

# Cinematic Exposure: How *Aruvam* Reveals The Hidden Dangers of Food Adulteration

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## Introduction

Environmental Humanities has evolved as a critical interdisciplinary methodology for understanding the interface between culture, society, and the environment. It examines how literature, cinema, and other narrative forms construct public awareness regarding ecological and ethical concerns. Tamil cinema, usually a reflection of societal issues, has been at the forefront in raising awareness regarding environmental injustices, industrial abuses, and their effects on human health. Within this context, *Aruvam* (2019) is a valuable cinematic text that reveals the undercover risks of food adulteration a crisis not only affecting public health but also posing important environmental issues, such as pollution, unsustainable industrial activity, and failure of regulations. From the perspective of Environmental Humanities, this research explores how *Aruvam* critiques the natural resource exploitation, food system contamination, and the moral obligations of businesses and governments towards ensuring food safety.

## Research Aim and Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to examine the way *Aruvam* creates awareness regarding food adulteration and uses Ulrich Beck's Risk Society Theory to understand how modern industrial hazards particularly affect marginalized sections of society. According to Beck's theory, hazards generated through modernization like pollution, industrial waste, and food adulteration tend to hit the weaker sections of society. These are hardly dealt with because capitalist motives prioritize profit over consumer well-being.

## Background on Food Safety Issues

Food safety is a growing concern in contemporary society, especially with industrial malpractice, unethical business practices, and regulatory complacency fuelling rampant food adulteration. The ingestion of contaminated or chemically treated food has been associated with serious health hazards, such as food poisoning, organ damage, and chronic long-term diseases. The absence of effective enforcement of food safety laws makes the situation worse, exposing consumers to hazardous and unethical industrial practices.

Food adulteration is not a recent phenomenon, but its effect has grown stronger with mass industrial production and globalization. According to a 2018 report by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), it was observed that almost 28% of food samples analysed were either substandard or adulterated. Cases of synthetic milk, vegetable contamination with pesticides, and artificial ripening of fruits using chemicals have caused serious health issues. In a few extreme instances, chronic intake of spurious food has resulted in death.

### **Cinema as a Tool for Social Awareness**

Film has been a powerful tool for social commentary for decades, revealing social ills and encouraging public debate. Tamil film, in fact, has a tradition of tackling urgent socio-political issues such as corruption, casteism, and environmental degradation. Filmmakers like Shankar (Anniyan, Indian) and Ameer Sultan (Paruthiveeran) have employed film to comment on systemic failures and immoral practices.

The 2019 Tamil movie *Aruvam*, directed by Sai Sekhar, offers a strong critique of food adulteration and corporate wrongdoing in India. The movie does not just depict food safety as an abstract concept but shows its actual effect by portraying how contaminated food can cause misery and death. With its thrilling plot and supernatural themes, the movie emphasizes the dangers of food contamination while promoting ethical business practices and regulatory action.

### **Food Adulteration in *Aruvam*: Cinematic Representation of Real – World Issues**

*Aruvam* powerfully depicts several types of food adulteration and their immediate effect on the public's health. The film illustrates the following:

- **Unhygienic Bakeries:** The hero discovers bakeries employing stale ingredients and unhygienic conditions, reflecting actual issues regarding bacterial contamination and foodborne illnesses. Most small bakeries in India recycle old or rotten ingredients to save money, resulting in food poisoning outbreaks.
- **Chemically Treated Tea Leaves and Milk:** The movie illustrates how tea leaves are treated chemically to improve colour and taste, whereas milk is frequently adulterated with detergent and artificial materials to add bulk. The National Survey on Milk Adulteration (2011) reported that almost 70% of milk samples in India were contaminated.
- **Expired Food in Hospitals:** A very disturbing sight is a hospital serving expired food to patients, an unethical process that puts already weak people in harm's way. Government hospital reports have highlighted cases where low-quality or expired food was directly related to high patient death rates.
- **Reused Cooking Oil and Contaminated Water:** The film brings attention to the habit of reusing cooking oil that releases dangerous carcinogens and the selling of polluted water as packaged drinking water. These habits are adopted by most street vendors and cheap eateries, putting customers' health in great danger.

### **Risk Society Theory (Ulrich Beck)**

Ulrich Beck's Risk Society theory specifically points out the concealed risks of industrial modernization, emphasizing how artificially created risks are unevenly spread throughout society. During late modern times, risks are no longer inherent but “manufactured” by human choices, technological developments, and system breakdowns. Food contamination is a perfect instance wherein poisonous substances are introduced into or substitute for real food ingredients placing public health in danger. Beck's model accounts for how such hazards unevenly strike marginalised populations, who don't have resources to prevent or resist them.

