

From Mass Hero to Political Contender: A Strategic Communication Analysis of Ideological Layering and Pre-Marketing in Actor Vijay's Cinematic Trajectory

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1013COM0017>

Received: 03 April 2026; Accepted: 08 April 2026; Published: 25 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Films and politics are interwoven with each other. Tamil films in particular have stood the test of time as a strategic communication medium for planting political ideologies and harvesting the required public acceptance. Actors in the past as well as present have emerged as political leaders by utilizing their popularity to mobilize the masses by layering their ideologies through films. The current research aims to explore the strategic transformation of Tamil Actor Vijay's persona from being a 'Mass Hero' to an 'Emerging Political Contender' with the establishment of his political party *Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam* (TVK). The study shall analyze the cinematic arc of the actor's movies from *Mersal* to *The Greatest of All Time (GOAT)*, his last released film through the Qualitative lens with an interpretive design that will analyze the ideological layering and pre-marketing of actor Vijay's films. The analysis focuses on the careful construction of a leadership identity in the actor's filmography that serves as a primary vehicle engineering political legitimacy much before his formal entry to electoral politics.

Keywords: Vijay, *Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam* (TVK), Pre-marketing, Political, Tamil Films, Ideological construction

INTRODUCTION

The Celluloid world and ballot boxes are two different yet correlated phenomena in the context of socio-cultural fabric especially in the state of Tamil Nadu. Unlike the other Indian states, Tamil Nadu has witnessed a massive transition of actors from the silver screen to elected representatives of the legislature through careful choreography. The political landscape of the state has seen pioneers such as C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, J.Jayalalithaa and many others who utilized the cinematic screen to promulgate the Dravidian ideology to the common man.

Dr. Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran (popularly known as MGR) was a popular actor, film producer, politician and a philanthropist. He served as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu for three terms and is considered one of the most influential political leaders of south India (Pereira, 2025). He gained popularity by playing characters in films which were primarily champions of the downtrodden, saviour of women and a reformer who worked die-hard against corruption. He gently inculcated the colours, symbols of his political party - the All India *Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (AIADMK) with an intent to ensure that his on-screen and political persona were inseparable. His acting venture preceded his political one and by the time he officially launched his political party, he did not have to introduce his new avatar rather his decades of filmography served to be a legendary political manifesto. He was fondly referred to as '*Makkal Thilagam*' - an honorific title given to him that means 'Jewel of the people' owing to his deep rooted popularity and influence in the political landscape of Tamil Nadu (Pereira, 2025).

Actor Vijay has carefully adopted the footsteps of his predecessor MGR by embarking on adaptation of his blueprint to plunge into full time politics and win the hearts of the people. This adaptation is done in the digital

age through a transition from overt propaganda to subtle layering of ideologies and pre-marketing of political ventures all through a sophisticated procedure. The career of actor Vijay spanning from 2017 till date indicates a decade of strategic communication which he utilized as a base of his political branding. The drastic shift spans from the movie *Mersal* to *The Greatest of All Time (GOAT)* which deviated from his traditional commercial formula towards a carefully curated model of layering his political ideologies and served to traverse the gap existing between the ballot box and the silver screen.

The decade marked an era of a massive transformation of the actor's on-screen persona from a "mass hero" to a "political contender" that showcased cinematic strategies subtly portraying leadership through his lens, specifically influencing the collective psyche of the youth in the state. The films that were released during this time period functioned to be miniature election manifestos presented as entertainers with contemporary socio-political criticism. Alongside, the audio launches of the films released during the said period served as para-texts of his political ideologies presented as '*kutti stories*' (Tamil word translating to short stories). These served as essential and powerful tools that communicated his future vision of the political landscape in Tamil Nadu. The conclusion of his full-time career as a super star and the beginning of his political party '*Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam*' went hand in hand. The party was started in February 2024 (Online Desk - New Indian Express, 2024) and his last movie that hit the silver screen was September 2024 (India Today, 2024). By the time, he managed to portray himself as a 'Real Hero' from a 'Reel' one blurring the lines between the same targeting the new-age audience towards his electoral cadre.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic discussions surrounding the strong convergence of Tamil cinema and Tamil Nadu politics form a firm base to analyze this paper's core idea of actor Vijay's trajectory. Following are some of the pertinent discourses considered to be highly appropriate to the current study.

