

## FAN CLUBS AND FILM STARS POLITICS IN TAMIL NADU

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### Introduction

In the third world countries, for instance like India, the youth have a major role in the development of their nation and the youth themselves have been engaging in the social service. No revolution in our history has achieved its goal without the participation of youth and their protests. Their role was especially evident in the anti-colonial struggle in India. Only the youth of our country has the tremendous power and potential to bring radical changes in our society. In India youth constitute about 70% of the population. Such a large number of community (youth) engages in different activities in our society. They are being organised themselves under a name or banner in political or religious or community wise for the social welfare. For instance the youth runs night schools, libraries, computer centres, tutorials, sports club, anti-corruption movements, etc.

Besides, there are several youth associations in the name of social reformers and political leaders such as Periyar, Ambedhkar etc. Moreover, in Tamil Nadu 'fan club' is a prominent association among the youth than other associations. Cinema and politics are inseparably connected with the fan clubs since the advent of cinema in Tamil Nadu. In 1954 for the first time the fan club was started by the supporters of MGR [M. G. Rama Chandran] namely, 'All India MGR Fan Club'. Simultaneously 10,000 fan clubs were started all over Tamil Nadu and was administrated by a person Kalyanasundaram<sup>1</sup>. Since then, we have seen the youth organizing and doing service under their favourite fan clubs. On the one hand, though there is a criticism that the fan clubs are started by the socially and politically frustrated fanatic group of youngsters. The fact that these youth have the strength to decide the politics of Tamil Nadu is undisputable. Many of the issues centred on utopian escape that arise in film themes are echoed in other aspects of cinema, although resolved differently. They appear in various ways in connection with fan clubs, particularly in the verbal images that fans construct of their heroes, the social services carried out in support of the star, and in the political use that stars have made of the cinema<sup>2</sup>. The fan clubs have tremendous influences both in the success and failure of the politician in the election. The fan clubs' role is more influential than any other movements in the politics of Tamil Nadu. Generally the Fan clubs of Tamil Nadu are predominantly dominated by men whereas the

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<sup>1</sup> M.S.S.Pandian, (1992) *M.G.Ramachandran in Film and Politics: The Image Trap*, Sage Publication, New Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Dickey, (1993), *Op.cit*, p.164.

women are hardly ever participating. The above factors have proved that the fan clubs are one of the powerful groups in Tamil Nadu. And also used as the most influential and powerful tool for the political parties. Thus, this is the right time for us to have a look at the fan clubs of Tamil Nadu critically and analyse in what extend these fan clubs have the space and limitation to work among the societal platforms

### **Purpose of the fan clubs:**

“The power of the conquerors and the strength of states”, Le Bon asserts, “is based on the popular imagination. It is more particularly by working upon this imagination that crowds are led<sup>3</sup>.” The youth are not only an audience but also they are acting as a fan and worshipers of the actors/actress of the silver screen. The youngsters of Tamil Nadu have adored and fascinated by the film idols. Apart from that they also want to engage in the public activities and social services through or under any of the identities especially the fan club. More than that the fan clubs there are other clubs like Lions Club, Rotary Club, and various sports clubs in Tamil Nadu. But these clubs are occupied by the elite and the upper class people. These people have already asserted their influence in politics. Because the members of the above clubs and their parents are most probably influenced in the power, they are recognised by the public quickly. For that reason youth of the middle class and the lower middle classes have no space to enter into such a clubs and also politics. An informative comparison can be made between the type of aid that fan clubs provide the poor and that provided by other social welfare groups in south India, most of which are comprised of relatively wealthy people, described in the literature as upper-middle and upper class members. Lower class low income group societies are such as the fan clubs emphasis on the collective that contrasts with “middle-class ideas of individualism or (at their best) of service<sup>4</sup>. Besides, Cinema provides the maximum entertainment for these people. So that they are celebrate the stars as well as their fan clubs. The fans believe that the media would expose their service and activities only when they become a member of the fan club.

