I am drawn to certain objects and values deemed to be minor... Whence, no doubt my taste for 'low' art, for idiomatic phrased and proverbs, fairy tales everyday events, embroidery, the cinema...' - Baudelaire

tamil cinema: a few perspectives
The overriding concern of the chapter is to deal with Tamil cinema. It is very important to study Tamil cinema to understand the objectives of culture and film industry. The segments on Tamil cinema are pertinent to understand the relationship between cinema and contemporary culture. Instead of giving a detailed history of development of Tamil cinema attention has been focussed on a few important elements of Tamil cinema. A historical lineage is necessary to understand the manner in which cinema developed from its nascent stages to a complex institution. In the process, the various social, cultural, political and economic factors that contributed to progress and development have also been studied in this chapter.

The first screening by the Lumiere brothers took place in 1895. In the following year, technicians working under the Lumiere brothers traversed the globe to promote, what was called later as the artistic, industrial and the entertainment wonder of the twentieth century. Maurice Seistere, a cameraman with the Lumiere brothers travelled to Bombay and showed the first film to India. Arthur Havelock was the then Governor of the British ruled Madras Presidency. M Edwards, another technician was showing the first film in the city, near Victoria Public Hall, the present day Rippon Building, in 1897. The first film in the city was known as the kinemascope. The first short films- the arrival of the train at the station, the workers leaving the factory, the gardener and the tramp, the mother feeding the baby and the breaking of the wall- were shown. And thus cinema was introduced into the city of Madras.¹

Two years later in 1899, the first news daily, Swadesamitran was launched. Apart from many other symbols the motor car became the status symbol of the rich. In contemporary culture the vintage cars have become the symbol of distinction by the rich. Trams were introduced in the city during the same year when the first screening took

¹ S.Theodore Baskaran. The Eye of the Serpent: An Introduction to Tamil Cinema, Madras: East West Books, 1996, p.1 Further referencing of this book will be made as Baskaran
place. Telephones found their way only in affluent homes and in companies. The practice of listening to recorded music through the Gramophone started.

In what Walter Benjamin calls, the mechanical reproduction of works of art had begun. Cinema was still in its primary stages. The tradition of screening of short films took place in continuos fashion and, these films were thereafter given various apppellations as in *Bioscope* and *Kinemascopc*. The venues of these shows were along the roadsides and parks. At this point of time there was no licensing for the electricity used in the screening of films. Films during this time were projected with magnesium lamps unlike the present day two projector system. A person named Major Warwick visualised the commercial possibilities of this medium and it was he who built the first cinema house, the South India Electric Theatre in 1900, in Mount Road in Madras. The new form of social entertainment in Tamil Nadu became a landmark in the social history of the state. During the first eight years the shows were confined to the city and it was only later that cinema travelled to the mofussil and the rural areas. Swamikannu Vincent introduced this medium to interior towns and villages of Madras Presidency. Vincent along with Venkiah were two important persons in the formative years of Tamil cinema who were responsible for the growth of this medium in the state, other parts of the country and, Burma and Ceylon. Vincent showed his first screening in St. Joseph's School at Tiruchi, then called Tichinopolli. Vincent had named his firm as Edison's Cinematograph. The Edison's Cinematograph toured the southern parts of Tamil Nadu. They went to Madurai, Tirunelveli and Rameswaram using carbide jet-burners for projection. The company also travelled to Bombay, Lucknow, Lahore and Peshawar with his equipment. In 1909, Venkiah used electric carbon for projection. R.Venkiah a studio owner and photographer at Mt. Road was attracted to this venture of film screenings and exhibitions. In 1909, Venkiah imported a Chronomegaphone, a gramophone combined with a film projector that gave an illusion of synchronised sound. They screened films like *Pearl Fish* and *Raja's Casket*. Venkiah travelled to Burma and Ceylon. Venkiah built the first

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2 Baskaran, Introduction.
permanent cinema hall in Madras in 1914 called the Gaiety, the first of its kind to be built by an Indian.³ Crown and Globe were the other cinema houses, which appeared in Purasaiwalkam in Madras. In 1909, an Englishman called T.H. Huffton founded the Peninsular Film Series in Madras. They screened hour-long films, which were imported mostly from the United States and they were drama films. Theodore Baskaran argues that the arrival of drama films is the cornerstone in the history of Tamil cinema, because thereafter cinema firmly and irrevocably established itself as a popular entertainment form. R Nataraja Mudaliar and SM Dharmalingam Mudaliar ventured into film production and started India Film Company in 1916. Thus, in a manner of speaking, the first studio was established and a stage actor called Rangavadivelu was hired to train actors. Thirty-five days after setting up of the studio, the first feature film was made. Keechakavatham was based on an episode in Mahabaratha and in 1917 Draupadirastiraparanam was made. R. Nataraja Mudaliar broke with his partner and sets up his own ventures in Vellore and alone produced two films called Mahiravanlan and Markendaya in 1919.⁴ Baskaran observes that it was Venkiah’s son, Raghupathy Prakasa and A. Narayanan who put Tamil cinema on a firm footing. Prakasa was trained in England in filmmaking and set up Star of the East Film Company. In 1921, Bhimsa Pratignai was released. He made a number of films that were screened all over the country with title cards in Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Gujarati. The company lasted for four years and played a crucial role in the growth of cinema in South India. Y.V. Rao and C.V. Pullaya who were important names in the Tamil cinema were trained in this studio. The first ten years of film production in Madras was done by R. Nataraja Mudaliar and Prakasa. The lone exception was an Englishman called Whitaker who produced Valli Thirumanam in 1921 and interestingly the movie was made in Madurai, the first of the kind to be made outside Madras. Baskaran reveals that a reviewer in the English daily, The Mail wrote that the film was of a higher quality than Phalke’s works.⁵


⁵ Baskaran, p.5.
A. Narayanan opened the Exhibitor Film Services in 1927 and supplied American films to Indian houses and set up a production company called the General Pictures Corporation, GPC. In 1929, Dharmapathini was released, and in the same year 24 films were made. GPC was responsible for the stabilisation of early film production in South India. The pioneer technicians like Sundarrao Nadkarni and Jiten Banerjee came from GPC. K Subramaniyam imbibed the basics of film making at the studios of Associate Films started by R Padmanabhan. Apart from Madras, Bangalore was another centre for film production. Altogether a total of 73 films were made during the silent era and Vishnu Leela by R Prakasa was the last silent film produced in Madras.

The imported films were more popular among the masses. The reasons attributed to such popularity were that they were of superior quality. The films of silent era lured the audiences with stories from mythologies and puranic literature. The content was mostly mythological. Baskaran is of the view that the British government stifled at the effort of indigenous production, which needed protection, as it was being done in Germany. An interesting parallel can be drawn on this regard. In the Australian colony, the fledgling film industry was killed by the British policy. India, as observed by film historians did survive because of the rich cultural heritage in terms of literature, history and myths it could draw upon to make films. These were conceived as the early impediments and the hurdles for the growth of Tamil cinema.

Apart from external colonial pressures, there was also a strong social domestic pressure that was manifested in the public attitude towards cinema. In the early days it was difficult to get people to act in films, for there was a derogatory connotation attached to cinema in Tamil Nadu. The actors who worked in commercial drama companies refused to work in the films because of irregular incomes. For instance, Serukalathur Sema was an accountant in the GPC and acted in many of their productions. T.S. Mani, a painter with the GPC appeared in many films. The initial days of Tamil cinema did not have any

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7 XXIV Film Appreciation Course Notes.
specialised department of actors and actresses nor any concept called specialised acting for the screen existed nor was considered anything near to an industry where routine and regular work, and remuneration was the order of the day. There was an instance where even an Englishman, Dr. Ernest Wood acted in Anadhaipen in 1931. Only in the last two years of silent era, the names of the artists started appearing in the publicity material that used to be distributed. The popular genre during this period was stunt films. The artists had prefixes like Battling Mani and Stunt Raja, which in fact were the main actors. Since women were difficult to convince to make men played the roles of women for quite some time. For instance, T.K. Muthusamy played the role of a widow in Menaka (1935) because it was a role of a woman and more particularly it was a role of a widow. Women donning roles in films were perceived and considered 'cheap' and performing a role of a widow was considered a taboo. Another film Baktha Ramdas (1935) where all female roles were played by men. Some of the conventions that were set during the silent era continued to be followed long after the advent of sound.

