India, despite the massive international critical and commercial success of the 1982 Indo-British biopic Gandhi by Richard Attenborough. People in India rarely use the term "biopic" because they are unfamiliar with it, often classifying it as "history." She observes that, since biopic is a hybrid genre, the biography does have some problems with fitting in the Hindi film form, which must have a hero, melodrama, spectacle, music, and also a star. The filmmaker behind Paan Singh Tomar (2010)

Tigmanshu Dhulia known as Indian screenwriter emphasises that audiences tend to categorise a biopic without stars as a type of documentary, and there is a notable reluctance in India towards this format due to its lack of commercial success. Biopics, especially sports biopics, have become immensely popular. Sports personalities have become a huge source of inspiration for filmmakers keen to make films based on them. Apart from this, there is a sudden surge of biopics about common people in Bollywood. These films are quite different from the usual biopics, as the focus has shifted from only celebrating the life stories of the famous. These biopics create drama out of the stories of ordinary people who face extraordinary circumstances and still emerge as successful in their endeavours. Examples of successful biopics include Manjhi, Manjunath, Sarabjit, and others. Reality (in terms of biopics) as a formula is gaining prominence in Bollywood, with even fictional scripts creating thrust on authentic

characters and situations. (India Times, Jan. 28, 2017)

#### **Background of the Study:**

Worldwide, countries are giving more importance to sports activities. A victory in a renowned game in any country instills pride in its people, akin to a wartime victory. Thus, notable countries such as the United States of America, China, Great Britain, Russia, South Korea, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary, and Australia rank in the top ten for assigning greater significance to various games (BBC, 2012). Similarly, while many countries have achieved success in the history of sports, India has not experienced the same level of success. Indians rejoice only in cricket, but have now begun to lend considerable support to even hockey and tennis.

Significantly, India boasts the most distinguished democracy in the world, maintaining its seventh position as the largest country and second-most populous, with a population of over 1.2 billion. India stands unique in its ability to challenge and influence other developed countries through economic, political, and technological means. However, corruption and inequality pose significant challenges for India. The movie serves as a significant medium for exposing these issues to a broad audience; the success of several films in the same genre has demonstrated the potential to alter people's mind-sets. Specifically, individuals with high caste religious beliefs have dominated sports in India, leading to corruption, shady politics, and inequality across the entire sports sector. Therefore, the current study endeavours to investigate the influence of sports-oriented Tamil films on the attitudes of young people, using a selection of these films.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

- The aim is to investigate the potential impact of sports-orientated Tamil films on the viewership.
- The aim is to examine how both sports and non-sports audiences view Tamil movies with a sports theme.
- The aim is to identify all the factors that impact the viewership of a sports-orientated Tamil film.

# Research Methodology:

The researcher has adopted a qualitative research method. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), qualitative research employs a flexible questioning approach, and qualitative data comes in a range of forms, including vital notes made while observing in the field, interview transcripts, and documents. The researcher uses these observations as an outline to develop a research design for the current study. In this investigation, we used the unstructured interview method to analyse the secondary data. In this method, the questions were not prearranged, and the conversation encouraged spontaneity to enhance the interview, further documenting the respondent's opinion and perception. We have analysed the contents using secondary data (David & Carol, 2009).

### Samples:

The researcher chose ten students and research scholars from the physical education department and another ten from other departments at the SRM Institute of Science and Technology as samples to understand the viewpoints of the various focus groups. Sports players and non-sports audiences are the two different groups used for this study. The researcher conducted this study using the purposive sampling method. To gather their perspectives and answers about the sports-based Tamil movie, the researcher has selected the unstructured interview questions.

#### **Selected Movies:**

This study includes only ten sports-themed movies that the Tamil film industry released between 2011 and 2021.

Dhoni, a ninth-standard student, aspires to become a cricketer like Dhoni, but his passion for cricket hinders his ability to study effectively. However, the social system and family setup continue to act as significant obstacles in his path. The movie revealed How will he be able to pursue his passion with his father's perseverance after such incidents and struggles? (Malathi, 2012)

The commercial cover for Ethir Neechal—a social subject-orientated movie—came out. A young man,

embarrassed by his name, finally decides to change by securing a victory in a marathon. Afterwards, his coach will find redemption in his achievement. This brings to mind the story of a successful female athlete in India (Suganth, 2013).

Real-life incidents sparked the creation of Jeeva, a movie that provides insight into the cricket selection commission. It investigates one particular community's dominance in the Tamil Nadu cricket game. Additionally, Saraswathi (2014) highlights their influence and manipulation of the selection process, which ultimately results in the promotion of only members of that community.