Legacy of the "Image Trap"

A study on M.G. Ramachandran focuses on how cinematic "super-humanism" transforms into political power. He also stated that MGR created an "image trap" by playing characters as a helper of the poor thus making the public not to separate the actor from the icon (Pandian, 1992). Another study on the same actor focused on "mother sentiment" and as a liberator of the rural, while later trends surrounded themes such as "angry young man" focusing on the urban and sub-urban people who are cynical with new economic liberal policies (Srinivas, 2009).

Ideological Layering through Para-Text as Element of Persuasion

"Ideological Layering" is a concept that is explored by prominent theoreticians such as Hall (1980) and Neuberg & Fiske (1987) says that mass media carry an "encoded" message which the audience "decode" on the basis of one's own socio-political state. The same was practised by the actor in his movies. According to Rajamani (2019) actor Vijay translates the on-screen "saviour" status into real world authority by breaking the fourth wall. The actor uses the theatre space to address the viewer and by constantly playing the roles of a victim of corruption, building moral values that served as the foundation for the political plunge.

Pre-Marketing and Setting the Stage for Political Base

The actor established a fan-based philanthropic organization called *Vijay Makkal Iyyakkam (VMI)* on July 26, 2006 at *Pudukkottai* (IANS, 2009). The organization involves welfare activities such as opening tuition centres, providing legal aid, organizing blood donation camps etc. It served as a pre-marketing strategy to transform a fan club to a primary party which creates an administration that imitates an effective state government (Manivannan, 2021). The strategy of VMI supporting independent candidates in municipal elections of 2021 proved that popularity of the actor can be transformed into vote bank at the ward level (Karthikeyan, 2022). The timing of actor's entry to analyze specific governance model preceded by VMI's decentralization of welfare network is a strategic move towards setting the stage for his political base (Rajamani, 2023).

Redefining Narratives for the New Generation Digital Fandom

Research about digital fandom by Jenkins (2006) says that “fan-to-voter” culture is gaining momentum by social media. Actor Vijay’s viral hashtags, first look movie posters and re-edits in social platforms further reiterate the political narrative. These digital tools create a participatory culture that feels natural and community-led. The concept of “fan-to-voter” pipeline is also addressed by Rajamani (2023) thus strengthens voluntary emotional contributions of the fans online. Social media serves as a bridge that gaps between a release of a film and a political function. The digital fandom creates a niche for conversion film dialogues into political outcries serving to be effective transformations of entertainment zones into ground for political participation.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative research design that is interpretive in nature to analyse how strategic communication has been effectively implanted in the films of the actor from 2017 till date for ideological layering and pre-marketing. Case study approach is adopted using Discourse Analysis as the methodology that focuses on the analysis of transformation of the actor’s persona from a mass hero to a political contender in the discourse of the said films. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is constructed on three levels of analyses as shown in Figure 1.

