

State Power as an Instrument of Class Dominance: A Discourse Analysis on “*Taanakkaran and Sirai*”

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Abstract

Films have always been a medium to show the social injustice that occurs due to power dynamics and social inequality. Tamil cinema has produced many film stories related to police subjects especially related to high ranked police officials, fictional stories, real incidents and some are adapted from a few incidents. But the lower cadre officials face injustice and dominance not only because of the cadre but also because they belong to lower caste and minority groups. Their role and achievements are never brought to limelight through films or any other visual entertainment medium as like higher ranked police officers. *Taanakkaran* focuses on a dated practice of British rule which was purely based on power dynamics, while *Sirai* focuses on social inequality in law which provides an injustice to class. According to Swetha (2022) caste identity is more discussed in the Tamil cinema which impacts on the socio-political situations in Tamil Nadu. The two films “*Taanakkaran* and *Sirai*” are trying to give limelight to such cadre officials and also their role as major influence in the society as shown in major films for the higher cadre officials. In this research these two movies will be analysed using Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis method. The research method adopted for this study is qualitative. The scenes, dialogues and social practices shown in the movie will be comparatively analyzed.

Keywords: State Power, Class Dominance, *Taanakkaran*, *Sirai*, Social Inequality

1. Introduction:

Cinema plays an important role as a medium through which various societal issues have been brought forward and have gathered attention of many, especially areas like social order, justice and authority. According to Velayutham et.al., (2025) there are Tamil movies which show the terrific treatment of police against the common people who are arrested on cases. The research identifies the relationship between police and how caste discrimination plays a vital role in treating the common citizens. In Indian regional cinema, especially Tamil cinemas representation of prison, policing and institutional discipline have steadily shifted towards critical realism. In response to social injustices which occur due to power dynamics and social inequality the new film makers tend to show this state violence, custodial abuse and mainly the psychological impact of the authoritarian system through their films. The paper undertakes a critical discourse analysis of *Sirai* (2025) and *Taanakkaran* (2022) to examine how institutional power dynamics are used as ideological sites of control, discipline and violence. Despite their interactions with

state power, the two films present different perspectives on justice. While *Taanakkaran* reveals how institutional systems justify violence, *Sirai* maintains a modern moral framework that stresses forgiveness and ethical responsibility. Both films provide a broad perspective on a system that continues to be influenced by social order, religion, and a hierarchy of authority that dates back to pre-independence and is still practiced in the age of digital transformation.

2. Literature Review:

The movie *Taanakkaran* shows Systemic casteism in educational institutions in various incidents through Abusive language, segregation in campus based on caste, physical assault by upper-caste students, and a silent agreement within the institution by administration and professors. It links caste and poverty by showing how Dalit students struggle to afford textbooks and uniforms and how poverty makes them socially immobile and education becoming a luxury. The continuous humiliation, physical abuse, and financial exploitation of Dalit families show an example of how society is always unjust and also exposing institutional and daily biases by Suresh, et al., 2024. In the movie *Sirai* the police officials are shown as powerful authorities who dominate the lower-level officers. Bhojpuri music videos always showed males in a very masculine and glorified way, portraying men as supreme figures and dominating figures; aggression and persistence are also romanticised through lyrics and performance. Male leads are fully dressed, the narrative is controlled by them, and they are always shown as powerful through their body language, smoking, and displaying their muscular bodies in the recent videos by Tanu Singh, 2025. The authoritative role shown in both the movies shows gender dominance.

The power dominance places a major role based on the senior and junior level officers. Malaysian Tamil films as always depict men (fathers, husbands, brothers) as leaders of the house and decision-makers, while women are confined to household roles and secondary status in spite of their major contributions to family life. This shows that decision making authority is an exclusive male privilege, while women and daughters accept male decisions without any discussion or objection by Sillalee S. Kandasamy et al., 2024. In the movie *Taanakkaran* the trainers are treated with their class and community. According to Jessop (2012) the Marxist approach shows the power focus and its domination in the capitalist societies which paved for a radical change in addressing the opposing of capitalism in the society. The movie *Sirai* has mentioned a particular community of people as offenders who are the cause for the bomb blast incident in the state. According to Chatterjee (2023) the identity of Dalits is shown in caste-based films in Tamil Nadu which is to promote social identity of Dalits. Both the movies *Sirai* and *Taanakkaran* show men as the powerful authority who dominates others through their power and class. Research by Halder (2024) say that the movies of Indian New wave are set to be an example to understand the shows men in superior power which impacts the gender, class and culture. In the movie *Sirai* community-based discrimination was shown in the village. The movie shows only one Muslim family which stays in a village and they were also opposed by other community people during conflict. The caste system that is influence in south Asia's Dalit

populations and how it impacts on the government and the other privileged groups of the society was shown in Tamil films like *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Karnan*, and *Jai Bhim- Purushothaman* (2023)

3. Objective of Research

1. To analyse the state power dynamics that focus on the construction of authority in the films *Taanakkaran* and *Sirai*
2. To examine the showcase of class dominance and hierarchy in both films
3. To analyse the Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional on both films
4. To assess the role of power of institutional discourse that controls discipline on the marginalized group.

4. Methodology

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis as its main analytical framework to explore how institutional power, class relations, and ideological dominance are produced in *Taanakkaran* and *Sirai*. Since it enables the examination of how language, visual representation, and narrative structures create and maintain power relations within social institutions, Critical Discourse Analysis is well-suited for this kind of approach (Fairclough, 1995).