Iruthi Suttru—the movie brings to life the real-life incidents that crop up with the thought of Mary Kom and her victory in the year 2006, the women's world amateur boxing championship (Anupama, 2016). An angry, straightforward boxing coach starts to train young, recalcitrant women under his wings for the world championship. The film rightly exposes the internal politics among the power-wielding members of the sports association, highlighting the real battle that takes place outside the ring.

The movie Vallinam emphasises the importance of promoting all sports and athletes in the country rather than focusing solely on cricket. It is an idealistic film, yes, but what makes Vallinam a commendable effort is that it doesn't resort to cricket-bashing to drive home its point. (TOI, 2017)

Kanaa is a movie that exemplifies the quote, "To dream is to believe that you can reach for the stars." In this film, a protagonist who is passionate about the sport shows the obstacles in her path and how she has to struggle to achieve her goal. We get a melodramatic film that tries too hard and delivers nothing. (Hindustan Times, 2022)

Bigil—the movie Bigil isn't another formulaic sports film, but it's pretty much set within a template. You have this underdog element, and you know who's going to win against all odds. Though Bigil has a subplot on women's football, there's very little about the players, their lives, ordeals, and dreams. (IndianExpress, 2019)

Boologam's structure combines elements of a sports film, a critique of TV media sensationalism and capitalism, and an inadvertent promotion of the Indian government's Made in India initiative. The significant boxing match looks real in all aspects. The avoidance of pseudo-heroism or drama enhances the viewer's believability and acceptance. (Behindwood 2015, TOI 2015)

The Kennedy Club effectively depicts the characters of girls from economically disadvantaged families, allowing us to empathise with them. Their family issues, which involve parents denying them permission to participate in Kabaddi matches, do engage the viewers. Despite the decent cinematography of the Kabaddi scenes, which feature some thrilling moments, the sequences' flow becomes overly predictable. (TOI, 2019)

Natpe Thunai is not a typical sports film, but one packaged with Tamil commercial cinema elements on friendship, sacrifice, and the rot within the political system. In the selection process, politics forced the protagonist to give up his game. Similar to this, the film's plot revolves around hockey, but touches on more topical issues and politics in sports. (FirstPost, 2019)

# **Review and Discussion:**

# **Non-sports Audience:**

A research scholar, Respondent (1), noted that the movies, infused with an understanding of Indian games, inspire young people who aspire to become prominent sports players. These types of movies not only inspire this generation of adolescents to participate in various games, but also raise awareness about domestic politics. Movies like Irudhi Suttru and Jeeva are motivating because they show that anyone from anywhere can achieve success if their intention is pure. The way the protagonist solves the conflicts is one of the key elements that is influencing the audience.

Respondent (2), a research scholar, acknowledges the statement and expresses that movies have more

influence on younger people. Moreover, movies have bolstered the mental strength of sportspeople and provided more evidence about the political aspects of the sport. Movies such as Bigil, Irudhi Suttru, and Jeeva have effectively depicted the politics involved in the selection process. The way the protagonists and other characters triumph over these politics inspires people to gain a broader understanding of the sport.

Respondent (3), a research scholar, has reported that after a few successful sports-based movies in the Tamil industry, the parents have gained more knowledge through these reviews and critics. Therefore, they are not inclined to express interest in their daughter pursuing a career in sports. The movies depicted the coach's favouritism and exploitation of girls. Besides, the Iruthi Suttru movie explored how the coach can make any player as vibrant, and how they stand behind their student's achievement. The respondent also pointed out those merely presenting facts in movies is not sufficient; there is still more to come, which could aid our society in identifying the true nature of sports and safety for the upcoming generation.

The observation from Respondent (4), a postgraduate student, indicates that talents from rural areas have had a greater impact than those from urban areas. The movies also serve as indirect representations of the same issues and communal problems. The popularity of these films in recent times indicates that the public has embraced the genre, and they anticipate more from parallel cinema directors. The movies are extremely helpful to beginners because they teach them how to overcome barriers in district, state, and national-level games to taste victory. Films like Vallinam, Jeeva, and Nandita's character story (Valli) from Ethir Neechal portray different conflicts in different aspects.

Respondent (5), a research scholar, has noted that sports movies also mirror the Indian social system. Several sports movies, such as Jeeva, have depicted similar scenarios, highlighting the continued significance of the caste system. The selection process in Irudhi Suttru exposes the mistreatment and sexual assault of women. In Bigil, there is caste discrimination, and in Ethir Neechal, there are attacks on those with lower economic status. These types of movies raise awareness among the audience and aspiring athletes, assisting them in preparing for their future endeavours. Apart from the heroic elements, the majority of the movie provides a realistic perspective of the Indian sports system.