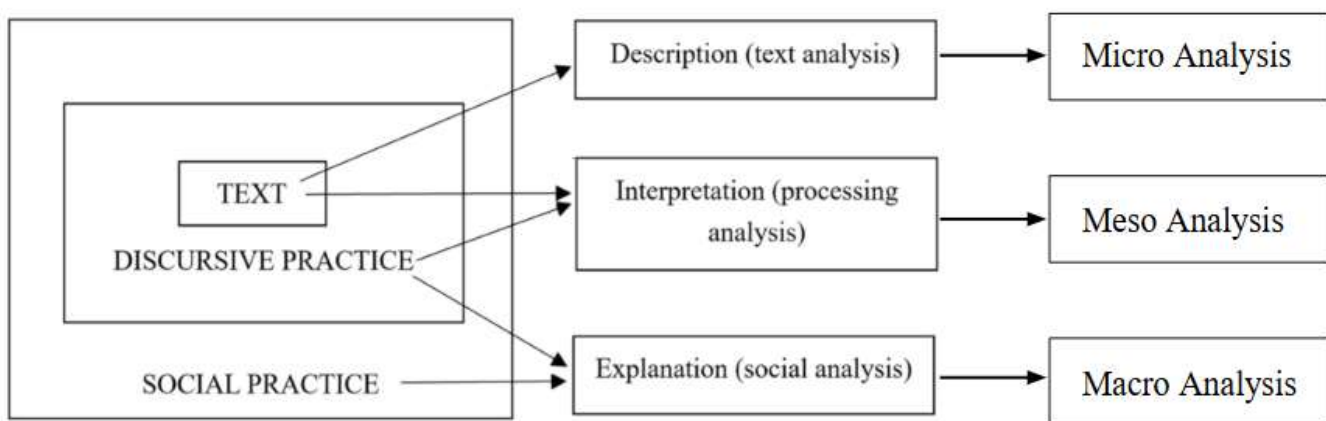


Figure 1 - Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- **Text (Micro level)** focuses on the linguistic aspects of a text such as lexical, terminology and choice of words used in specific texts. This level examines how meanings are constructed at ground level (Dahl, 2017; Nadasdy & Elam, n.d.).
- **Discursive practice (Meso level)** analyzes how text is produced, distributed and consumed, and how individuals interpret the text based on their societal context (Dahl, 2017; Santoso, 2018).
- **Social Practice (Macro-level)** examines how language is governed at large by societal and institutional structures, specifically how text conserves and challenges power relations and ideologies (Lin, 2014; Santoso, 2018).

The main focus of this framework is intertextuality, according to which no text is an isolated entity and all texts are drawn and associated with other discourses (Dahl, 2017). Thus the study applies the CDA framework as an important tool to research how Actor Vijay utilized his movies, media representation and language to fortify power and ideology. The study examines eight movies of the actor Vijay in order of release from 2017 to 2024 (refer Figure 2). The movie Mersal acts as an entry point as he transformed his branding from ‘*Ilaya Thalapathy*’ to ‘*Thalapathy*’. Every movie released from 2017 stands as a testimony for his political career and serves to pre-market his political venture.



Figure 2 - Movies Analyzed for the Study

Analysis And Interpretation

Analysis of *Mersal* Movie using Fairclough’s Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The film covers aspects such as health care, disparity, corruption, exploitation by privatized health care, taxations, *Tamil* pride and the like to frame the social issues in the state. In a particular scene, the actor utters the following dialogue “*Oru Kozhantha Uruvakurathukku Patthu Maasam, Oru Paattathari Uruvakurathukku Moonu Varsham Ana Oru Thalavan Uruvakurathukku Oru Ugaamay Thevappaduthu*”. The dialogue translates to the central idea that it takes an era for a leader to emerge. These words are not mere text meant to entertain, they rather reflect ideological aspects that are in line with Populism. Criticism of heavy taxation regimes and inadequate health care reflect a sense of inefficient governance. These choice of words indicate the echoing of real-world public grievances by the actor - a usual and popular path adopted by forerunners who strategically utilized films as a medium to propagate their political ideologies to the common man. Apart from this the film comprises a hit song with the lyrics ‘*Aalaporaan Thamizhan.....*’ which emerges as the actor trying to identify himself as a Tamilian ruling the state.

Dimension 2 - Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The plot of the film revolves on the real-world issues pertaining to the implementation of GST (Goods and Services Tax) and disparity in health care especially to the marginalized. Incidentally, the movie was released on October, 2017 three months after the implementation of GST in India serving as an outright critique on heavy taxations coupled with poor health care framing it as a political commentary. One of the characters the actor plays in the movie is that of a doctor who uses many metaphors to criticise the systemic malfunctions and corrupt practices in health care which emerges to be a voice of dissent and positions the actor’s political resonance. Debating around these aspects by the actor amplifies the reach of the film and serves to function as a pre-marketing of the political persona of the actor.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The film aims to position the actor as a public figure with reflecting political dimensions voicing out social injustice. This way the film sandwiches a mass hero as a reformist and critique thereby embedding his political ideology within his mass hero image. It marks a major transformative shift from being a star to that of a

people's protector and eventually as a potential political contender. The statements or words uttered by the actor were amplified by the coverage of the same and can be clearly decoded as political messaging.