In what was construed as an attractive attention before the screening of silent films, group dances and boxing matches were organised prior before the screening. A person would read the title cards and then follow a running commentary according to the whims and fancies of the commentator. This was because the level of comprehending the new medium of cinema was in its primary stage, which some film historians attribute to the low level of literacy. Since the culture of cinema was in its nascent stages, it is believed that the general literacy and education level would not have mattered for understanding the new medium. The dependence of the early years of films on mythologicals had a crippling effect on the cinematic vocabulary. The dominant perception was that the episodes from the Indian epics were familiar with the Tamil audiences and consequentially the filmmaker seldom had to explain the film visually. As a result the scope of developing a film language and grammar unique to Tamil cinema was curtailed. Baskaran argues that the possibility of developing a visual grammar was there because the

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8 Baskaran, p. 7.
formative years were silent but the opportunity was lost to Tamil cinema. After the advent of sound, the film relied on its verbal narration to tell the story. During the silent era few films were made on contemporary themes and most of them drew episodes and stories from mythologies. For instance, A. Narayanan’s *Dharmapathini* (1929) and Raja Sandow’s *Anaadhaipenn* (1931) reflected upon social themes. During the pre World War I period, films from Holland, Germany and France were screened in Madras. If this trend continued the indigenous development would have been wholesome posits Baskaran. And the after effect of the two World Wars saw a ban on films from Germany and Russia, and earlier from the United States and Great Britain.

Finally, cinema was appearing clearly as a true form of mass entertainment. The accessibility was open to all classes unlike the earlier pattern where only the urban rich could afford. Barring a few individual initiatives like K. Subramanyam, Tamil Nadu Soundararajan and Padmanabhan most of the film production, which started during 1931 faded into oblivion. Even these production companies stopped at one particular period of time. Between 1935 and 1942 five production houses emerged and these were the pioneering film production houses which set the trends of Tamil cinema. Gemini Studio by S.S. Vasan, AVM by Meyappan Chettiar, Modern Theatres by Sundaram, Bashiraja Sriramulu Naidu and Jupiter Pictures by Somu and Mohideen. These five production companies were termed as the five Pandavas by C. ‘Ramasamy Iyer, then a leading lawyer and a Dewan of Travancore. Even these production houses couldn’t sustain in the film industry beyond a duration of twenty-five years except for AVM which has been able to sustain till now. Muktha Srinivasan by citing these examples argues that the general trend in film industry is that most of the production houses find it difficult to

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10 A few reels of both the films were initially said to be in the Film Archives at the Film and Television Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. But later were damaged beyond retrieval. Hence no formal and written analyses was possible. Interviews with people who have seen these films revealed that the films carried social themes.
11 Baskaran, p.10.
15 Muktha, p.12.
sustain because the economics of film making incur more losses than profits. Before the era of the famous five, Nadrajah Mudaliar, Venkiah, R.Prakash, A. Narayanan, Modi Narayana Rao, C.V. Raman were the pioneer producers. They produced films for a few years. After the famous five, there emerged Venus Pictures, the Panthulu organisation (now Buddha pictures), Thevar Pictures, Velumani Company, A.K. Velan and MAV Pictures who successfully operated for ten to twelve years. During the sixties Muktha films, K Balaji, R.M. Veerappan started their own productions and could sustain only for a few years. M. Karunanidhi, the present chief minister of Tamil Nadu started his own production companies, Mekala Pictures and Poompukar Productions. Muktha Srinivasan argues that the reasons for heavy losses on very many films is that every film is a test by fire and one has to qualify the test successfully every time. The fact that a particular film has enjoyed box office success does not qualify for the same receipts in its successive venture from the same director or a production house.16

Advent of Sound: The Birth of a Nation.

Ninety-nine films were made in the first six years of Tamil cinema. Eighty-eight were drawn from episodes in Indian mythology. These films contributed to an uncritical, orthodox tradition of the early motion pictures or it seemed a mere representation of the then ruling caste and class in the state. The mythologies added to the popularity that appealed to the audiences with a sense of religious piety.17 Early films were celluloid versions of stage plays.18 The normal practice was to engage a drama troupe, enact a performance and shoot them. This was a true form of photographed version of drama or the ‘photographed theatre’ as it was called in the West. Sarvotham Madami who directed *Galavarishi* (1932) in an interview tells Baskaran how the movie is filmed. A static camera is used and the drama enacted scene by scene is then shot. These films were shot in Bombay, Calcutta or Pune. Most of the technicians who worked during the silent era and

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16 Muktha, pp.14-16.
17 Baskaran, p.12
18 The notion that posits that there can be no variation in any classical art form has been destroyed after the invention of cinema. The classical school of thought always represented the dominant and allowed one strand of thought. The classical form, at least in arts, is pitted against the popular. It is this myth that variations are only possible with the popular form and not in the classical form that has been exposed after the invention of cinema.
after the advent of sound in Tamil films were non Tamils. There was little scope for cinematic conventions to develop because of the obsessive concern towards stage. The Tamil cinema had become a slave of the stage at its early growth, and it took some time to come out of the domineering influence of Tamil stage.  

After the period of the mythologicals it was the turn of the saints. There was not much of a difference between these two periods but more so a continuum in terms of its content with varying treatments. For instance, the films released in this category were New Theatre’s Nandanar (1933) an untouchable farmhand who is a devotee of Siva, Siru Thonda Nayanar (1935) and Sankaracharya (1939). Gramophones were becoming popular. Companies started releasing songs from drama sets. A close association was established between the drama sets and the film companies after the advent of sound. The complete sound track of Alli Arjuna (1935) was released. Some of the companies who were into producing records started producing films, for instance, Orrs Gramophone & Talkies Ltd. of Madras produced films like Vishnu Leela (1938) directed by Raja Sandow. The first movie to be made against a contemporary setting, as what in the Tamil cinema genre, was called the socials was Kausalya (1935) produced by the South Indian Film corporation. The film featured a pistol-wielding woman as the protagonist. Dumbachari (1935) was adapted from a popular play featuring the famous comedian and comedienne pair in their debut. In 1937, thirty-seven films were made and, out of which seven films had contemporary social themes. Another film that lampooned caste prejudices of the time was Balayogini (1936), directed by K Subrahmaniyam. This director was responsible for introducing nationalistic symbols into movies. In Sevadasan (1938) he introduced symbols like the chakra and the portraits of national leaders in the movie. K Subramaniyam is best remembered for his Thiyagaboomi (1939). In the same year T. Marconi released Vimochanam. The main thrust of the movie was temperance around which Gandhi’s programme for national upliftment. More contemporary themes were released during this period. Westernization was shown as evil where women were involved. For instance, CK

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19 Baskaran, p.13.
20 Ibid, p.18.
Rajagopal's Dharmapathini (1935) revolved around a socialite and her Anglophile husband.

The developments of the mid thirties gave a fresh impetus to the further development of Tamil cinema. In 1934, the first sound studio was established in Madras called the Srinivasa Cinetone or Sound City followed by Meenakshi Cinetone and then Vel Pictures. The filmmakers didn't have to go out of the city for the facilities were available in Madras. New trends of films were produced on contemporary issues. For instance, Pathi Bakthi (1936) was adapted from a stage play. But on the other hand an exclusive script was written for Balayogini. Thus a different mis-en-scene and a narrative technique was developed for the film to suit the story which is exclusively written for the medium unlike the adapted stage plays. And the directors chose subjects who were relevant to the period and thus an entire genre of filmmaking came into practice viz., the socials. The period was reflected in the films. They captured the moods, conflicts, tensions and the like of the social and cultural realm. At this time the nationalistic fervour was fuelled by political activism of the Civil Disobedience movement. Baskaran describes that the Tamil cinema benefited from this development. The nationalists used the press, stage, gramophone, the screen and just about any other medium to convey their ideas and expressions. Films were the most popular and effective medium for propaganda. Congressman Sathyamurthy used films to gain popularity of the national movement. According to the historians of Tamil cinema, Tamil cinema gained respectability during this period.

This was partly by the efforts taken by Sathyamurthy who represented the interests of the Congress. He helped mobilising people to join films and especially the social elite who were actively involved in the cultural realm. Tamil cinema started casting amateur actors because their services were cheaper, and as a consequence it took cinema away from stage ethos. After non-professionals making an entry into Tamil cinema the entire style of

\[21 \text{Ibid. pp.13-15.}\]
acting changed. Later 'stylised' acting gave way to realistic acting and an accent on the songs got mellowed down. Emphasis on realism was given importance and one such early attempt was *Sitakalyanam* (1933) with G.K. Shesagiri, and Viswanathan, brother of K. Subrahmanyam.

