TAMIL LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN MOVIES THE BACKGROUND AND PROCESS OF USAGE AND MEANING

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The main purpose of this research is to develop and establish a study tool to analyse film texts in order to understand the usage of Tamil in movies. To fulfill the tasks I have considered Karunanidhi's selection of films for film deconstruction and film textual analysis.

This study also has touched on Tamil literary traditions, social reform movements in India, and the Dravidian socio-political revival movements. These create the background entry point to introduce Karunanidhi's usage of Tamil in his movies and contributions in a specific context.

The deconstruction methods have been applied in this study to present Religion in movies and usage of Tamil in cinema. To deconstruct film contents a coding schedule or data collection form had been developed and put into use. All the thirteen movies have been deconstructed and decoded into the coding schedule and classified under the five headings of Story, Themes, Narrator analysis, Stress or Pressure narratives, and Conflict-Tension analysis in this paper the outcome of two films being presented.

By presenting evidence of Tamil literature and its richness, it combines historically the activities of some revival movements, which emerged to uphold the *manam* (dignity) of Tamils. Later evaluates also the results of revival movements and their impact on Tamil films. It proceeds to introduce the entry into the Tamil film industry of Karunanidhi, whose films are to be treated as the primary source for this study to understand religions in movies and usage of Tamil.

The reasons for choosing Karunanidhi's contributions are: Karunanidhi has been prominent in the field of politics and in the Tamil film industry for more than five decades from 1950. The Tamil social revival movement promoted by the Dravidian political party (popularly known as DMK) in challenging Aryan religion was active during the period 1950s to 1978. Karunanidhi, as premier leader of the DMK produced films during this period which carry a considerable number of religious themes and criticisms of religions in the story and narratives this he did well because of handling Tamil language wisely. In other words Karunanidh's films are the end product of his ideological convictions which he gained eventually in encountering Tamil culture, Aryan religion and his involvement in politics.

Nature and Functions of Indian Cinema

There are three different words we come across in daily usage in English movies, cinema, and films. In Tamil the word *padam* (picture) or *thiraipadam* (screen picture) denotes the meaning film or either one of the above. The word film can be defined as "... a sequence of images of moving objects photographed by a camera and providing the optical

illusion of continuous movement when projected on the screen."

Cinema is produced out of a highly complex process and it could be said to be the art of all arts. At the same time it binds a particular context to a universal message. By studying a film we discover contextual and inter-contextual linkages. Films are produced with a set of aims, which may be commercial or social. The Tamil film industry is known for both genres. The success of a film in a particular place may not be repeated in another place, by reason of its accountability to value systems or language, which vary according to the contexts.

Every film has its own effect on a given audience, either good or bad. It is highly problematic to determine whether all successful movies at the box office are good movies, or failed ones bad movies, because many unsuccessful movies may be good if cultural and social messages are taken into consideration. For the same reason, successful films may not be good ones. To find an answer to the question of why a film is a success or why it is unsuccessful, account must be taken of audience research. Before we embark on a search to create a platform for argument, we need to trace the basic functions of cinema as a whole. Films carry a main story and stories within the main story and find a solution between tensions, which are faced within society. The word myth, in Greek *"muthos"*, simply means story. In every film, stories are portrayed mainly through narratives with a combination of film genres. In this process of interaction between audience and film a realised experience evolved in constructing a common memory from the past, with an application to the present and the future which will emerge as a result of this synthesis process. Cinema has a role in shaping the collective dreams of people in society. Gaston Roberge has highlighted this concept with examples from Indian Bengali movies.

Film, as a significant medium in history, underwent several shifts in its technology and in terms of its genres, starting from the year 1895 when the Lumiere brothers demonstrated this technology in Paris. The development of film as an art has consumed arts and cultures as its ebullient nature has resulted in the emergence of cine cultures. On the other hand the advancement of tele-communications and information mobility, conniving with the market economy, has not isolated the film industry. Rather the result has been the creation of a global village reflected in films from Hollywood to Bollywood with commercial interests.