Analysis of *Sarkar (2018)* Movie using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The film being a political-drama hovers around a legal provision a voter can enforce as a counter measure against fraudulent voting. The actor plays the role of an NRI (Non-Resident Indian) CEO (Chief Executive Officer) who exercises this provision to counter fraudulent voting against him. There are two important political undertones to watch out - one he travels all the way from the United States to India just with the intention of casting his vote and two he initiates counter measures of his basic constitutional right - the right to vote. In his mission to cast his vote legitimately, he raises awareness among the general public (through the '*oru viral puratchi*' translating to a revolution with a finger) towards reclamation of stolen votes positioning himself as an enlightened educator of the masses. This marks a transformational shift from a corporate leader to a social reformist. The film includes textuality around vote, voter rights, corruption, power of a common man all of them being overtly political in nature.

Dimension 2 - Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The context in which the film was released revolves around a point of time with intense debates sprawling around electoral malpractices. It emerged to be an outright critique on the prevailing political landscape. The portrayal of such malpractices during election served to be a full-fledged political pre-marketing of the political persona of the actor. The film actually received multiple critiques which eventually resulted in strengthening its stature to serve as a voice of reformation and dissent. Apart from this, the discourse of the actor during the audio launch is a crucial aspect of consideration. His speech included references to becoming a leader if the people wish so. This serves to be a para-text to the audience engaging themselves in the political fandom from a mass hero stardom who resorted in tearing up voter ID cards as a means of voicing against the corrupt system and resulting in blurring the line between a movie goer and a party supporter. He also mentioned the regular process where people contest in elections, win them and then form the government whereas he formed the government (mentioned as *Sarkar* translating to government) and then contested in elections. He even called for action to watch the film if the audience liked indirectly hinting at casting their vote to the candidate of their choice.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The socio-political context in which the film was released in the post-demise era of political stalwarts Dr. Jayalalithaa and Dr. Karunanidhi. This is clear cut evidence of how the discourse is influenced by the existing social structures with a hollow state of political leadership in the state. The film criticised how the earlier governance accustomed people with the freebie culture and is clear that the actor has adopted a populist ideology questioning the prevailing political status-quo.

Analysis of *Bigil (2019)* Movie using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The film *Bigil* incorporates social aspects such as empowerment of the downtrodden/ under-privileged and women through the lens of sports (football), teamwork, justice, powerplay in sports and the like - all being ideologically power packed aspects. By voicing out for the downtrodden / under-privileged and women the film intends to portray the actor's character as a voice of voiceless or voice of the oppressed. Through the song "*Singapenne*" women are explicitly celebrated and through the lens of CDA it is seen as an element of political-cultural discourse. Of all the dialogues, the most important and the most repeated one is "*Cup mukkiyam Bigilu*". It stands as the most-strategically crafted piece of ideological layering. This discourse suggests a major shift from the perspective of self to the perspective of an objective aimed at collective achievement.

Dimension 2 - Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

Apart from the film, the promotional material also reiterated narratives pertaining to empowerment, highlighting the shift in the focus of the actor's movie trajectory from that of mere entertainment towards a more socially conscious storytelling by addressing progressive social reforms. The film does attempt to retain and reinforce the actor's political-reformist image and an emergent leader. As usual, the audio launch of the movie was a master piece of strategic communication where the discourse was designed to be an emergent leader addressing supporters rather than being an actor intending to promote his film. His ideology of fitting women empowerment in the guise of a coach signals a status of a paternal protector with an intention of seeking a supportive and expansive voter base from the opposite gender. The film's discourse also touches upon the drawing of parallel lines between the actor's real life hurdles with that of the ruling power metaphorically portrayed through the actor's enemies on-screen (in the film) and his critics off the screen.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