To understand the historiography of Tamil films or the filmography of Tamil history, it is relevant to understand the impact of the Tamil language had on its society and the changes brought about in various spheres. The first two or three decades of this century witnessed a revival of Tamil language and culture. Work of scholars like R. Caldwell and GU Pope on Tamil language and literature in the later half of the nineteenth century had created tremendous interest in the language. As earlier mentioned, Swadesimittran was established as news daily in 1899 and before that in 1880 it was established as a magazine. The next two decades saw sixty periodicals being published in Tamil Nadu. Baskaran is of the view that the rediscovery and publication of Tamil classics of the Sangam era circa 3-5 AD by UV Swaminatha Aiyer in 1900 brought back a glorious history. V. Kanagasabai Pillai's, *Tamils 1800 Years Ago*, published in 1904 was a part of this process. Somasundara Barathi's *Tamil Classics* and *Tamizhakam* published in 1912 were a part of this process. M. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Tamil Studies* published in 1912 also added to this interest. Poet Subramania Barathiar's works brought poetry closer to the semi-illiterate and boosted revivalism, and not only that, his poetry popularised the entire genre of poetry and

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22 The intention of Baskaran’s usage of stylised acting is not known with respect to Tamil cinema. But a brief on the Method acting would lend a perspective to understand the Tamil cinema. Method was the American adaptation of Stanislavsky’s teachings on acting and direction stressing mainly the building of the role rather than the technical side of the presentation. The fundamental idea is the complete losing of the actor in the role. The chief exponents of the Method, particularly Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan and others connected with the New York Actor’s Studio place great emphasis on improvisation and exercises to improve the actor’s gifts of empathy. Al Pacino and Robert de Niro represent the Method school of acting. Back in Tamil Nadu though it is perceived that Sivaji Ganesan represented the Method acting but it was Kamalhassan who made efforts best to follow the rules of the Method. The usual criticism of the Method trained actors, at least in theatre was that they neglect diction and are effectively limited to naturalistic acting. Method acting was the working of the ideology of the anti-hero. It constitutes relatively more concrete realm of theatrical style, voice and gesture, which borders on the behavioural stances and gestural idiom. It reflected the interpersonal languages of everyday life, indeed the stylisation and effect of elements already present in the parts of the American community, and also the cause and model of newer kinds of behaviour that adapt it to the street and to the real world. Here for the first time perhaps we can understand concretely how what is best about a particular movie is also what is least good about it. The anti-hero is predicated on non-communication and inarticulacy. The agonies and exaltations of method acting were perfectly calculated to render this asphyxiation of the spirit that cannot complete its sentence. Later, in the reappropriation of this style, something paradoxical happens. The inarticulate becomes the highest form of expressiveness, the wordless stammer proves voluble, and the agony over uncommunicability suddenly turns out to be everywhere fluently comprehensible.
literature associated with it. Though Baskaran calls it as revivalism he does not clearly state the patterns for revivalism and the effects. This kind of revivalism was also manifested in the films. Baskaran argues that the writings of Ramalinga Swamigal alias Vallalar (1823-1874) were the motivating forces of Tamil revivalism. In order to felicitate him, a film was made on him, Jothi with the dialogue written by P. Sambanda Mudaliar released in 1939. The film included ten songs from Arutpa, which is the collection of devotional songs by Ramalinga Swamigal. Life during the Sangam era began to take shape through films and Baktha Kumanan (1939) told the story of a legendary king from the Sangam period that was renowned for his generosity. The two great literary epics were filmed during this period, Manimekalai and Silappathikaram. Manimekalai was made in 1940 and Kannagi in 1942. Manimekalai is Buddhist in character and Kannagi is Jain in character. The two faiths were popular during the Sangam Age. Thiruvalluvar, the savant who lived during the Sangam period was also captured in the screen. Thiruvalluvar was made in 1941 and Serkalathur Sema donned the role of Valluvar and Tirunelveli Papa as his wife Vasuki. Araichimani (1942) portrayed the life of the Chola King renowned for his sense of justice. Raja Sandow directed the film. Later came the poet Barathidasan, who even changed his original name, Kanagasubburathinam because of the influence of poet Barathiayar. Barathidasan, entered the films as a song writer and a song writer for Balamani (1937). Barathidasan was a sympathiser of the self-respect movement, precursor to the Dravidian parties and worked in Sri Ramanujar (1938), Kalamegam and Ponmudi which were released in 1940 portrayed rationalistic and reformist ideas. The arrival of the dialogue writers, which did not exist before, like T.V. Chari and Ilangoavan wrote flowery lines in chaste Tamil filled with literary allusions. All these reinforced the process of Tamil revivalism. Ilangoavan was associated with Manikodi, a magazine that was committed to striving ideas towards excellence in literature, arts and also recognised cinema as a medium in this aspect. Ilangoavan wrote the dialogue for Ambikapathi (1937) and Sivakavi (1943). Both the films portrayed stories of the son of the famous poet Kamban and Poyyamozhi Pulavar. T.V. Chari wrote the dialogue for Manonmani (1942) based on Manonmaniyam. One of the earliest Tamil plays, set in the classical age of the

21 Baskaran, p.19.
Cheran and Pandiyam kingdoms—written by Sundaram Pillai in verse form at the turn of the nineteenth century glorified Tamil language and tradition. *Tamilariyum Perumal* (1942) set in Chola times told the story of a poetess. V.A. Chellappa as Nakkeeran and MR Santhalakshmi played the male and the female lead role. Other prominent characters in the history of Tamil Nadu like Karikal Cholan and Avvaiyar were also made.

By the end of the Second World War the nationalistic content in the movies slowly faded and was supplanted by Tamil consciousness in some films. In *Kanjan* (1942) the hero sings songs, which eulogises to the qualities of Tamil people. The film was directed by Kovai Ayyamuthu who was a staunch congress leader, a lieutenant of Rajaji and influenced by Ramalinga Swamigal. In 1953, *Avvaiyar* was released and the film was dedicated to Mother Tamil and opens with a song praising Tamil Nadu. Other important characters in Tamil history like the King Pari, the poet saint Thiruvalluvar and Avvaiyar’s deity Lord Murugan are depicted in the movie. By this time the Second World War had its own impact in Tamil Nadu. The local Congress government of the Madras presidency resigned. Censorship was made stringent and no nationalistic propaganda was allowed in the movies. On the production side it also had its effects. The film stock became a scarce commodity and the cost of the film went high and as a result the film production became very slow. The war with Japan meant no film market outlet in Burma.

In 1938 thirty-seven films were produced and in the year 1943 and 1944 fourteen and ten films were produced respectively. Films were asked to lace war propaganda and the director of War publicity was G.T.B. Harvey. The government orders were that one out of three films should be a war effort film. Towards this trend *Burma Rani* (1945) was produced by Modern Theatres directed by T.R. Sundaram, *Manasmarakshanam* (1944) was released and directed by K. Subrahmanyam and *Kannamma En Kadahali* (1945) was produced by Jupiter Studios directed by Kothamangalam Subbu. The government hired filmmakers to produce short films on war and made films between 1943 and 1946. For instance P.S. Srinivasa Rao made such a film. W.J. Mylon, the manager of Gemini Studios took over as the chief of the war publicity in Madras and made *Madras Must Not Burn*
explaining the work of the Air Raid Precaution Unit and the civil defence procedures. Vittal made *Home Front* with Tamil commentary to propagate anti-panic measures in wartime.\(^{24}\)

**Rebel Cinema**

The stage was used for propaganda purposes and fund raising. Despite the war drama flourished. C.N. Annadurai's *Chandrodayam* was staged in 1943, the cast included Annadurai himself and Muthuvel Karunanidhi. The *Dravida Kazhakam* was formed in 1944 and the stage was used as a tool for political propaganda.\(^{25}\) By then the leaders realised the power of histrionics and used the stage for the party's political purposes. Drama was the high point and the highlight of *Dravida Kazhakam*’s conferences. Aspiring writers for films went to the story department in Modern Theatres, Salem, which served as a school for the dialogue writers. The story department at Modern Theatres has produced many prominent writers for the Tamil film industry. Barathidasan honed his skills here and wrote the dialogue for *Subadra* (1945). This trend set an example for other writers to come. The writers of the *Dravida Iyakkam* worked in a number of films and the entire genre of filmmaking came to be known as the cinema of dissent. The cinema of dissent came to be iconoclastic in its outlook and radical towards certain traditional beliefs and orthodox practices. Penelope, a film historian argues that a cinema of dissent or disengagement makes no less revealing than the one, which wholeheartedly endorses the standards of its society. In 1936, *Nallathambi* written by C.N. Annadurai inspired by Frank Capra's film *Mr. Deed Goes to Town*, which was an original story set against the backcloth of the American Depression years written by Robert Riskin. Annadurai’s successful drama was *Velaikkari*, a story of a theist turning into an atheist. Jupiter Pictures

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\(^{24}\) Ibid, pp. 20-26.