The process of film developing as an art in India dates from 1896 the first feature film *Raja Harichandra* was produced by Dada Sahep Phalke in 1912. The very first film derived its story from the great Hindu epic Mahabharata.

In consequence of the above, mythology became the dominating feature of Indian film distinguishing it from film production elsewhere. The historically long-standing images of Vedic gods that had existed in the memory of people were now made available through visual projection in the form of filmed images in film texts. Religious images and religious culture, and the traditions attached to temples, now reached the masses. In other words,

practical aspects of religion were moving closer to people through films. For example, Southern Indians now knew the Hindu pilgrim centres in the Northern parts of India. In this way people came to familiarise themselves with images, and rituals through films. Hinduism especially, through the influence of films, began to move away from a static position towards a new dynamism in shaping the religiosity of people. The influencing boundaries of Hindu mythological films can be applied to the whole of the Indian sub continent where Hinduism is dominant.

Now a second dominant factor in Indian films can be identified. The mythological impact referred to above is always coupled with family centred stories projecting a Hindu way of life. Whether the stories are religious or social, the Hindu value system is the salient sustaining factor which governs the formulation of screen play.

Gaston Roberge, while explaining the blend of family based stories in Indian films, gives the following three definitions: 1) Family is equated to the world 2) It is about relationships 3) Family performs *dharma* (sustains and ensures the progress of all). The fourth factor added to the above three is that family inheritance continues through a line of male hierarchy. In the Hindu mind, human life on earth, is divided into four stages: i) *Upanaya* - a man is initiated into manhood ii) *Brahmacharaya*- the bachelor stage iii) *Vivaha* - a man marries and embraces family life and learning iv) *Upanaya* - parents leave their property to children and seclude themselves. Paul Weller explains the Hindu way of life in four concepts as *dharma* (religious life), *artha* (economic development), *kama* (sense of gratification) and *moksha* (liberation, salvation from the cycle of birth and death). All these four are understood as *purushathas* (aims for human existence). In any formulation of cinema story the dominant family flavour is inevitable because, This hierarchical understanding of the family are the mythologies of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the great epics of the land ...which have had their recognizable effect on the family in India, a majority of Hindu society.

But Karunanidhi, as scriptwriter for film stories, cuts out the existing dominant Hindu worldview by reinterpreting it from a secular perspective. For example, the word *"dharma"* according to him is *"kadamai",* which means a person bound to perform certain duties in his lifetime. He derives this term from the dictum of his political party DMK and excludes Hindu perception.

Karunanidhi movies have brought about a Tamil social renaissance, starting from the early 1950s. To differentiate the strategies he brought into films for a Tamil renaissance movement needs a background understanding of Indian social movements, which will allow us to locate his position in the whole process of different socio- political ideologies.

When the social reformation was gaining ground vigorously in India, the mythological films appeared and they were unable to control the visible reinforcement of superstition and social evils, which existed among people. For example, the oppressive

belief and systems connected to religions were reinforced in the films. Although a few films attempted to eliminate superstitions in film, it existed alongside them. We understand philosophically that darkness exists with light, or the other side of the light is darkness. People saw the image of God in actors and actresses and a new culture was emerging centred around film figures. But that was not the end in the regional scene, efforts were made to restore and revive regional sentiments through films. In the Tamil region, the regional revivalism and religion were always intertwined in Karunanidhi's films.

On the one hand, Periyar through the OK movement and Annadurai through DMK forged their principles against Vedic Brahminical religion. On the other, they integrated Tamils to stand against Hindi and Sanskritization of the nation.

The imposition of Hindi, gave the Dravidian movements an opportunity to exploit the Tamil Dravidian myth and come to power in 1967. This has led to a revival of Tamil culture and sharpened political communication. An effort has been made to reinterpret Tamil history in the light of its widely available literary works from the past and to avoid a Sanskritization process from the Brahminical North into the Dravidian South.