By voicing out for the marginalized and weaker sections of the society, the actor aims to achieve the outfit of a political contender trying to establish his leadership and iterates the fact that the marginalized always require a leader to come to their rescue. This underlines the hegemonic undertones with an inclusive and progressive outlook in the discourse of the film. The focus on teamwork in the film aims to layer the ideology of participatory democracy as a political eloquence. The ideological positioning is achieved through the game of football which figuratively refers to the political landscape in which the system has pitfalls and necessarily requires a leader who will fix the same strategically. The same is mirrored through the characters '*Bigil*' and '*Rayappan*' respectively.

Analysis of Master (2021) Movie Using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The film touches upon social aspects such as reformation of adolescents, education, discipline indicative of a transition towards socially responsible discourse. The most important textual aspect of the movie is the song '*Vaathi coming*' signalling the readiness of the actor to reform, educate and lead the youth of Tamil Nadu. The actor plays the role of an academic who stands as a guiding light to his students signalling political overtones of next generation leadership. It mirrors his real life political discourses where exclusively attempts to influence the young voter base to seek a change in the governance and leadership. The juvenile home portrayed in the film shows the actor's attempt to rehabilitate them towards a morally better future indirectly hinting at reforming the youth for a better tomorrow through his political leadership. In the film, the ruthless antagonist '*Bhavani*' lures adolescents in the juvenile to carry out criminal and anti-social activities. The character '*Bhavani*' is authoritative, coercive in nature completely contrasting the protagonist, and intends to establish dominance through illegal activities involving young adolescents as a shield. This way the film implants an ideological contrast between the protagonist making sincere efforts to empower the young minds while the antagonist attempts to exploit them.

Dimension 2 - Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The actor delivers an ideologically strong dialogue in the movie that states "We are hearing. But not listening". The dialogue continues like "Students don't listen to the teachers, Teachers don't listen to the students, Children don't listen to their parents, Parents don't listen to their children" and finally ends up with "The government does not listen to its people". In the lens of discursive practice, the dialogue is interpreted as highly having political resonance that criticises the governance systems that receive the petitions or voices of the citizens but fail to act upon them. The word 'Government' was muted in the OTT version of the movie. The dialogue delivered in the climax adds weightage to the intensity where the actor is seen as a spokesperson of the neglected society strategically layering a civic discourse. Clips of the dialogue delivered by the actor was widely circulated in social media and was seen as encoded critique of the government and transforming the film into a bold statement. Another significant aspect of consideration is the actor's discourse during the

audio-launch about staying calm in the midst of a storm referring to the IT raids done during the time of the film, merging with the idea conveyed in the song “*Kutty Story*”.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The film questions the exploitation of the neglected and voiceless, signalling the layering of the ideology that questions the social inequalities and the same being advocated for by the actor seeking broader political and social changes through reformation. The social status quo is questioned by the protagonist who just does not stop with confronting the antagonist but goes a step further in terms of trying to reorganize the institutional setup by emphasizing on discipline and guidance mirroring the political rhetoric of moral leadership, responsibility and authority. The actor delivers a powerful dialogue referring to a bunch of college students in the context of orientating them towards student election where he iterates about refraining from vote buying just for the sake of petty or monetary benefits. Apart from this, in his discourse he also talks about removing caste and religion from the student nomination form and asserts that it should be removed right here meaning at the college level. Both these dialogues can be seen as a direct attack on the government and society at large. The movie was released in January, 2021 and the state legislative assembly elections in Tamil Nadu took place in April, 2021 with a few months gap in between.