\(^{25}\) The difficulty in dealing with film and politics is that what takes place must be assessed not only at the production level but also at the consumer level. The question of effects and functions of propaganda for the audience is as complex as that of intentions and awareness in the producers. Even if feature films do not have the authority to determine political opinions and actions to any significant degree, they can operate covertly with political consequences that might be diametrically opposed to the apparent intention. Hidden propaganda takes many forms. Every society which is built on a reasonably firm and homogenous set of values, strives to reinforce and maintain them through times of change.
decided to do the film and *Velaikkari* was released in 1952. The film had a rationalistic appeal and an anti-priesthood slant.  

Hollywood films influenced C.N. Annadurai. The stress was on the spoken word and the word was given primary importance, for instance in Robert Riskin's dialogue in *It Happened One Night* (1934). Scenes in *Velaikkari* were modelled along the lines of Count of Monte Cristo and the last scene of *Velaikkari* was inspired by *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) starring Paul Muni. Rouben Mammoulin's *Queen Christina* (1935) inspired CN Annadurai's *Sorgavasal* (1954). *Gaslight* (1944) inspired Annadurai's novel *Rangoon Radha*, which was later made into a film in 1956. Many other writers from the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam*, DMK also joined the film industry in the years that came. For instance, AV Asaithambi wrote the dialogue for *Sarvathikari* (1951) and M.K. Maruthamuthu wrote dialogues for *Ilavarasi* (1950). M. Karunanidhi's *Parasakthi* (1952) brought him critical acclaim and fame. In the history of Tamil cinema the writer's name was beginning to be acknowledged. Producers and production companies realised the potential of the rhetoric and elegance was saleable commodity. Writers of the *Dravida Iyakkam* were hired for writing dialogues. They neither wrote screenplays, shooting script nor had any control over the film that remained with the director or the producer accordingly. For example, the prominent comedian during this period NS Krishnan who played the lead role changed the story and C.N. Annadurai who wrote the dialogues was in no position to resist or change it. The producers during this era were all theists and the dialogue writers, most of them, were atheists. The producers had the fear of stretching the radical element too far because by doing this they thought they would alienate the masses because a lot of money was at stake in each film. S.K. Mohideen and K. Somasundaram, the owners of Jupiter Pictures were ardent believers of their own religious faith and did not allow any atheistic ideas into their films, the films that were produced form Jupiter Pictures. For instance, the radical rhetoric, which was initially there in the play was watered down by the director A.S.A. Samy who was a devout Catholic. In another
instance-and this tradition is being practised and followed for all Tamil movies—where K.A. Perumal, the owner of National Pictures before the beginning of Parasakthi shooting, performed a puja ceremony. But the reassuring message from the writers were that they against the orthodox practices and superstitions, cast hierarchy and temple priesthood. They fought against suppression of women and for social justice, which in some way or rather was manifested in their films. For instance, the last scene in Velaikkari, the camera tilts up to the a board which reads, There is only one god and there is only one community, intending to clarify the doubts of the sceptics among the viewers. Another scene from Parasakthi would be of relevance to the discussion here. The priest tries to molest Kalyani inside the temple and she appeals to the goddess. The next shot shows the temple attendant woken up from his sleep hearing her cries, ringing the bell frantically, the priest releases Kalyani. The shots were edited in such a way, basically to convey the director's idea, that the bell was rung in answer to Kalyani's cry for help. The successes of these films were not a marker of the popular perceptions of cinema about the content, Avvaiyar and Gnanasoundari (1955) are examples of successful films with overt religious content. It is argued here that the films that portrayed the societal ills and evils of the society failed to make an impact on the society. The DK and later the DMK's ideological intention was to promote the party's ideas through these films. Though the films always stuck an anti-establishment note, they failed to suggest and failed short to make any reformative measures. A similar strand of argument is being posed in favour of the critical queries against the Dravidian movement. In all films the courtroom was the high point, for instance in Prasakthi, Velaikkari, Manohar (1954) and in Manthirikumari (1950). The play-within-the-film was introduced during this period to provide scope for preachy monologues, the socrates play in Rajarani (1956) written by M. Karunanidhi or the Samrat Asokan drama in the film Annaiyin Aanai (1958) written by Murasoli Maran. Baskaran argues that most of the films by these writers had run-of-the-mill-plot in conformity with existing traditions as in Karunanidhi's Pudhayal(1957) and Kannadasan's Madurai Veeran(1956) and Tenaliraman (1956). But the examples given to substantiate his arguments are only works of exceptions of these writers. Annadurai's Nallavan

27 Baskaran, pp.27-30.
Vaazhvan(1961) included anti establishment jibes. Dialogues predominated in these films. The films were stagy, with eye level shots and horizontal exits and entries, characters looked into the camera and carefully delivered the lines.28

The primacy given to the word rendered the camera movement immobile. Even after the advent of the mobile camera, where the *mise-en-scène* resembled that of a drama, where the characters spoke form one particular point or within the frame of the camera. For the very same reason the filmmaker was in a difficult position to get at the essence of the medium of cinema. Till then the Tamil cinema was preoccupied with the spoken word and neglected other forms of the medium. Cinema was not visualised through images and pictures but perceived in just literary terms.29 The film dialogues had its impact on the public as in it was sold in printed book forms. Tamil cinema was still portrayed as an extension of literature instead of belonging to its own medium. Though cinema has its relation to other arts it has its own indigenous traits but nevertheless the dynamics of the medium is brought out by the complex relations it has with other arts.

The popularity of the Dravidian rhetoric lasted for just more than a decade and then wore off. The DMK decided to fight in the elections. Though it was their obsessive concern to promote a rational mode of thought and fight orthodoxy and superstitions through films, they were careful when they decided they would fight their elections. They were on a guard against alienating any section of voters by attacking or hurting their beliefs, practices and values. So the films made at this time proffered entertainment with an eye on the box office.

The early fifties saw an unprecedented boom in production. The end of war and lifting of sanctions facilitated expansions in the industry and during the period 1953, thirty six films were made. Another reason cited is the rural electrification programme widened the

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29 Baskaran, p.34.
market for films especially in towns and villages and took cinema to the interior parts of the state. The number of moviegoers increased and the market for films also increased. Baskaran observes that it was at this time that the dialogue writers from DMK consolidated their political position. 30

**Songs in Tamil Cinema**

There were striking features of cultural change in Tamil Nadu over the past few decades in the growth and dominance of songs and film music. Film music and songs have played a very important role in the everyday lives of the Tamil society. Film music has a special relationship with the social and the political sphere of the state. The interdisciplinary study of film music and politics attracted scholarly attention. Film music’s most predominant form of manifestation was song.

During the contemporary period, film music has been backed by a mammoth music industry and has been literally reproduced through transistors, tape recorders at fairs, election campaigns and at all public places. Film’s music audio tapes have become an industry by itself. Tamil Nadu has a rich tradition of music culture with various forms and divisions. A complete detail about the folk and classical musical tradition will be beyond the reach of this work. But a preliminary brief and the impact it had on Tamil cinema warrants discussion here.

Folk music has a rigorous tradition in Tamil Nadu and the folk tradition is mass oriented. Much of the literature on folk music and its discourse is disseminated through oral tradition. The Carnatic music is the classical form that has been the preserve of the Brahmins for a very long period of time. Carnatic music is religious in content and it required learning and discipline and thus it acquired a saintly character. 31 Though the

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31 Baskaran, p.38.
requirements suggested here to acquire or learn any art form requires formal learning and discipline, be it classical or folk or Jazz. 32

It will be relevant to dwell on the universal sociological dimensions of music in brief to understand the dialectics and conflict. Charles Nanry argues that within the socially prescribed limits, there existed from the very beginnings of American music life, a certain tension between 'official' and proper music and the music of those outside strict control. He further adds that sometimes this dialectic operated within the context of sacred music and folk music, and sometimes it operated between sacred music and folk music, and sometimes it operated within the context of sacred music. 33

Carnatic music was accessible only to the privileged upper castes and they only had the access to learn the tradition. On the contrary, folk music was secular in content and emanated from the masses and their daily lives. Moreover, the folk tradition, especially its songs, was comprehensible to the common man because the songs and the tune were drawn from the everyday experiences of their lives. The arrival of the Gramophone had changed the situation. The distinction between upper and lower classes began to blur but the very trait of distinction in the Bourdieuan sense manifested in various ways and it changed with times. Music transcended the area of social stratification. When classical music was recorded the common man had the chance to listen to it for the first time. Through time classical music was popularised through films. Company drama played a crucial role in contributing to the fabric of film music. Company drama was the most popular and mass based entertainment form as against the amateur drama clubs. Company drama worked on commercial lines, hired professional actors, their repertoire consisted of a few mythologicals which were written as musicals and the chief composer was called vaathiyar who did the role of the director, writer and just about everything. Songs in drama companies used carnatic music. Nattya sangeeth was introduced in the dramas,