This ethos has been promulgated in the political media; for instance, the understanding of *"thaithamilnadu"* (mother Tamil nation and Tamil language as mother) was developed through political communication and especially through films by DMK leaders. In south India, people speak the following four languages: Tamil, Kanadam, Malayalam, and Telugu. The Dravidian family of languages has at least 20 branches of dialects among which Tamil is the only language considered as an official language in other countries outside India, for example in Srilanka and Singapore word spacing into Tamil. Now we have two major forms of Tamil language in daily life. It has long been recognized that it has two major varieties, commonly held to be associated with the written and spoken media, which offer distinctions at all linguistic levels. According to Asher (1985: IX), Tamil provides An absolutely typical example of diglossia ... (as Gregory James quoted form his writing), any literate speaker of Tamil will have a fluent command to two distinct varieties of the language "high" ...for writing and for formal speaking ... and ... "low" ...for ... conversation. The latter is the one acquired in early childhood, the former being met only when school education begins. But the literary form and high Tamil usage have brought closeness among Tamils from different parts. This we can understand well from the quotation used by Gregory James from the writings of Gnanasundaram: A standard spoken Tamil. is at least 'emerging' ... as that variety ... used in the Tamil 'social' film, on the radio and in production of 'social' dramas, both live and on radio and television it is the variety that emerges when speakers of various local and social dialects meet in college and university hostels in Tamilnadu and must... speak a variety ... that is understood to other Tamil from ... different parts ... An attempt to be comprehensible to the largest number of speakers means avoiding regionalism, caste specific forms, rustic or vulgar forms, of anything stereotypical of a particular place or community. In recent years this kind of inter-

caste, inter-regional dialect has most typically resembled high-caste, educated speech of non-Brahmin groups.... • Apart from "high" and "low" tradition, an oral medium with a poetical style of writing and speaking is also prevalent among Tamil scholars. The history of Tamil literature closely corresponds to the written origin of the language as already cited, the period from 272-232 B.C., as described in the early Tamil Brahmi, the Damili inscription in use during the reign of King Ashoka. We know that the two major Tamil literary traditions are the *"Eluttatikaram"* (the power of written form) and *"Collatikaram"* (the power of the spoken words), from *"Tolkappiam"* a famous piece of literature written by Tolkappiar, a diciple of Agastya, which came into existence in 2 B.C.-cent A. D and which is known for its Tamil Grammar. Kamil Zvelebil states that It is only the Tamil culture that has produced - uniquely so in India an independent, indigenous literary theory of a very high standard, including metrics and prosody, poetics and rhetoric. Kamil Zvelebil, while admitting the influence of Sanskrit on Tamil literature, also identifies a Tamil literary counter tradition which was maintained by the Tamil writers right from the period of *"Tolkappiyam"* preserving Tamil from Sanskrit influence. Most Tamil writers carefully did this in due course, in order to get rid of the influence of non-Tamil cultures. Further he writes, The Tamil cultural tradition is independent, not derived, not imitative; it is pre-Sanskrit, and from this point of view Tamil alone stands apart when compared with all other major languages and literatures of India. Tamil is an ancient language, which is neither monastic, nor baronial, nor belonging to the elite. It is not the property of a particular social class, or not a literature of monastic orders, or of a group of rulers but belongs to all classes in society from potters to kings, priests to worshippers. The basis for our understanding of Tamil literature is based primarily on the following theory developed by Kamil Zvelebil in his writings and presented in chart 8 of his book "Smile of Murugan on Tamil Literature of South India". He understands that the essence of Tamil literature contains the following worldviews. The Universe is perceived as *Katchi* (scenes or happenings) or *nigalvoo, nigalchi,* incidents and *Karuttu* (concepts) to link *katchi* and *karuttu* the space and time provides the continuity which leads to have *Mutal* the first of fundamental. Time is divided into two categories as *perumpoluthu*: the major seasons of the year and *cirupolutu*: small time. Space is divided according to Indian philosophical understanding and compares five landscapes to five phases of love. Each one of these landscapes corresponds to a phase of love: the hills are a proper setting for union of lovers; the forest corresponds to patient waiting; the seashore to long and anxious waiting; the pasture lands provide a setting for (the) treatment of infidelity; and the waste land of long separation. The *Karu* is understood by him as 'things born' or native, which is again divided into God and Nature. Nature is subdivided into human and non-human nature. Under human nature are included tribes, occupations, arts, and ways of life, customs, and music. Non-human nature is divided between animate and inanimate: the two main representatives of animate nature are birds and beasts; while under inanimate nature are described trees,