They have limited space to do their service independently in the other associations like political, religious and community organizations. If the peers of Tamil Nadu organized together themselves without any banner there have many barriers for their social work. Hence, just to avoid the barriers they are launching and establishing the fan clubs. The creation of the fan clubs is mostly by the people those who are working as low paid and daily wage jobs and they are from the lower middle class poor family backgrounds. Notably the unemployed youth are playing an important role in the fan club activities.

While looking it widely, we can see that fan clubs were started by a Brahmin Kalyana Sundaram<sup>5</sup>. “The majority of the members, who are hailing from the economically and weaker section, are not highly educated. At the most of them are School or might be dropouts. The strength of these outfits comes from those who are working in factories and workshops of cars, autos, motorbikes, besides child labours and auto-drivers”<sup>6</sup>. Although Thompson is speaking of nineteenth century England, the attitudes he cites are strikingly parallel to those in contemporary south India, where most upper-class social service association call for remedies of “*uplift, reform, rehabilitation, guidance, and enlightenment*” for recipients whom they characterize as

<sup>3</sup> Preminda Jacob, (2010), *Op.cit.*, p.240

<sup>4</sup> Sara Dickey, (1993), *Op.cit.* p.164.

<sup>5</sup> M.S.S.Pandian, (1992), *Op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> .Lakshmanan, (2007), *Op.cit.*, p.206.

“*poor, suffering, helpless, backward, and ignorant*”<sup>7</sup>. They too need some kind of space and sphere to engage with social activities during their young age. The banner of a fan club also offers the benefit of hiding, if not erasing, one’s caste identity giving a delusion of overcoming the insurmountable, as the reputed film critic Venkatesh Chakravarthy has observed<sup>8</sup>.

Youths of different castes and localities who come together under the umbrella of fan clubs. On the other hand an actor must be or need to be sustaining in the cine field for a long time for which the supports of the youth are essential and hopeful strategy for his journey. Hence, both he and she are encouraging the fan clubs, help them to organize and sponsor various programmes like the patron’s birthday celebrations and public activities or social welfare. These peer groups are strengthening the actors’ popularity to create the market in the film industry. Lakshmanan says “For prominent actors, popularity through cinema has always ensured a steady mass following, mostly of youth drawn from the socially economically and politically frustrated classes/castes<sup>9</sup>.”

Further, these groups of fan club members motivate its patron to get a new platform in the political arena. And it strengthens his/her political journey in the politics of Tamil Nadu. For instance, Tamil cinema has contributed many politicians to Tamil Nadu starting from MGR, Karunanidhi, Jayalalitha, and Vijayakanth etc. Almost all the politicians of Tamil Nadu have come from the same arena and have been establishing their strong political move with the help of fan clubs.

### Definition for fan club

The term *fan* evolved; in general describe a spectrum of passionate obsessions and those who indulge in them. The word’s modern English origins are located in the eighteenth century, when it was used to identify enthusiasts were known as *fancies*; later shortened to *fans*<sup>10</sup>. According to Lakshmanan ‘A fan club is a peripheral organization/association, which is different from other mainstream organizations. It exists in society, for a group of individuals of similar interest based on the popularity, talent, charisma, glamour, fantasy etc. of an individual to show their admiration, appreciation and adulation’<sup>11</sup>.

In Tamil Nadu fan club is one of the most popular associations which is doing the welfare programme to the people. Fans are the promoters for the actors’ growth in the politics. They realise that, the supremacy of the film industry through the mass or fans and their associations/ club they could achieve their progressive political assertion. In the late 1990’s, the fan clubs were transformed to welfare associations. The reason for the change was to avoid the fight among the various fans and their clubs. For instance there were a serious fight between the fans of Kamal Hashan and the Rajini kanth during the late 1990s, in which both the fans fought each other and it laid a strong deprivation between both the fans throughout Tamil Nadu. Consequently the actors were trying to stop this conflict among the fans. As a result, instead of abolishing their fan club they changed the fan club into welfare association. For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, it was actor Kamal Hashan who initiated the change of his fan clubs

<sup>7</sup> Sara Dickey, (1993), *Op.cit*, p.164.