32 The notational form of music is a result of the codification of musical forms written in the form of notes comprehensible to those who undertake formal education in music. Folk music is the precursor to notational form of music. The notational form is a recent invention. As a result, music has become a body of classificatory knowledge system accessible to a few. Prior to that folk music encompassed the realm of the everyday life. Interview with Palanibarathi, music composer.
which was a kind of Hindustan music appropriated from Marathi drama companies that toured Tamil Nadu. Baskaran is of the view that through this strain Hindustani ragas were assimilated. Another tradition that influenced drama and dearly cinema music was the Parsi drama companies, which toured Madras during the thirties. Folk songs did find their way into these dramas, which were often featured by the comedian but the dominant influence was the carnatic music. From the silent era during the early twentieth century to the twenties where cinema was just emerging as a mass entertainment form, the dramas had tremendous growth and development but this did not affect the status of company dramas and cinema and company dramas co-existed without any conflict. During the silent era, most of the films made were action films and that did not have any need for singers. The situation changed after the arrival of sound cinema. The first few years witnessed film version of successful, song laden plays staged by drama companies. Only singers familiar with carnatic music found a place in cinema and consequentially most of them who came into cinema were Brahmins. But the entry of the classical musicians into films was not easy for the world of carnatic music- classical musicians degraded cinema and had pejorative connotations toward cinema. And the stage singers sang only on the stage, though some of them after gaining fame through dramas gave solo concerts. SG Kittappa and Devudu Iyer are examples. 34

Sound came to Tamil Nadu through four reeler sequences of semi classical music, folk songs and dances. The first talkie in the whole of South India, Kalidas(1931) had contained fifty songs in it. This was a perfect example of drama-cinema continuum, a continuation of the drama tradition. As we have discussed in the introductory chapter that cinema are culture specific and this aspect of song and dance sequences are a unique feature of the Indian cinema. The plurality of traditions in Indian society had their own songs, folk or classical, which revolved around their daily lives. Baskaran believes that the mythological films serve as a vehicle for songs. After the talkies arrived, regional production began, and

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34 Baskaran, pp.39-41.
34 Randor Guy, A Narayanan: He gave a new direction to Tamil Cinema in *Screen*, April 26, 1991
regional films were seen more in the light of an alternative, though they were also viewed as a counterpoint to the films from the West and Europe.

The first sound studio came to Madras in the year 1934, Srinivasa Cinetone by A. Narayanan and by 1937 there were nine such studios. This was an indicator that this art form was growing to be huge industry. All the technicians of the stage used their own positions in studios that sprang up in Madras. Initial attempts by the film industry to lure the classical musicians proved futile. But glamour and money was associated with cinema began to be construed as a respectable medium overshadowing the earlier conception that cinema was not a legitimate art form. At this juncture Baskaran argues that cinema gave status and respect to the classical musicians.

For instance, Papanasam Sivan wrote and composed for more than five hundred songs and lured other musicians during the thirties and forties. Other musicians like G.N. Balasubramaniam, M.M. Dandapani Desikar, Musiri Subramanya Aiyer and V.V. Sadagopan were prominent during the first phase of the history of Tamil cinema. Some of their films became memorable like Meera (1945). Classical music was modified, so that it was adapted in films, in that the essential raga was retained and the duration and its narrative form was shortened without the improvisation and the innovative embellishments, the characteristic of the classical style of music and singing. The popularisation of classical music, though acceptable to a wider audience, received a contemptuous attitude from the elite who was mainly Brahmins. The popularisation of classical music was through film songs. The method through which the musicians popularised classical music altered their singing style and the pattern of music composition. Singing in front of the microphone replaced the tradition of singing on the stage for a huge audience. The recording was done through microphone and the playback system then hadn't come into practice. Shooting and sound recording went on simultaneously and camera remained most of the time static. Because of the better facilities in the technology and the increase in microphones, complexity was feasible in
cinema. Pre-recording facilities were beginning to be available and the problem of synchronisation of sound and the picture was getting resolved. The playback system emerged and had its own repercussion on Tamil cinema.³⁶ Playback singers emerged, artists with good looks and acting talent were recruited. Tamil cinema had always been influenced by the pattern of the Western music, especially the Hollywood themes. The Tamil films, which were made in Calcutta by the Bengali technicians, were influenced by Western music. The Madras studios acquired Western musical instruments and hence the Tamil film industry was beginning to assimilate western musical traits and use it in its films.

In the thirties, popular film songs in Hindi were copied. Asandas' classic Nandanar's (1935) song tunes were lifted from Chandidas, (Hindi, 1934). Songs became a part of the Tamil cinema due to its cultural internalisation of this aspect of cinema. It is not a mandatory constituent of the cinema and it is so often that in most of the movies an emotional outburst would end up in a song or lead into a song. Ashok Ranade identifies a progression in which speech moved unobtrusively from pure prose to metrical patterns to simple tunes. And he adds that songs from these early films were not really film songs as in the modern day sense but an extension of speech. But film songs as an independent cinematic aspect was to emerge later. P. Samabanda Mudaliar wrote that songs should take about one fourth of the film duration in the Handbook of Tamil Talkie.³⁷ Baskaran argues that the resort to a song in a given situation is a continuation of literature orientated aesthetic where versification or poetry is considered superior to the spoken word or written form. Cinema appropriated the features of literature in order to gain initial validity as a medium. Song-dominated cinema was thus conforming to, and extending the framework of aesthetic value in Tamil society. In 1944, film songs with a distinct set of characters had emerged where a mix of Carnatic, Hindustani and Western pop had constituted the elements of film songs. For instance, Haridas which had lots of songs gave the music director a sense of status and standing in the industry. Both Guy and Baskaran

³⁶ Baskaran, p.44.
observe the music director of Ambikapathi was given credit for his composition. In the present day, the launch of a movie begins with the recording of songs. Sankaraparanam (1981), Telugu was another instance where songs were endowed with regional appeal and was responsible for its success and popularity. Hindi films with good musical scores in South India prove this point.

The Gramophone industry was very closely associated with the development of film music in India and in 1902 the arrival of Gramophone sparked a new phase in the music industry where film songs were being cut in vinyl discs. The arrival of talkies witnessed the import of cheap gramophones from Japan and film songs were released in vinyl discs. Songs were recorded separately and songs from the sound track were reproduced on discs. The mammoth audiocassette industry in the present day had its origins when film songs were composed keeping in mind the gramophone industry, and a separate market for audio products associated with films. The songs during these days lasted for 3-4 minutes and with 78 rpm. The songbook was another addition in the industry. The songbook was priced low, which featured a printed still from the movie, the story line, the cast and the main credits. Tamil film songs also had its influence on the nearby island nation, Srilanka. In 1949, they started a commercial broadcasting outfit, called the Radio Ceylon, which began to broadcast film songs for six hours a day to start with. The sale of radios soared. Film songs were brought into the drawing room. The All India Radio in 1967 opened its commercial wing for broadcasting film songs. After the advent of Television, film songs occupied prime time in the viewing preferences of the audiences. The most wanted programme for many years was Oliyum Oliyum, which sustained its popularity for many years. Now, the film songs are released in cassettes. The addition or the deletion of songs wouldn’t affect the narrative flow of the film. Film songs were also used for propaganda purposes. It started during the British occupation where songs were used to rally the nationalist cause. Film songs were used to propagate the Dravidian ideology and their

37 Ibid. p.45.
causes. Film songs played a crucial role in MGR’s films. He carefully chose the titles of the movies and the lyrics of the songs. For most of the leftists and the rationalists song writers, film songs served as a political marker and a means of protest.

Film songs often and frequently manifested the existing value system of the masses. The role and significance of film songs in popular culture was evident in 1984 when MGR was ailing at a US hospital. For instance, in Oli vilakku (1970) when MGR is fighting for his life, a woman laments through a song. Most film songs are titillatory, often containing double entendres. Tamil poets of repute also wrote for films. Baskaradas, the nationalist and Barathidasan, a radical rationalist wrote till the end of the first decade of talkies. In the fifties, Pattukattai Kalyanasundaram of the communist movement dominated the world of film songs. During the sixties and seventies Kannadasan of the Dravidian movement held a domineering presence. Songs from this period were literary in flavour. As songs became an essential ingredient for films other faculties which were closely associated with it shot into prominence. They were the music director, the playback singer and the person who combines the song and dance combination, the choreographer and the dance director. For most part of the time song and dance were thought as an intrusion into cinematic narrative, in that the song and dance sequences remained unintegrated with the filmic narration. The entry of dance has no regard for the formal grammar of dance traditions. But the commercial cinema uses popular genres to communicate to the audiences and hence the popularisation of music and dance forms. Invariably each dance came with a song and a mix of all styles of dance forms, which had come to be known as the Oriental dance.