flowers, objects, and forms of water. Apart from these, Tamil literature is a poetical form of communication which brings out "innermost psychological events, with drama of human souls and hearts; this is the inner and external life, the behavior of the heroes, their feelings, deeds and situations". The five landscapes described above, and equated with love, were outlined in his chart 9 (page 96) as follows:

Phase of Love	Landscape
Union of lovers	Kurinchi – Hills
Domesticity, patient waiting	Mullai – Forest
Lover's infidelity - sulking scenes	Marutam - Cultivated Fields
Separation, anxious waiting	Neytal - Sea-Coast
Elopement hardship	Palai - Waste land

These five landscapes are known as *"aintinai",* parallel with five types of love *"anbu",* Tamil literary writings centre on these and each landscape has its own gods but understood from a non Vedic Aryan experience.

The following theory of *"kalavu"* and *"karppu"* explains Pre-marital and wedded (plus extramarital) love, and both well-matched and ill-matched unions. The theory provides a minute-description of the entire gamut of human erotic experience, for the total love experience of man and woman. The couplet theory of Agapporul (inner life) Purapporul (external/material) has been used by Tamil writers. The Triplet understanding of *Agam* or *Agapparul* (inner), *Parul* or *Purapparul* (material), and *Inbam* (pleasure) have also been developed by many of the writers of classical Tamil literary works. Tamil literature carries deep expressions and reflections on human experience. One can find a beautiful weaving of words connected to every stage of human life in Tamil works. This background study provides a useful basis for researching the primary source, because the Tamil movies of Karunanidhi reflect the cultural tradition of Tamil literature in the form of film genre. His films have resulted in stimulation of the Tamil renaissance.

A Tamil scholars association was functioning during the period of the kings Pandia, who ruled in Tamilnadu with their capital in Madurai. This association, known as Tamil *"Sangam",* functioned in three different periods dating from 150-250 A. D.: "Sangam", Middle *"Sangam",* and later *"Sangam",* which exercised supremacy in validating the early Tamil works and encouraging poetry, literature and rhetoric in general.

Some of the author's exponents of Tamil literatures are: Manimehalai, Silappadiharam, Thirrukural, Devaram, Thiruvasagam, Thirumandiram, Thivya brabantham, Kamba Ramayanam. These are a few drops from the ocean of Tamil writings, just to indicate the triple tastes of Tamil *'muthamil' (three* Tamil). The philosophy of *muthamil* is *Eial, Eisai, Nattagam* (Literature/poetry, Music, and Drama) which cannot be separated. This quality is usually explained as the tastes of fruits we enjoy in Mango, Jack, and Banana

(Ma,pa/a, vaioi). Muthamil is also elaborately classified as: *Isaithamil* (Tamil music), *Natakathamil* (Tamil Drama), *Nattiayathamil* (Tamil Dance), each has its own genre of films combine these tastes and use a film medium for Tamil renaissance, and this will be pointed out in the treatment of the primary source.

When the sound movie *Melody of Love* hit the international audience in 1929, the Indian film industry had already produced *Alam Ara* in Hindi. The story was based on the film *Melody of Love*. In the same year the first Tamil film *Kalidoss* was released at Kinema Central in Madras on 31 October 1931. Tamil films, from their origins, follow Tamil dramas as their basis. Historically Tamil films utilised most of the artists, stories, and presentation style; which already existed in Tamil dramas.