<sup>8</sup> C.Lakshmanan, (2007), *Op.cit*, p.202.

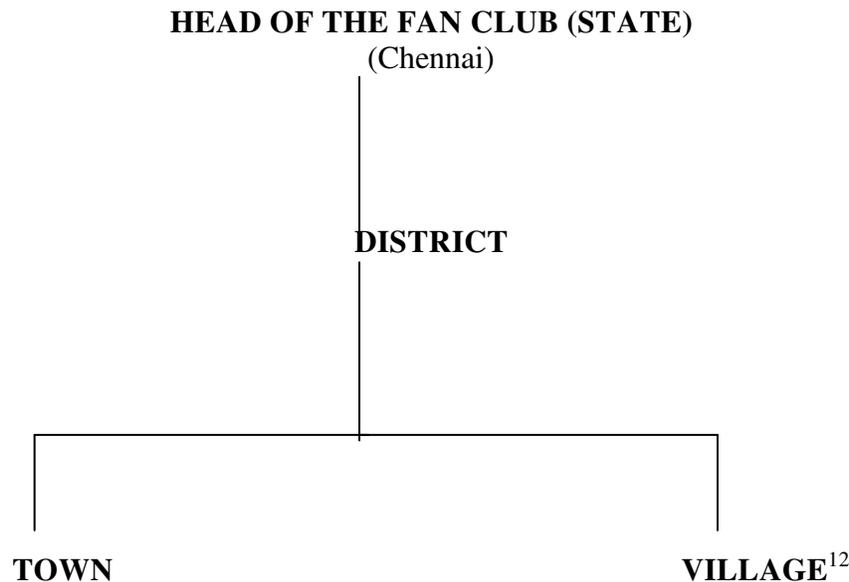
<sup>9</sup> C.Lakshmanan, (2007), *Film Stars’ Fan Clubs and Politics of Tamil Nadu* in Arvind Sivaramakrishnan, (Ed), Short on Democracy: Issues Facing Indian Political Parties. Haryana, pp. 201-202.

<sup>10</sup> Preminda Jacob, (2010) *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi.

<sup>11</sup> C.Lakshmanan, (2007), *Op.cit*,p.202

into welfare associations. He advised his fans not to put up banners and cut-outs but instead asked them to do the social service to the people like blood donation, eye donation, body donation after his/her death and etc.

**Structure of the fan club organization:**



Chennai is the head for the most fans club of Tamil Nadu. The fan club members have registered their club in the head office. If the fans have to start a fan club, at least there should be ten members. The minimum numbers of fan is ten and there is no limit for maximum. All the fan club need to be registered. The head office has the rights to register the club. Every year all the registered fan clubs have to renew their membership with the minimum amount of ranging from Rs 100 to 150. The registered fan club members can use the letterhead for all the communications. The unregistered fan club couldn't use the letter head because it is illegal. One of the fan club members of Rajini kanth says, "We use the letter head for all the petitions for instance from the Panchayat President to the District Collector regarding our own and villagers' issues so that the responses from both the government and private reach us immediately. Thereby we feel happy that we too enjoying our own rights through the name of our fan club"<sup>13</sup>.

The district head club has to coordinate all its branches both in towns and villages wherever the patron conducts political conventions and distribution of the social welfare schemes. And also it coordinates the other regional clubs to put up banners and cut outs as well as distributing sweets and free meals during the first day of release of their patron's movie and on his/her birth day.