Film songs acquired a new strength because of its independence as an aural medium. For poets and lyricists who wrote songs with ideological intentions and convictions also filled in their own ideas despite pressures from the producers. Film songs have supplanted folk music in the lives of the masses. In fact film songs have become a body of representation

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of the folk forms at a popular level. Folk music does not presuppose the formal knowledge of music, as in the Carnatic tradition. The association of sound with images, of songs with dance sequences is another reason for popularity. The lyrics were unabashedly erotic. Film music was catholic in its approach, adapting continuously from other styles and through such adaptation at times degenerated into plagiarism. Technological developments in the world of sound and acoustics accelerated the spread of film songs. Film music is omnipresent and it has an interesting effect on the cultural scenario. In most parts of the world, changes in musical tastes and trends mould and affect the music used in films. In Tamil Nadu, the situation looks completely reversed. It is film music and more precisely the film songs which set the trends and moulds musical tastes. The cultural niche occupied by pop music in the West is the preserve of Indian film music. The dominant hold of film music is so powerful that no music outside the realm of film music has such an influencing force. All songs, apart from film songs are patterned on film music. The influence of film songs had its own effect in rural areas in the form of ‘record dance’ which is a poor man’s cabaret. William, O. Beeman has suggested that the song feature relate directly to the semantic function of music in the Indian cultural tradition.

As earlier discussed, the predominance of songs is a unique feature in Indian cinema and sets apart from other countries popular cinema. As film music is an applied art, this application was not executed in Tamil films. Music was neither adapted nor transformed for cinema but was merely transferred from stage to the screen. Songs were totally unrelated to the narrative and that is why popular nomenclature categorises most of the commercials as masala films. The ingredients of the movie is already predetermined-like in the inclusion of premeditated fight sequences, song and dance sequences, and, a few comedy scenes. The story line is decided accordingly and not explaining and expanding a plot in a linear or a non-linear fashion. In critically pointing out the shortcomings and the flaws of the popular Tamil cinema, Hariharan observes that more than half the film gets

39 Basakaran, p.51.
40 Ibid. pp.52-54
filled with lengthy and elaborate song, dance and fight sequences as a strategy to avoid proper characterisation, thus distracting the viewer to a non-narrative, purely voyeuristic preoccupation. And he adds that most Indian mainstream films seem to have fallen into this 'musico-emotional' form and the trap. This obviously is manifested in the sudden rise in sales of music cassettes and the domination of the song/music director. Consequentially this is manifested in the rise of AR Rahman whose music has been patterned on the lines of Music Television, MTV trends and hence the rise in the sales of cassettes.43

In the ‘Black and White’ days songs were shot in real time and there were no changes in costumes. As movies were shot in colour, it affected the song and dance sequences. The modern day song sequences are shot in various colourful locations. During this entire sequence there is a complete suspension of time and logic.44 This suspension is not clarified by the director or the filmmaker but is left to the understanding of the audiences and audiences have accepted the disruption as a cinematic convention. That this is a disruption in the cinematic narrative is manifested, especially in popular cinema, and forms the crux of popular narratives when the audiences take a break during the song sequences in Tamil Nadu. Baskaran argues that film reviews never refer to the irrationality in films. This again buttresses the cinematic convention. On the contrary as we have laid out that in these irrational sequences that time and logic are suspended. Moreover editing, which can be diachronous joins or cuts circumstances, situations, places and locations that are spatio-temporally asymmetrical. In believing that many factors had a role to play in hindering the growth of cinema, Baskaran observes that songs have retarded the growth of cinematic convention. As in the early days, when indigenous cinematic elements were being conceived cinema just resembled theatre, drama, vaudeville, pantomime or a combination of all these. The early films were called photographed theatre. The camera movement and its accessory techniques were not harnessed into full exploitation then. Song sequences militate against a strict definition of

cinema. This weakens the main thrust of the film and this is one notion why most Tamil films to a large extent remain at the level of picturised entertainment or photographed entertainment till now. And music is not integrated or incorporated into the film cinematically except for the background score. To this extent it is not film music in the strict sense, it is simply a joint presentation of film and music.

The latest influence on Tamil film songs comes from the music videos with film songs shot in the style of a music video. Consequentially separate audio and video albums in Tamil have been released which is a contemporary phenomenon. The song sequences also are shot on the lines of the MTV style. This trend of cinematography and picturisation started from *Agninatchattiram* (1988).

Further the songs, which were composed for the films remained removed from the cinema. These are construed as literary and musical diversions of cinema. The audiences play an important role in sustaining the tradition. They are actively involved with the songs. As the film narrative becomes superfluous, many films have solely relied on the strength of their songs for the box office receipts. The visual element is the basic ingredient of cinema. That its basic cinematic quality is neglected has thwarted the growth of cinema. What was significant in the films, which won critical acclaim in India and abroad, according to Baskaran, is that all these films contained no songs, for instance, *Unnaipol Oruvan* (1964) and *Veedu* (1988).

But the sociological dimension of the songs can't be neglected when a study like this is undertaken. The predominant role of songs in films is that it has its own ideology, in the sense that songs are a powerful source of escapist entertainment. Thus it provides a sense of catharsis to the audiences. These moments of fantasy enable the audience to undertake a flight of fancy and thereby a suspending of his being and time for a fleeting duration and thereby the fantastic also lives a fleeting existence. It is escapist because it is fantastic. It is fantastic because it has a imaginary and a fleeting existence. Baskaran argues that the strong presence of songs in Tamil cinema will act as a major hurdle in the emergence of a

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44 Baskaran, p.55
culture of political cinema. This argument is further reiterated by the fact that audiences are distracted by songs even though they espouse an ideology. The predominance of songs is basically an element that has got an intimate relation with the career of the music director. And the prominence of music industry gained importance especially after the introduction of Ilayaraja in Tamil cinema when he scored in his debutante *Annakkili* (1976). His folk tunes and songs became extremely popular and was responsible in building the popular music and audio cassette industry. In a manner of speaking, a paradigm shift occurred after Ilayaraja began to compose for Tamil films. His blend of Carnatic, folk and Western music gave a new shift in the trend of film music in the Tamil film industry.

There has always been a continuos conflict between the traditions of classical music and film music. Film music, in a great way took innovative measures to popularise classical music. The classical musicians who seemed at first, came in a big way when fame and money lured them, eventually they had to leave because of the more innovative and populist composers. And film music has always remained the music for the masses, which is a significant phenomenon in the social and cultural history of Tamil Nadu.

**Dialogue in Tamil Cinema**

There has always been a revivalist tendency in Tamil language and its past glory coming to terms with the current progress and development. In the silent era, title cards were used. During the screening there were narrators and people who explained the movie. Even after the advent of sound title cards were used. *Kalidas* (1931) opened with a big preface called ‘munnurai’. Anything, which was perceived to be incomprehensible to the audiences, were replaced by a title card. The tradition of title cards extended up till

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45 *Agninatchattiram* paved the way for a new stylization in Tamil cinema. PC Sriram pictured the film in a chiaroscuro style, in contrasting dark and light shades.
46 After establishing himself as a leading music director Ilayaraja started his own recording company called the Echo Recording Company which was responsible for the sales of his own films and others too. The reasons for closing his firm are not known but it is being widely argued that the influx of many contemporary music directors at a time when not many films were being produced could be a strong possibility.
Then came the sound era. Tamil cinema was aurally oriented because of the predominance of folk and oral traditions in music concerts. In the early period of Tamil cinema, songs reigned supreme where stories from mythologies and epics were in vogue. In Kalidas, only songs were in Tamil and the dialogue was delivered in Urudu and Telugu. Song was the important factor, which determined the character of the film and the spoken words was totally neglected in early years of sound cinema.

The spoken word acquired primacy or, at least, became important when Ilangoavan as a dialogue writer emerged in Tamil cinema. Thus the spoken word became important in Tamil cinema. The earlier style of Ilangoavan was flowery and replete, with witticism, for instance in Ambikapathi (1937) and AshokKumar (1941) and Thiruneelakantar (1938). The movie that marked the arrival of the dialogue writer was Kannagi. The chief reasons for the phenomenal success of this movie was that it was based on a literary epic. Its high point was its dialogue. Other writers, V.V. Somayajulu (Chinthamani, 1937), T.V. Chari (Manonmani) and A.S.A. Samy (Valmiki, 1946) along with Ilangoavan ushered a new era in the field of dialogue writing in Tamil cinema. S.D. Sundaram, (Kanniyin Kadhai, 1949), J. Pa Kannan (Adithan Kanavu, 1948) and Barathidasan (Ponmudi) continued this trend. Thus along with songs, dialogues became another source of filmic entertainment. Apart from its form and content the ideological content of the spoken word was realised and employed by the writers of the Dravidian movement. Dialogue became very important and it was becoming to be charged with political intent and content. The high point of this trend was manifested when the writers of the Dravidian movement entered the film industry and used films as a tool for purposes of political activity and propaganda. For instance, CN Annadurai and M Karunanidhi used alliterative monologues.