Whereas industrial modernity has enabled economic progress, it has additionally introduced complicated as well as very often intangible dangers. Such a danger lies in food adulteration coming from unmonitored industrial capitalism where consumer health is not accorded importance alongside profit. Destructive colouring agents, harmful chemicals, as well as cheap ingredients, permeate key goods such as milk, oil, and spices. These health risks mostly impact the poor, who use cheaper, mass-produced products and cannot afford safer versions. Corporate complacency is largely responsible for perpetuating these risks. Most firms reduce costs by disregarding safety standards, fuelled by competition and the need to maximise profits. In spite of food safety regulations, enforcement is poor due to corruption, lack of funds, and bureaucratic inefficiency. Regulatory bodies often fail to hold corporations accountable, creating an environment where malpractice thrives.

Public lack of knowledge further intensifies the crisis. Adulterated food is a risk to which most consumers, particularly those who are poor, lack knowledge. Such lack of knowledge is not inadvertent; it is a product of systemic failure in terms of education, information access, and company-led deliberate mislabelling. Risk, therefore, becomes a burden for the vulnerable, and this brings out the underlying inequalities inherent in modern industrial systems

### **The Role of *Aruvam* in Public Awareness**

The 2019 Tamil movie *Aruvam*, directed by Sai Sekhar, surpasses the genre of an ordinary horror-thriller by presenting a gripping social commentary on food adulteration. The integration of supernatural factors with real-world issues makes the movie an essential part of cultural discourse that enhances public consciousness about the risks of adulterated food and the institutionalized corruption facilitating it. In the process, *Aruvam* acts as a visual activism that informs audiences about the concealed dangers inherent in ordinary consumption.

At the centre of the film is food safety and the fallout of industrial irresponsibility. The narrative follows Jagannathan, a food safety officer committed to bringing out the unethical, and Jyothi, a woman who is anosmic, who becomes an agent of justice when he is killed. Through their quest, it is exposed how common adulteration is and how badly it can affect people, particularly marginalized groups who do not have access to cleaner alternatives of food. *Aruvam* makes an effort to lay bare the ways in which corporate greed, negligent regulations, and public ignorance cumulatively add up to create a deadly mechanism. It takes a cinematic turn to portray genuine threats such as the adulteration of milk, oil, and baby food causes frequently disregarded due to sloppy enforcement and neglect by the media. By so doing, the film puts focus on an invisible crisis.

The emotional burden of the characters' ordeal provokes sympathy and anger, leading viewers to question their eating habits and call for accountability. *Aruvam* employs mainstream cinema not only as entertainment but also as a source of education and mobilisation of public concern. It asks the audience to challenge the morality of food production and their place within this corrupt system. Essentially, *Aruvam* sends a strong message about corporate responsibility and consumer rights, taking the personal and making it political and turning entertainment into a vehicle for social activism.

### **Real-World Parallels**

The food adulteration cases portrayed in *Aruvam* are not exaggerations on the part of film makers but actual depictions of incidents that have occurred in India. News of toxic levels of pesticides in vegetables, industrial detergents in milk, and artificial colouring agents in spices is routine. Even though laws like the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 exist, they are not enforced effectively because of corruption, ignorance, and insufficient inspections. In 2019, there was a shocking incident in Uttar Pradesh where huge amounts of synthetic milk, prepared using shampoo

and detergent, were confiscated. Likewise, the Maggi noodles scandal in 2016 uncovered the fact that Nestlé’s product had lead levels many times over acceptable levels, resulting in a blanket ban across the country for several months.

## **Conclusion**

*Aruvam* upholds this tradition, revealing unscrupulous food industry methods and initiating debates on consumer rights and the role of the government. *Aruvam* emphasizes the prevalence of food adulteration and its catastrophic impact on public health. The film effectively incorporates real-world problems with supernatural themes to engage the audience and also conveys a powerful social message. *Aruvam* is not just a supernatural justice film it is a daring commentary on the actual crisis of food adulteration. Its contribution to public awareness cannot be overemphasized, as it informs, provokes, and inspires action among viewers, making the invisible visible and the mundane political. *Aruvam* is not just a supernatural justice film it is a daring commentary on the actual crisis of food adulteration. Its contribution to public awareness cannot be overemphasized, as it educates, challenges, and stimulates action among audiences, making the unseen seen and the mundane political.

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