**Finance**

Financial resources are mobilized through subscriptions, registration and renewal fee from the members of its branches. In the early period the actor/actress used to give money to his/her fans for the banners and cut-outs during the releases of his/her new film and to promote the movie in

<sup>12</sup> Interview with R.C.Sekar, (41), Procurator of Fan Clubs of Rajini kanth, Thiruvallur District. On 24-08-2011.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with R.C.Sekar, (41), Procurator of Fan Clubs of Rajini kanth, Thiruvallur District. On 24-08-2011.

the market. Veteran film journalist, 'Film News' Anandan says, "Fans should stand by their 'hero' when in need. For instance, they are boosting the ticket sales when a film opens by watching it repeatedly. They can also spread a good word about the actor by indulging in community service<sup>14</sup>." Apart from the needy situations the actor does not give money to his fan. The fan club members are donating their own money and at times collecting donations from the public, especially the wealthy persons of their area, the Panchayat presidents, Government employees and business men to do the service for the poor people.

Most of the fan clubs do not maintain their accounts for the sources and expenditures. Instead they are filing the photographs and the news paper clippings as documents for their club. They feel that these proofs are recognizing by the head club and media and also it encourage them. The head of the club/welfare association is directly helping in some cases to the poor people those who are in need. The president of district fan club is the active mediator between the public and the head of the association. In certain cases the district president gives the recommendation letter to those who need help on his letter head and forward it to the head club, Chennai.

### Major Activities

One of the key impulses of the fan clubs is the distributions of welfare schemes to the public. They include free eye camp, blood donation camp, distributing note books to the poor people, free meal (*annadhanam*) etc. Wheel chairs and other accessories are being given to the disabled people. On behalf of their patrons wishes during the festivals like Pongal and Diwali they use to distribute uniforms and clothes for the poor students and deserted people, and also conducting the sports and games for the adult and the children. The fan club use to organise free marriages for the poor with the help of the head club. One of the Rajinikanth's *Rasigar Mandram* (fan clubs) of Tiruvallur District helps the poor people to start small business like petty shops, tiffin centres (Idly shop), tailor shop, cycle repair shop, etc.

In Pondicherry, members of the 'Illaya Thalpathi' Vijay Fan Club are conducting a computer centre, in which free Diploma certificate courses for the period of six months are conducted for the benefit of the poor sections of the people. The selection of the students is based on the marks of Secondary School and Higher Secondary School or both. Further more, this fan club concentrates much to the education of the weaker sections of the society. Each actor/ actress has different visions and missions in their charitable works, for instance actor Vikram has been doing planting saplings on his birthday, by which this he creates awareness on environment among the people.

Apart from the social welfare programmes and donations the state fan clubs of various heroes are publishing the monthly journals in the name of the respective heroes. The popular magazines being circulated among the fans are *Ajith*, *Vijay*, *Ungal Sarathkumar*, *Ungal Vijayakanth*, *Rajini Style*, *Rajini Rasigan*, *Kamalhasan's Maiyam* etc. These magazines are also called *Fanzines*. In these magazines the activities of the clubs and their welfare programmes are published with photographs after the full detail of the hero's upcoming events, commitments and

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/11/04/stories/2003110400350100>. On 10/08/2011.

their new movies etc. Further there are number of e-journals, blogs and web pages that are devoted for the actors and actresses.

### **Women and Fan Club**

Fan clubs are mostly dominated by men and therefore women's participation is very limited. Though there are women in all kinds of organizations, movements, revolutions, associations and sports and games, the participation of women in the arena of fan clubs is very limited. It has been maintained by the social hierarchy of our society which pre-dominates the women and their participation in our country. Lack of women's participation in the fan clubs is a good example which shows the way in which the women are being incorporated and neglected by the dominant cultures.

Despite the above barriers there are few fan clubs for the actresses of Tamil Cine field, which is consisted of women alone. For instance, actress Thrisha Fan Club is headed by D. Jesi, an educated woman from Malaysia return. They too are interested in the charitable works especially among the women of poor sections and deserted. For instance, Thrisha Fan Club was organised blood-donation camp and interactive programmes with more than 30 Children at the Cancer Institute, Adyar. And also it adopted 10 orphan children. Although the women fan clubs are yet to establish fully, they have a little influence in the society by which they have been occupying the space what they been given.