The language used in films is different from the spoken Tamil. The language spoken by the characters in the film or the language written for the dialogues is written Tamil, that is, Tamil in its written form. Tamil is a diglossic language. It has two forms, high and
The former is grammatically more complex and used at times only which is codified and 'legitimate'. And the latter form has a lot of liberties with grammar and form. The distance between the written and spoken word is great and the two categories are sharply defined. This dichotomy is a case of a formal pattern as opposite to the informal. In case of the spoken context, the high variety was used then, and, now the trend has changed. What defines the form is the relationship between the speaker and the audience, or in fact the audience and the dialogue writer. The high variety Tamil has had a direct correlation with the social status. In the early days of Tamil cinema, especially in mythologicals, the king used high variety keeping in mind the royal position he occupied and the comic and the menials used the informal and the low variety of Tamil. Then came the predominance of the Brahmin dialect that was considered superior. An instance of their predominance and the total neglect of circumstantial situations and context were reflected in many films. For example in Kulebahavali (1935) a Muslim prince spoke in the Brahmin dialect. This practice lasted till Chandralekha. The main reason for this was that most of the dialogue writers or the directors were Brahmins. The appearance of the Dravidian leaders accentuated the use of the high variety of Tamil. In their films dialogues were much of an oration, which reflected their skills in writing stage speeches for election and other political activities. For instance, Manohara's complete dialogue was released in a gramophone and an audiotape. Speeches in the film were addressed to the audiences. There was no camera movement and the speeches were delivered standing. To these writers, argues that, film was a public address system. They address straight to the camera or otherwise the audiences but not other characters in the movie. Baskaran argues that a speech that was meant for crowds at a political rally was delivered to the film audience. But if that was the case and that if film had a message it has to be woven into the filmic narrative for the audience to receive it through a cinematic experience by their becoming active participants in the film at the level of imaginative experience and not as passive listeners.

48 Baskaran, p.64.
In Tamil Nadu, each caste group community has an independent dialect spoken and has its own variation. It is the spoken word which has so many variations but not the written word unless in exceptions where the spoken word is written literally as it were spoken. Regional dialects have come into the movies. The earliest film to adapt regional dialect was *Makkalaippettra Maharasi* (1957) where the characters spoke in Kongu Tamil, which is spoken in the Coimbatore region. In fact, Tamil cinema was largely responsible for the popularisation of regional dialects, Tamil cinema was largely responsible.

From the eighties *Vattara Vazakkku* 49 was practiced but was not used consistently, especially when the song appeared literary Tamil was used. For instance in *Pasi* (1979) Madras dialect was consistently used in an authentic manner. The cinematic quality of films is enhanced by the manner in which words are combined with significant action and behaviour. This quality is absent in Tamil films. As long as the reliance of the spoken word for the flow of the filmic narration persisted, there was no effort to stretch the visual range of cinema. During the fifties, the spoken word reigned supreme. Very few directors had the cinematic sense to contain the dialogue writers. The convention of addressing the audiences directly found in the folk theatre convention where the performer addresses the audience directly. 50

Muktha Srinivasan categorises the period of Tamil cinema into four periods or phases 51

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<td>1950-1975</td>
<td>Melodramatic story period</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1985-</td>
<td>Violence and Sex Oriented stories period.</td>
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**Phase I:** Some of the movies which were released during this period were, *Kalidas* (1931), *Harichandra* (1932), *Nandanar* (1933), *Draupadi Vasthirapaharnam* (1934 ), *Baktha*

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49 *Vattara Vazakkku* is local idioms. *Vattara Vazakkku* differs from place to place in Tamil Nadu as in the speech varies in its content, and the way it is spoken and expressed. Even names of things and objects change from one district to another. In fact it is difficult to understand the local idioms of one region in Tamil Nadu to another.

50 Baskaran, pp.65-69
Dhruva (1935), Tara Sahsangam (1936), Arunagiri Nathar (1937), Yayathi (1938), Prahaladan (1939), Thirumangaiyazhaar (1940), Arya Mala (1941), Aandha Sayanam (1942), Arundhati (1943), Haridas (1944), Meera (1945), Valmiki (1946), Ayiram Thalai Vangiyapoorva chinthamani (1947), Chandralekha (1948), Pavalakodi (1949). About 450 movies were released during this period and out of which more than ninety percent of the movies were puranic, mythological and magical in content. The main directors of this period were Sundaraao Nadkarni, M.L. Tandon, P.S.V. Iyer, Bomman D Irani, D.P. Kailash, V. Sampathkumar, K. Subrahmanyam, Ellis R Duncan, A. Narayanan, R Padmanabhan, R Prakash, Murugadasan, Raja Sandow, Y.V. Rao, Raja Chandrasekhar, Nandan, H.M. Reddi, TG Acharya, T.R. Raghunath, R.S. Mani and a lot others. These directors had already ready-made stories in mythologies and other epics. This period's films never exploited the creative talents of the directors and most of the movies were song based. Most of the directors came from drama companies and hence the director was almost free without having to do any thing. Thus the role of the director in this first phase was to take care of the commercial and the technical aspects of the film. The director had complete control over the film and the actors also. In this period the skills of the director and other information regarding filmmaking was not passed to their assistants and other information not disseminated. This, Muktha Srinivasan, considers as the weakest point in Tamil movies.52

Phase II: Traditional directors: This phase came to be called the melodramatic story period. The films of this period consisted of social stories that were excessively emotional and drama oriented. About 1100 films were released during this period. Out of this about ninety percent of the movies were socials and the rest were historicals and mythologicals. There was a huge welcome by the audiences for this trend. In every phase it seemed that the audiences anticipated a change in the trend or the shift in the form and content of the movies. The films of this phase manifested, what Muktha Srinivasan calls the five basic shortcomings and the ills in the society in terms of its conception. Poverty, chastity,

51 Muktha, p.25.
52 When asked to Akira Kurosawa why he doesn't pass on his accomplishments to young people, he replied in the positive. He also added that ninety nine percent of his assistants have become individual directors in their own right but critically...
Exploitation on Women, Caste and Superstition and love themes. The films revolved around these themes and tried to communicate to the masses, that these traits were the basic hindrances to society's progress and development. The story was told in a loud fashion in the sense it was an extension of drama and the films were extremely unrealistic. The influence of theatre was strong and pure melodrama in terms of acting. There was a heightened showing of unrealistic emotions and unrealistic sacrifices. Man's existence and the survival between him and dogs were shown as fighting to grab the left over in the bin were shown. Muktha Srinivasan contends that there could have been instances but there was surely a excess and an unrealistically tragic romantic portrayal of man's life in Tamil cinema. The villain was one of the vital constituents of Tamil cinema. He was manufactured during this period. The villain was portrayed as the destroyer, the rapist and the evil force. The hero was juxtaposed against him. Srinivasan argues that this was an unrealistic portrayal and presentation.53

The treatment of films of this period had all elements of drama in it, and, inevitably all the love stories had a tragic end. For instance most of the stories in the films had almost similar plots in that the hero turns into a drunkard and the heroine committing suicide. These films, observes Muktha Srinivasan, had some social benefits to the society and reiterated the bond of family and love. In Tamil Nadu, cinema more than an art form, has been the social and cultural beacon directing them towards good or bad and have remained as a rudder in directing the society. The film Samsaram released in 1951, with family and poverty as its main theme, formed the basis for Tamil cinema's melodramatic stories and this continued till 1975. Digambara Samiyar (1950), Samsaaram (1951), Parasakthi (1952), Inspector (1953), Ethirparathathu (1954), Mangaiyar Thilagam (1955) KulaTheivam (1956) Yaar Paiyan (1957), Pathi Pakthi (1958), Kalyana Parisu (1959), Kalathur Kannamma (1960), Pasamalar (1961) Saradha (1962), Karpagam (1963), Sarvar Sundaram (1964), Palani (1965), Motor Sundaram Pillai (1966), Karpuram (1967), Thillana Mohanambal (1968), Suba Thinam (1969), Namma Veettu Theivam (1970), Kulama Kunama (1971), Gnana Oli (1972), Gouravam (1973), Naan Avanillai (1974), Doctor Shiva

adds that they have failed to learn the most important things. Akira Kurosawa, Notes on Filmmaking in Something Like an Autobiography, New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