Respondent (6), an assistant professor, expressed dissatisfaction with the impact of money, internal politics, and the caste system, which disproportionately affects the poor and systematically lowers them. For instance, Jeeva, Kanaa, and Vallinam have performed admirably. Some movies, such as Boologam, have also tried different conflicts that occur because of corporate companies in sports. Movies such as Natpe Thunai and Kennady Club lack coherence, as they prioritize commercial aspects over sports. Another movie, Saarpata Parambarai, delves into the political dynamics between two clans of groups. It also motivates young people to focus on their goals.

One of the postgraduate respondents (7) said that due to the awful politics, several talents could have died, as shown in the Jeeva movie, and also lost their opportunities. The report suggested that we should screen the life histories of most sports players, much like Marry Kom. It would have had more influence on Indian sports. These types of movies draw the public's attention to the various sports available in India. All these movies portray success in sports as the ultimate goal of life. In reality, people can even lose. These movies create such attitudes that failure is the end of life. Every movie has a happy conclusion. Alternative endings should also be celebrated.

Respondent (8), an undergraduate student, noted that movies also showcase the positive aspects of the sports industry, serving as a guide for aspiring players and their parents in choosing their career paths. Furthermore, the strategies have alleviated their problems and provided them with opportunities for achievement. Movies such as Saarpatta Paramabarai, Vallinam, and Irudhi Suttru effectively depict the game's strategies.

Respondent (9) a postgraduate student who is also a movie buff stated that all of these films have a similar template. The story arc is very linear, and it is obvious that the protagonist wins the match. The way he/she/achieves is the only element of surprise in the story. No sports movie has ever depicted the true essence of

the sport.

Respondent (10), a research scholar, said that movies like Bigil talk about discrimination based on caste, economy, gender, and so on. Instead of focusing on commercial elements, this movie encouraged the audience to engage in sports. Sarpattai Parambarai is also one of Tamil's best sports movies, portraying the local boxing culture in North Madras. The movie effectively portrays the boxing techniques and styles. Jeeva also beautifully portrayed caste discrimination. This type of sports movie not only raises awareness about the unscrupulous politics in sports, but also inspires the younger, aspiring audience to pursue sports.

#### **Sports Players:**

Respondent (11), a Kabaddi player, differs from the previous respondents by asserting that the movies do not solely focus on sports; instead, they have crafted a narrative that is heroic. The respondent acknowledges the connection between internal politics and sports in India. This created awareness among the elderly; it led to a sense of knowledge, and they are not encouraging sports due to dirty politics. The movies have depicted only half of the issues underlying the selection process effectively.

Research scholar Respondent (12) asserts that, despite the term "sports-based," movies only depict a single aspect of sportsmanship. Hollywood films such as The Blindside (2009), Remember the Titans (2000), Miracle (2004), and others have already delved into these realities.

Respondent (13), a volleyball player, said that, in all these movies, dialogue plays an important role rather than the story and the screenplay. Movies like Kanaa, Irudhi Suttru, and Bigil have a much greater impact than any other. Especially, these three talk about women's empowerment. In the movie Kanaa, there is a dialogue that reads, "(in Tamil language) *Oru visayam venum na... Aasa patta mattum pathathu... Adam Pidikka Theriyanum...* Nee pidikara adathula tha. The mother of the protagonist (a woman) says, "Athu evlo unaku pidikum nu mathavangaluku thorium," which translates to, "A person should know how to be stubborn rather than dreaming something." Your stubbornness shows how much you like the thing." These types of dialogues continue to motivate me even after watching the movie.

Respondent (14) an athlete stated that most of these sports movies do not focus on sports' technical aspects. The film portrays the protagonist's pain and struggle as they strive to achieve their goals. The character, not the sport itself, bears the brunt of the impact. A Hindi movie example Lagaan (2001) perfectly balanced both sport and the character's influence. It depicts nearly all the details of the sport (cricket), which significantly enhances its dynamics. This kind of impact is missing in most of these movies. In Bigil, the focus is primarily on women's empowerment and hero build-up rather than sports.

Respondent (15), a state-level cricket player, said that the Jeeva movie showcased the real struggle of the non-forward community cricketer. He also added that this movie has created a lot of awareness about the cricket committee among the audience. Apart from that, vallinam movies have showcased cricket's dominance in other sports. Kanaa has portrayed women's cricket in a decent way. However, none of the movies have accurately depicted the elements and techniques of sports. Every movie focused solely on the social impact of politics in sports.

Respondent (16), also a volleyball player, has observed that Tamil movies have to give more importance to athlete-based movies. He also added that most of the movies exaggerate the sport rather than portraying it as reality. This leads to an inaccurate representation of the game. For instance, in a movie like Bigil, every player portrays the reverse shot as a common shot, despite its extreme difficulty in reality. Watching this movie will unintentionally inspire budding players.