### **Critical analysis**

In Tamil Nadu Vinayagar Pooja has become famous and has turned out to be a popular festival in the last couple of years. The car festival and the pooja for the vinayagar statue are happening every year. The people are celebrating this festival in each street. They display the Vinayagar Statue in the public place and do pooja for five or seven days. After seven days they are immersing it in the sea or river or in other water resources. These practices are encouraged by the Hindu ideologies/followers. Sometimes the Vinayagar statue itself has the political party's flag. These ideologies are made for the downtrodden and the under privilege sections of the society. They are made as worshiper in this egalitarian society, never be a god creator. These Hindu ideologies make the people foolish and maintain their space to rule others. So they keep the people with their place in different form of the customs here the one example is vinayagar pooja.

The same ideologies are applied in the case of fan clubs also. The youth from the OBC and SC are occupied by the political or religious or community associations. The members of fan clubs also follow the kind of practices in religious spheres, like worshiping cinema stars and doing pooja to the picture of the stars and pouring milk to his/her cut-outs and taking Kavadi. Even the fans do the pooja first before the film reel box is taken inside the theatre for the show. Usually the Rajinikanth fan club members are doing this kind of functions. For this celebration the police use to give security to the crowd and especially to the film real box. They never ask any question against any injustice, because they never realise themselves that the fan club is one of the form of diversion of the youth from the main stream activities.

According to the Government Societies Registration Act 1860 the groups of individuals below the age of 18 years could not form an association, whereas it is not a barrier in the formation of a fan club. Generally, the members of the fan clubs are from 16 to 30 and indeed varied in ages. In this frame the fan club members certainly not change as a movement or trust like as a power group. In this caste hierarchical society, the downtrodden people never get a chance to come up in the social ladder. In such a critical juncture, the downtrodden people try get

their supremacy in the society by asserting their political power through their active role in the fan clubs is an undisputable truth. Even though the fan clubs are divided by the name of caste and religion, in some sort of social issues- proper road facilities, water problem, sanitation, etc.- the various fan clubs are joined together and struggle to get their rights.

One of the important contributions by the fan club in Tamil Nadu is its influence in the political sphere. From the beginning onwards fans had the space to enter into politics. For example there are a number of political leaders who came to the political arena from the fan clubs. K.K.S.S.R.Ramachandran, Sengotayan, Anna Thambi and Tiruchi Soundarajan from AIADMK attained their political assertion through the fan clubs and its associations. Remarkably, MGR himself claimed that, 'Fans associations and the political party are not different'<sup>15</sup>. Apart from those, more recently, actor Vijayakanth, leader of 'Desiya Murpoku Dravida Kazhagam' also entered into politics because of his fan clubs and supports. Finally, Anandh (40) of Pondicherry had become one of the MLAs in the Pondicherry Legislative Assembly only because of his active role in the fan club of Ilaya Thalapathi Vijay. They are all belonging to the upper- caste and class. In other point of view the upper-caste women have the space to launch a fan club not an OBC/SC woman. The fan club is one of the forms plot in the name association of individuals to retain the caste and class hierarchy in our society.

### Conclusion

Volunteerism is one of the key impulses of the development of youth and the society. Without volunteerism nothing can be done in the history of human being in the world. Volunteerism is a natural phenomenon which transforms a man into human. Volunteerism and dedication are one of the best qualities of human being to reach the zenith of his life. Youth and volunteerism in India is always contradictory. Generally, the youth of India has been exploited by the politicians and political parties and being cheating them due to their lack of volunteerism in the public life and social welfare. Still the elders of India have been discouraging the youngsters for their lack of knowledge in the public sphere and their selfishness.

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