Analysis of Beast (2022) Movie using Fairclough’s Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The character name of the actor in the movie is Veera Raghavan, a RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) agent framed as a saviour figure for people trapped in a hijacked mall. Unlike the earlier films, the dialogues are sparse though very intense. In the opening scene of the film, the actor is involved in a secret operation intended to completely wipe off the terrorist Umar Farooq. During the same, a conversation builds between the actor and another terrorist keeping a group of civilians under siege. The terrorist converses in Hindi while the actor responds in Tamil. Conversation does not proceed smoothly due to language barriers for which the actor sarcastically goes about saying “*Chumma elathaiyum unaku Hindi la translate panitu iruka mudiyudhu, Unaku puriyanumna nee vena poi Tamil kathutu va po*” translating that “I cannot explain everything by translating to Hindi and you better learn Tamil to understand better. This dialogue is an outright statement opposing the imposition of Hindi - a major political stance layered in the narrative against the pressing debates on language policy. The character is portrayed as a man of action rather than a man of mere words.

Dimension 2 Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The teaser of the film carries a crucial statement from the actor where he goes about saying “I am not a politician, I am Soldier”. According to Fairclough’s CDA Framework, the two contrasting aspects in the dialogue are ‘Politician’ and ‘Soldier’. The former is coded as one who negotiates, compromises and often lured by greed while the latter is coded as one who sticks to dutifulness, responsibility and ready to sacrifice for the larger good. This rhetoric is an outcry for the electorate and echoes the legacy of the actor’s predecessors such as MGR who often resort to forced leadership owing to the agony faced by the people. This stance is strategically layered in the film as a critique of the government while safely claiming it as pointing to the flaws through the perspective of a soldier. Unlike the previous film, this one has a differently contrasted character to the protagonist - the politician (a) minister whose daughter and wife are caught in the hijacked mall. The protagonist is portrayed as one with better capabilities than the politician who is an elected official - an usual practice adopted by celebrities wishing to enter the political landscape.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The hijack crisis in which the film is constructed around, actually reflects the poor state of National Security. It serves to question social safety - a primary commitment of governance and only with the intervention of the actor serving as a source of rescue and thereby positioning him with powerful stature and a wiser alternative to the incompetent authorities. Through subtle means, the film attempts to layer many ideologies such as patriotism, moral leadership, ensured public safety, intolerance to terrorism and the like resonating with

political discourses. The character of the actor in the film is carefully constructed so as to align his cinematic profile with that of potential political pathway. The Nationalist ideology in the film attempts to widen the ideological base of the actor through hyper-individualism.

Analysis of *Varisu* (2023) using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1: Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The title of the film itself is a linguistic move of power signifying inheritance and legitimate take over of leadership who attempts to fix the fracture caused in the empire. A intense dialogue by actor in the movie quotes "*Power Seat-la Irukkaathu Sir Athula Vanthu Oruthan Ukkaruraanla Avanta Thaan Irukkum Namma Power Antha Ragam*" translating to power lies not in the seat meant for the leader but to the one who emerges as one and I belong to that category. The dialogue as well many other references to power in the narrative hints at marking linguistic dominance and leadership. The role of the actor is portrayed as a unifier trying to repair the internal decays in the family and business and aptly suggesting him as the true heir to the society at large.

Dimension 2: Discursive Practice (Meso-Level)

The actor's discourse pertaining to the dialogue "*Ella edam namba edam thaam*" translating to all places are ours - contextually attempts to establish the actor's show of strength owing to his fan base across the territory. Another text quoted by the actor to the antagonist "*Ground motham un aalunga irukalam aana audience ellarum oruthana mattum thaam paarpaga - kelvipattuirukiya - Aatanayagan*" translating to the entire ground may be yours but the audience always focus on the man of the match amplifying his stature as the undisputed. During the audio launch of the movie the actor disseminated a short narrative with that of a crow and the eagle which was widely seen as his outright statement on the prevailing competition in the industry and trying to stay steady above these petty politics. The persona of a leader is carefully constructed through the character of the actor who values humans over money, one who stays calm amidst pressure and a mature individual efficiently handling the hurdles coming his way.