The study is very much qualitative and interpretive in nature; it focuses on selected scenes as discursive sites where meanings are developed. The films are not only treated as mere narratives but are also analyzed as cultural texts that encode ideological assumptions about state power, class hierarchy, and justice.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Plot Story of *Taanakkaran*

Taanakkaran (2022), set in 1999 in a police training camp at police recruit school, revolves around the protagonist Arivu (Vikram Prabhu) and the trainees. The recruits are divided into batches for training of which arivu is placed in the batch of 1982 who were not placed during that period due to some internal issue but after a legal battle of two decades are placed in with the batch of 1999. The training camp is run under inspector Muthupandi (Madhusudhan Rao) who looks very strict but is also a corrupt officer, Eshwaramurthy (Lal) is the strict trainer who functions under muthupandi and controls the whole camp with his ruthlessness known for his extreme training Extra Drill (ED). The movie revolves around Arivu and the batch of 1982 who are targeted in all ways to make them withdraw from the training camp through this series of rigorous training and punishments by Eshwaramurthy.

5.2 Plot story of *Sirai*

Sirai (2025), set in 2003 around protagonist Kathiravan (Vikram Prabhu) armed reserve police constable in Vellore prison the story starts with an incident during a prisoner escort where the prisoner tries to escape after attacking the escort but is shot by Kathiravan shoots him when tries

to board an auto rickshaw and he dies on spot. After the incident Kathiravan and his colleagues are called for an inquiry by the commission and the issue is kept under investigation. As we think the story would go in the direction of the investigation trial for IPC section 129 it takes a u turn where he helps a colleague to see his ailing mother takes up his long escort duty of a murder accused Abdul Rauf (LK Akshay Kumar). The movie moves forward and takes everyone in a thrilling ride of suspense and emotion during the escort of Abdul Rauf and his flashback of his life and how he got arrested to his current trial status.

5.3 Textual Analysis of Dialogues and Para-Text (Micro-Level)

We see in a scene at *Taanakkaran* at the beginning of the training camp that the parade marshal insults the recruits for their appearance and age, threatening them with punishment or death if they do not leave. We also see many low-angle shots of the trainer to show his authority. The body language is also very rigid, making him look unwelcoming, matched by his voice, which is very commanding and threatening as well.

In a scene in *Sirai*, inside the bus while escorting the prisoner, when a prisoner requests to go without handcuffs inside the court, the police say that if you commit a crime, you have to face consequences, and you will be dragged like this with handcuffs only also their body language was very rude while handling Abdul Rauf during the escort. The tone used when speaking to Abdul Rauf is also very commanding and rude.

5.4 Discursive Practice (Meso-Level)

In *Taanakkaran* the hierarchical dominance is even noticed in their addressing; we can see in several scenes that a senior officer who is of a lower rank has to address even officers younger than him only because they belong to a higher rank than him.

In a scene during a roll call parade, Eshwaramurthy calls for the attention of the trainees, stating that if the police are in attention, even if bitten by a snake, they should not move. However, a trainee ridicules it by stating a mosquito bite. Immediately, he is beaten for disobedience and given punishment for the same. Here we can see that the importance of obedience is given more than for reasoning.

Sirai starts with a scene where a prisoner is accompanied by armed reserve police to court for his trial. In the course of transfer, the prisoner tries to escape, and he is shot dead while trying to escape. To justify the sequence, the adjacent scene where the protagonist says that he did it because he had no other choice, either way he would be punished, so he had to take that action since he also had the authority to do so. Through this, we can see that due to hierarchical pressure and dominance, the lower cadre officers also become a part of the system.

The police personnel accompanying the prisoner use a very authoritative and rude language while handling the prisoner. All this behavior reflects the authoritative atmosphere that they are

very used to, and it shows in their actions; the frustration of that pressure is dispersed to the prisoner they accompany.

5.5 Social Practice (Macro-Level)

The societal practices of discrimination which affect the regular system which can also be seen inside the institutions of states.

In *Taanakkaran* we can see that trainees and even training officers are discriminated against based on their caste. In a scene Eshwaramurthy can be seen asking Arivu which people he belongs to in a colloquial language. Through Eshwaramurthy's prejudices he divides the trainees in groups according to him which he thinks are of lower caste. According to Mouly et al (2025) the movies of Pa Ranjith showcase the caste oppression and Dalit identity in the society and how upper caste tradition is still followed in Indian Cinema.

Similarly, we see in *Sirai* where Abdul Rauf is illtreated by Perumal's son in law when he goes to play movie and picks a fight when a friend of his says he is from our own village Perumal's son in law says they have come from some other place and settled here how can he become one of us. In another major scene when Kathiravan and his team miss Abdul Rauf, they find him in the nearest police station when they were looking for him. The inspector of the station asks about the loaded rifle stating that in long escort the guns are not loaded usually why the rifle was loaded Pandi (Harishankar Narayanan) states that the convict is Muslim that's why he kept his rifle loaded. Here in both movies, we can see that prejudice and discrimination is present even in the institutions of state power where it is least expected to happen.

Conclusion

In the past we have seen many perspectives of Tamil directors in cinema related to power and dominance which were based on real incidents and even real stories. The stories shed light on various problems that society faces due to dominance, inequality and prejudice that it has been carrying since ages and affecting the whole system. Both *Sirai* and *Taanakkaran* give a contrasting perspective on state power which is complementary as well. We can see that one institution follows violence and the production of enforcers who would also take up violence and be part of the system, whereas the other upholds faith in moral change within the oppressive systems. Ultimately, both demonstrate how governmental institutions function as tools of class dominance. These films try to demonstrate language, physical punishment, spatial hierarchy and class dominance which is also a major aspect which is used by the power to create inequality which relates with Fairclough's (1995) theory. In this way, we can see that Tamil cinema is used as an important cultural space where people challenge the trustworthiness of the state authority rather than just accepting it.