Sankaradoss Swamigal sowed the seed of modern Tamil dramas. Following him the Pammal Sambandha Muddaliar, "the father of Tamil dramas" and several others worked for the Tamil drama movements. Many of their stories used in the dramas were later produced as films. With this background let us try to perceive the Tamil film industry and its development to identify Karunanidhi's place in a large context.

It was Elangovan who paved the way for creating a new trend in formulating dialogue typical of Tamil, replacing the influence of Hindi, Sanskritized mixed Tamil in films. The DK and DMK movements have been accommodative and encourage writers to express their views in films and political magazines. The Dravidian movements have influenced people like Udumalai Narayana Kavi, Pattukottai Kalyanasudaram, Kavingnar Kannadossan, Vali and more recently Vairamuthu. They have all made a significant imprint in Tamil films.

Deconstruction of Film Texts

Film deconstruction work is like the dismantling of parts from a finished product, much like the removal of motor parts from a machine. The content-wise classifications or deconstructions in this section take meaning only when they undergo analysis and interpretation.

Film 1
Title: Maruthanattu Illavarasi (Queen of Marutha Nation) 1950
1. The Story

The development of the story highlights two Tamil kingdoms of the past, namely *Kurinchi* and *Marutham* (two landscapes of Tamils). The *Kurunchi* king had a affair with a woman who gave a birth to a son. This denigrated his wife. The real heir of the *Kurunchi* kingdom was growing in the village. The queen sought the custody of the temple of *Kali* (a folk goddess developed contrast to Vedic gods) where men cannot enter by law, which was the practice at the time of the trial faced by the queen. Meanwhile the *Marutha* nation queen loved the young villager, who was the son of the *Kurunchi* king. The conflicting forces are represented by the *Kurunchi* army chieftain, who made his sister queen of

Kurunchi. By a secret plot he tried to ensure the *Kurunchi* kingdom passed to his sister's son. The two kingdoms faced a war, because the *Marutha* queen wished to marry the village man and not the son- in- law of the army chieftain, who was not the legal heir to the kingdom. The village man and *Marutha* queen were arrested and the story ends with the real queen and the prince (village man) and the king uncovering the plot of the army chieftain. Then the *Marutha* nation queen marries the real prince of *Kurunchi*.

2. Themes

In between the progression of the story we discover themes like the rights of people, *manam* (dignity), evil, nation, *uravu* (relationship), hell, and *karppu*.

3. Stress Narratives

Voice 1: The ordinary people are in the place of god to execute justice and not the king.

Voice 2: The ordinary people of the nation have the right to challenge the injustice even if it is going to be the kingdom of god.

Voice 3: *Kali* is my goddess she will not keep you safe from my anger

Reply Voice: I don't want *Kalis's* protection. My *Karppu* of *Tamilachi*

(virtue of Tamil women)will keep me safe in the shadow of Kannagi.

Voice 4: Injustice did not receive the power to exist forever, but it will die.

Voice 5: Everyone has the power to destroy injustice.

4. Narrator analysis

The main objective of this analysis is to answer two basic questions. They are: who tells the story? With what purpose? According to Johan G Hahn the expectation of narrator figure analysis is to reply to the following question; what narrated figure do we meet in the film? The living as well as the nonliving.

Here the narrator Karunanidhi, hiding himself within the characters, urges the Tamil audience to be aware of the two existing systems, the state and religion. Both are manipulative of the existing culture of Tamils. To bring change in the system, the film directs the audience to revive the culture of the past. The marriage between the *Kurunchi* prince and the *Marutha* nation's queen reinforces the need for reconciliation and to fight against evil structures.