Dimension 3: Social Practice (Macro-Level)

The ideological layering in the movie is done through the means of a rejected son who is destined to return to save the empire built through sheer struggles. This is reflective of an emergent leader who is capable of fixing a broken and corrupt societal system. The song "*Vaa Thailaiva Thalaiva*" and "*Thee Thalapathy*" (*Thalapathy* pictorially on fire) is seen as a linguistic political branding exercise for the actor who is positioned as the leader of the working class attributing to the support for his political venture. Like the previous film, the actor follows the footsteps of his mass industrial predecessors who prioritize family over others and projecting himself as the saviour of social values.

Analysis of *Leo* (2023) Movie using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1 - Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The film revolves around aspects such as drug cartels, violence, family ties, identity crisis, personal-level transformation with moral ambiguity. Unlike *Mersal*, *Leo* focuses on a protagonist's reflection of his persona and the character is projected as an 'ordinary-man' who exhibits resistance from his early life and intends to position himself as an emerging leader metaphorically resisting his earlier persona as a mass hero. Another crucial textual element is the name of the character 'Leo Das'. The name is suggestive of indomitable resilience in overcoming the many challenges arising from his past and former associates. The actor plays two dual personalities in the film that face struggles inside and conflict outside. This can be understood as mirroring duality in reality between shedding the image of a mass hero and to become a potential political contender embracing social responsibility. The name also is suggestive of its respective zodiac sign that personifies confidence, ambition and strength.

Dimension 2 - Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The movie was the third in LCU popularly known as Lokesh Cinematic Universe that posits the actor amidst many other powerful actors trying to amplify his reach symbolically. The film called for suspense surrounding the identity revelation in which ambiguity endured anticipation. The film comprises a song with the lyrics “*Naaa ready dhaan varava.. Annan naaa erangi varava.. Thael kodukku Singathaa seendathapaa Evan thadathum En routeu maarathappa Naaa ready dhaan varava.. Annan naaa thaniya varava..*” indicative of the actor’s readiness to plunge into politics. Apparently, the movie was released in November 2023 and the actor’s official political party was launched in February, 2024.

Dimension 3 - Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The film collectively overlays social responsibility above personal reclamation and thereby embedding a sort of political ideology disseminated as a narrative of transformation. The actor refutes glorified violence, association with drug cartels outrightly signifying his massive shift towards an emerging moral leader. In the parlance of the success meet of the film, the actor quoted the movie name of former chief minister M.G. Ramachandran “*Kudiyirukum Kovil*” (translating to ‘the temple I reside in’) to state that he resided deep in the hearts of his fans. Actor Vijay is clearly following the footsteps of his predecessor MGR (M.G. Ramachandran) in shaping political narratives through his on-screen persona with an intent to mobilize his fandom a signature emulation of the former leaders’ legacy and marks a rhetorical shift from entertainment to civic responsibility.

Analysis of GOAT (2024) using Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Framework

Dimension 1: Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)

The most crucial textual element to be considered for analysis is the name of the actor’s character ‘Gandhi’. By naming so, the character has been portrayed as a symbolic identity of the nation who holds high morality and delivers high-level action. The film touches upon ideologically intense aspects such as national security, responsibility, futuristic vision with an intent of projecting the actor taking up proactive leadership, a transition from his previous films that were oriented towards a critique approach. A linguistic high-energy peppy number beginning with the texts such as ‘*Party onnu thodangatuma adhiradi kelapatuma*’, ‘*Whistle Podu*’, ‘*Campaign ah thaan thorakatuma*’, ‘*Mic ah kayil edukatuma*’ are bold political statements hinting towards the start of his political party in the near future and thereby making it a trailer for his political venture. ‘*Whistle podu*’ is an iconic terminology in the parlance of exhibiting pomp, excitement and mass appeal. These texts are repeated chants in the song intended to be sung along by the audience serving to be a rallying cry for the actor’s fans. Among all these strong ideologies, the number plate of the actor’s car bearing ‘TN07CM2026’ clearly signals the actor’s real-world political ambition in the State Legislative Assembly Elections, 2026 strategically inserted in the narrative.