Respondent (17), a research scholar, observed these movies as not sports movies but movies that talk about the social and political discrimination of sports and its committee. Most of the movies haven't portrayed sports. Instead, these movies are portraying only the conflict between the sports committee and the selection process. These movies merely instil motivation, rather than suggesting that cinema cannot influence athletes.

The respondent (18), a cricket player, stated that Tamil sports movies portray Jeeva effectively. This movie provides him with motivation when he is feeling low. This movie primarily focuses on the politics involved in the selection process. It created significant awareness among people. Other than that, the sport's technical aspect remains unincorporated. It only depicts the success of a talented cricket player. But it doesn't show the tricks and tactics of the game. These kinds of tricks are missing in every other movie, too. He suggested classifying films that offer a comprehensive understanding of the sport as sports movies. These are just the stories of winning sportsmen.

Respondent (19) A physical education trainer asserted that commercial elements permeate every movie. Every movie has attempted to portray some form of politics and discrimination, but none have specifically depicted sports. Movies such as Irudhi Suttru have effectively depicted sports in a more accurate manner. This is a movie that accurately depicts the style and type of punch. The movie's flow is very similar to reality. Many movies, such as Kennedy Club, Natpe Thunai, and Bigil, over-exaggerate the sport, which is not a good way to portray it. A movie that portrays the reality of sports is only considered a sports movie. Saarpattai Parambarai, for example, is a periodic film that showcases the local boxing culture. Instead, the film primarily focuses on politics. In Dhoni, not Out, the whole subject talks about the students' passions other than education. Sports don't play a significant role in the story. Some of the scenes in this movie are very good, creating a positive vibe for the sportspeople. Again, it is common for everyone. Aside from those sports movies, they never inspire athletes.

Respondent (20), a state-level badminton player, stated that most Tamil movies concentrate on famous sports like cricket, Kabbadi, football, and boxing. There are very few movies that talk about other sports. Vallinam is one of them; it portrays a basketball game. This is one of the best Tamil sports movies. Even those who are new to basketball can understand the entire set of rules. This is what makes the movie so successful. Apart from that, the majority of films concentrate on the game's politics. The portrayal of many other movies, such as Natpe Thunai and Bigil, is top-notch.

#### **Conclusion:**

Cinema is the most powerful form of art in the present world. It can aid individuals in better understanding their own lives, as well as society and culture. Films have the potential to shed light on political and communal issues, as well as provide a cathartic experience that can inspire individuals to adopt new perspectives and approaches to life. Tamil Nadu has a wealthy tradition of movies in different genres; the present situation in movie making is highly appreciable.

In the present day, the movies have generated enormous social tension (Goswami & Kumari, 2013). Further, Jonathan (2010) has observed male dominance in sports-based movies, and the researcher lamented that successful movies mostly have male actors, namely Rudy, Rocky, Raging Ball, and more. According to reports, female athletes have been portrayed in sports movies, either positively or negatively, and many issues arose when people started to see many of the female sports movies. Many movies, such as A League of Their Own and Million Dollar Baby, portray female athletes in a positive light, while there are even more negative depictions of female athletes. Significantly, in Aaron's Contesting Identities: Sports in American Film, Baker's (2003) study observed that "race, gender issues, class, and, to a lesser extent, sexuality, constitute the dominant discourse in sports movies." The recent Tamil movie Iruthi Suttru followed a similar dictate. The movie insisted on the researcher's justification, arguing that if the quote is true and necessary, then it mirrors society.

The selected movies, most of them, have portrayed the social and political discrimination against sports. Movies like Ethir Neechal, Irudhi Suttru, and Saarpattai Parambarai have portrayed the real sports incident in a fictional manner. Meanwhile, movies like Dhoni Not Out, Bigil, Natpe Thunai, and Kennedy Club have used sports as a commercial element rather than the main conflict. Jeeva solely concentrates on caste politics during the selection process. Bhoologam concentrates on the business aspect of sports, while Vallinam depicts the balance of sports elements and the tension between two distinct sports.

According to the respondents, there is a clear consensus among the general audience and non-

sportspeople that sports movies have a significant impact on encouraging young people to participate in sports. Six out of ten non-sports audiences have the same thoughts about it. Other respondents hold different opinions, believing that these movies either exaggerate or don't focus enough on sports. Sports players, on the other hand, hold completely different opinions about these movies. Nearly all respondents stated that sports movies do not influence individuals who are new to sports; instead, they can serve as a source of motivation. In such motivations, dialogues play an important role. It is evident that sports movies do not persuade individuals to pursue sports. Sports movies solely foster motivation, a concept that is applicable to individuals in the workforce. Dialogues and positive endings create a spark of motivation.

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