5. Conflict and Tension analysis

The queen of *Kurunchi* symbolically represents the whole Tamil *pathinippen* (virtue of Tamil womanhood) and their culture through the image of Kannagi who is still portrayed as symbol *karppu* and *pathinipen* of Tamils. Through the characterization of the *Kurinchi* queen the tension between the *manam* and *karppu* of Tamil women is reinforced. As a devotee of the goddess *Kali,* the queen kills the chieftain in order to establish justice and erase evil. The rule of the kingdom, when matched to the autocratic system, has been challenged by recommending the people's democracy, and the story ends with that acclamation.

Film 2

Title: Parasakthi (Supreme Power) 1952

1. Story

A Tamil family with three brothers and a sister lived in a city called Madurai. Due to striking poverty all three brothers moved to Rangoon in Burma, (the present Myanmar), leaving the youngest sister, Kalyani, with their father. As time passed a marriage was arranged for Kalyani in the atmosphere of the 2nd world war which prevented the three brothers from coming to India except for one, Manoharan, the hero of the film. He lost his money and belongings while travelling to India to take part in the marriage of his sister. The sister's marriage was held without the presence of the brothers. In an accident her husband died and she became a widow, facing trials in her life. Firstly a criminal tried to deceive her, but her brother Manoharan, who at that time was acting like a mad man to protect his sister, rescued her. The second time a *pujari* (Temple priest) tried to harm her. Finally a wealthy man also tried to harm her. He was known for his *bhakti* as a devotee, to sustain his social recognition in the community superficially, but in his inner life he was bad in contrast to his spiritual appearance. The hero had to fight with all such villains and the police, for attacking them, arrested him. At the end of the film, in a court scene, the hero gives a very long stress narrative for more than five minutes criticizing the manipulative extravagancy of religions and the irresponsibility of the social system which causes suffering to the ordinary poor. In the history of Tamil film, *Parasakthi* stands as the hallmark of Sivaji Ganesan's acting and Karunanidhi's screen dialogue.

2. Themes

Family, Tamil manam (dignity), widowhood, Nallanearam (fortune time), women, ulagam (world), dharma, sin, poverty.

3. Stress narratives

Voice 1: I have created troubles in the temple, it is not because the temple should not exist, but I did it because the temple should not be the tent of robbers.

Voice 2: Shall we give telegrams to Varna Bhagavan (Hindu god of rain) to face the poverty?

Voice 3: The circumstances made my sister to be a widow but the ulagam (world) never allowed her to live.

Voice 4: Is there any margo (path) to remove the darkness - the sufferings of the people?

Voice 5: No, the marriage cannot be stopped because it is arranged according to sastram (Hindu ritual system)

4. Narrator analysis

The narrator in this movie wanted to pinpoint the existing religious system, which does not offer anything to the life of the world. He establishes this conviction in the following ways - the marriage of the hero's sister was arranged according to the sastra, the date and time of marriage was fixed by the Brahmin guru, then she lost her husband and emerged in poverty as a widow. He concludes that the sastras cannot be the means of life.

5. The Conflict and Tension analysis

The narrator tries to present critically the gap between religions and the practical religiosity of the people. Because, according to the story teller, the outward religiosity, appearance and exercise of religious rituals cannot transform a person. He always finds conflict between the two realities of faith and practice. Rather pure religiosity is justified when one helps the poor. This point has been highlighted through the characters of Kalyani and three types of criminals projected in the film.

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9. Periyar is the founder of Dravidar Kazaham (movement-DK) who protested against Aryan religion through his social revivalism. Anna the founder of Dravidian Political Party (DMK) who stabilised Tamil purism from the northern Hindi influence and of Hindu Aryan religion. Both the leaders were the forerunners of Karunanidhi.
10. Ibid., p. 10-11.
11. Ibid., p. 18.
12. Ibid., p. 25.
13. lbid., p, 26. cf: Works of Viramamunivar Beschi's Thembavani and Tamil Bible translation work done by Ziegenbalg and others.
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