Dimension 2: Discursive Practise (Meso-Level)

The movie was apparently parallelly filmed when the actor unveiled his political party flag and released an audio-visual anthem for the same. This is seen as an act of synchronized launch of his real life narrative and on-screen persona. Also, the movie was extensively promoted as the last one of the actor’s filmography - his penultimate film interpreted as an inevitable sacrifice made by the actor at the peak of his career to serve his people (who elevated him to this level) by venturing into active politics. These aspects are indicative of the fact that the film was a futuristic political rhetoric attempting to construct the image of a visionary leader with a generational responsibility.

Dimension 3: Social Practise (Macro-Level)

The trailer of the film begins with a voice-over ‘A new assignment, A new leader here to lead you’ is yet another bold political statement serving to be a narrative metaphor that intends to transform the fans to build expectations to be future political architect of the state - a clear cut pre-marketing strategy in the film. The

climax of the film shows footage of cricket icon Mahendra Singh Dhoni playing the stadium with fans' outcry and loud support is seen to be inter-discursive with the actor expressing his readiness to join the wagon of Leader of the Masses.

The tabulation below showcases the analysis of all the eight movies considered for the study in terms of his role played, branding objective, ideological layering and the target audience.

Table 1 - Analysis of the Movies taken for study

S.no	Film	Role	Branding Objective	Ideological Layer	Target Audience
1	<i>Mersal</i>	The Campaigner	Advocacy for Social Justice	Critique of Healthcare Infrastructure	Rural & Urban Masses
2	<i>Sarkar</i>	The Reformer	Corporate Professional transformed Activist Politician	Voter Right & Electoral Awareness	Youth & Working Class
3	<i>Bigil</i>	All Round Mentor	Voicing for empowerment of Women	Sportsmanship & Female Power	Families & Female Demographic
4	<i>Master</i>	The Disinclined Hero	Flawed Teacher to Moral Guide	Reformative Justice focussed on Juvenile	Students
5	<i>Beast</i>	The Warrior	Intelligent Guardian/Protector	National Security & Counter-Terrorism	Action Enthusiasts
6	<i>Varisu</i>	The Chosen Heir	Protector of Family Values	Corporate Ethics vs. Familial Bonds	Multi-generational
7	<i>Leo</i>	The Lone Wolf	Action Icon in a Cinematic Universe	Survivor of a Dark Past	Cinephiles & New Generation Fans
8	GOAT	The Grandmaster	Multi-Generational Appeal	Loyalty, Betrayal, and Duty	Global Fanbase

CONCLUSION

The actor's movies considered for the study often reiterate themes such as Healthcare, Tamil Pride, Voter Rights, Electoral Malpractices, Freebie Culture, Empowerment of Marginalized and Women, Moral Authority, Language Imposition, Anti-Terrorism, Power Reclamation, Identity Crisis and Nationalist. The study has clearly sketched the trajectory of actor Vijay from the movie *Mersal* to *GOAT* and the analyses clearly demonstrate the fact that the actor has strategically exercised ideological layering to blur his image boundaries from a mass hero to that of an emerging and potential contender. Through the lens of the theoretical framework adopted for the study - Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, it is clear that the actor has utilized his films as a discursive medium to promulgate his ideologies and premarket his political stance. This seconds the legacy of the political predecessors who utilized the silver screen as an ideal venue to propagate their political ideologies and win the hearts of people. The films considered for analysis reflect a steady trend with respect to layering of ideologies through cinema and strategically portraying the actor within the socio-political context of Tamil Nadu. The cinematic trajectory has so far turned out to be successful in terms of utilizing the film medium successfully as a space for political rehearsal and establishing a unique political identity. The films are a testament of careful curation between fandom and statesmanship integrating his transformation from an entertainer to that of a socially responsible political aspirant and thereby proving that

his films were not mere cultural products rather strategic communication vehicles. The films are nothing short of meta-narratives that promote the ‘*Thalapathy*’ brand and are packed like a manifesto delivered as entertainment.

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