A.S.A. Samy told the society's ills through Velaiikkari, which was written by C.N. Annadurai, M.V. Raman redefined new ways in picturising songs and Neelakandan acquired expertise in story telling and narration without disruption. K Shankar's films were emotional and AP Nagarajan's were delicate in terms of human relations, and T.R. Ramanan specialised in entertainment films. Thirumugam who directed most of MGR's films during this period had bravery, chivalry and machismo as the main theme for all his films. Muktha Srinivasan categorises the directors of this period into various categories in terms of their outlook. He typologises L.V Prasad, A. Bheemsingh and K.S Gopalakrishnan as the traditional directors. K Ramnoth, CV Sreedhar and K Balachander as the rebel directors. The traditional directors produced movies based on family stories and sentimental sob stories and in fact gave successful films of this kind. There was a fan following for these films and the directors and producers bought their films with interest. All their films were melodramatic and none was realistic. The films were a stylistic portrayal of a fantastic life and had lots of dialogues in it. L.V Prasad was a prolific filmmaker and at a time used to shoot three films. He gave great attention to the storyline. A Bheemsing was another perspective in this phase and he was called the king of melodrama. He had an expert team in Solaimamalai and Ra Venkatachalam as writers, a leading cast, V Ramamurthy as the music composer and Kannadasan as the lyricist. All these directors worked within the framework of normative and conventional modes of storytelling and filmmaking and of course within the established norms and values of the society and hence these directors were called traditional.

5) Muktha, p. 34.
The second group, observes Muktha Srinivasan, breached the normative framework. But directors like Balachander, though communicated women’s problems, especially women and their problems as the central focus of his movies, struck a conservative note in his later movies especially after the eighties. For instance the handling of the reservation issue in Vaaname Ellai. When movies start to portray social problems they tend to take a stand on the issue. But in situations like these, the director assumes the role of a preacher and inevitably falls into an ideological framework. CV Sridhar broke the tradition of the hero meeting the heroine. His women characters rebelled from the conventional stereotypes. The heroine always married a man whom she did not love. For instance, in Kalyanaparisu and Nennjil Or Alayam.

K Balachander is categorised into the rebel director’s group for his movies, Arangetram, Thanneer Thanneer, Apporva Rahangal, and Aval oru Thodarkathai. From here, Tamil cinema moved into the next phase. There was a lot of dissent among the audiences on the story line especially when Tamil cinema was moving into the fourth phase. In the year 1976 Panju Arunachalam directed Annakkili. Both the story and the music was completely country based and the music was completely folk and the songs filled with folk tunes. This film launched Ilayaraja as a music director to the world of Tamil cinema. Annakkili was a landmark in Tamil cinema. Muktha Srinivasan considers Nalu Veli Nilam as the first realist film, the play directed by Sahasranamam, scripted by Janakiraman and Muktha Srinivasan directed the film. There is no scope for catharsis for the audiences in realist films and hence it is most of the time a commercial flop. The audiences are not willing to accept the realist course of development and the ending since it is most often tragically real.

By 1976 the third phase of progress and development in Tamil cinema reached its peak. And it continued till 1985 and this period was categorised by half realistic films. Though the domineering presence was made by the semi realist genre, a few melodramatic films

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54 Ibid. p.43.
55 B. Lenin feels that Annakkili was an instance of an entry point to Ilayaraja. The entry point concept heralds a new change in any aspect of the cinematic medium. Lenin says that there was a paradigm shift in regard to film songs. Interview with B. Lenin, Film Editor, 1996-1998.
56 Muktha, p.47.
also found their way during this era. According to Muktha, this phase can be divided into further three divisions: 1. Fictionalised real life stories. 2. Non-Conventional or Anti-Conventional stories. 3. Anti-establishment stories. S.P. Muthuraman, R.C. Sakthi, Balumahendra, Bagyaraj Barathiraja, Rudraiah, Durai were some of the directors who belonged to this era. There was a change in the tastes and the likes of the audiences. The audiences accepted the films, which were rejected in the previous phase. The reason for such an argument is that some of the movies that were produced in the earlier phase were accepted during this era with the same themes. And hence the earlier phase was accepted during this era with the same themes. And hence a change in the tastes of the audiences. For instance, films like Aalayam and Panam Paththum Seyyum. In the earlier phase the hero embodied only goodness and the present hero was given a new anti-hero status. The audiences accepted the changes in the character of the hero. The third phase was completely dominated by movies, which broke the established tradition. So much so the names of two notorious murderers Billa and Ranga whose act shocked New Delhi during the eighties was adapted. Both the movies had Rajanikanth in the lead role where he plays the good character and in Ranga, it is almost an anti-hero status for him. Along with this tradition, the anti-establishment stories emerged. The police, politicians and bureaucrats were portrayed as the bad elements of the society. The entire state machinery was constantly portrayed in bad light and corrupt in Tamil films.\textsuperscript{57} Muktha Srinivasan justifies this portrayal of characters in films. It was during this period that cinema questioned the basic values on which the very foundation of the society was laid. The classic examples are Pasi, Aval Appadiththan, Malaiyur Mambattiyan, Kudisai, and Sirai. Barathiraja, Balumahendra and Bagyaraj dominated the semi-realist films. Barathiraja’s movies were fictionalised realist portrayal. Something close to a docu-drama. Bagyaraj infused comedy into his films and in fact it was Balumahendra who paved the way for a realist genre of filmmaking.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Kamalhassan has argued that the real life has so much to offer in terms of violence rather than reel life. And much of what is shown in the cinema doesn’t in anyway compare to the sheer brutality of real life. And therefore that cinema is one of the causes for the ills plaguing the society has become much debatable and has dichotomised cinema and society in a bad light. Interview with Kamalhassan, 1996.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. p.54
From 1986, a violent cinema emerges in the Tamil film industry. Muktha Srinivasan argues that Tamil cinema took a complete volte face stand at this juncture. A cinema of sex and vulgarism began to dominate the Tamil film industry and this trend set a bad precedent. He argues that this precedent hampered the growth and progress of Tamil cinema. Muktha Srinivasan further argues and attributes this trend to the influence of violence and sex oriented films from the yearly film festivals but falls short of substantiating his arguments and further developing it. This sort of an argument on the contrary is handled by the fact that the Indian literature, paintings and sculptures have ample evidences of sexual connotations and innuendo. For instance, the Tamil epic Kambaramayanam was filled with these instances and the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and dialogue writer argued that the work was vulgar and lustful in its presentation and in a moment of protest he wanted to burn the copies of Kambaramayanam. In Sama Kala Ilakkiangal and in Siru Kathaigal there were very few works which didn't have kama kalappu. For instance, in Sandilyan stories, there are vivid and detailed description of the woman’s body.  

Cinema is found responsible for the lewd acts and the vulgar actions, but on the contrary, the everyday and the vast multitude of experiences the individual and the society draw from various fields are filled with sexual denotations and connotations and are manifested in various ways, subtle and bare. Right from 1941 the portrayal of women in films had a too glamorous trend. For instance, K.R. Chellam in the movie Vanaraja Carson did the role of a Tarzan woman. All aspects of the film were influenced by the overwhelming urge to make it sexually appealing. Classical dance was the order of the day in movies produced in the first phase. And in later phases to be only replaced by dances which resembled close to cabaret. These forms of dances have played a crucial role in the success of most of the entertainment films. Dialogues were written with sexual overtones, filled with sexual puns and double entendres.

It will be important to discuss as to what constituted violence in Tamil films. As it has been discussed earlier in this chapter the beginning of Tamil cinema at its silent stage, was dominated by stunt films mostly imported from the West. In the first phase of Tamil
cinema the stunt genre of films continued to be produced. *Minnalkodi, Toofan Queen, Danger Signal, Madras Mail* belonged to this genre. But the stunts in all these movies were of a playful sort and did not evoke violent emotions. The scenes and the sequences were not violent and it was only later in the third phase the films turned violent and this violence was portrayed in a different light, not through stunts but gory murders and sadistic techniques. The act was shown in graphic detail and as a result the tastes of the audiences also changed. But the game and the technique of the film industry had by then undergone a serious change and it is difficult to analyse whether the tastes of the audiences have changed or to say the film industry’s trend have changed according to the profit motives in the box office. Muktha Srinivasan attributes this trend to the Western influence. Muktha Srinivasan justifies the violent scenes because of box-office and the industry’s purposes. Thus a special department is born. A stunt department with stunt specialists and other technicians who specialise in stunt films. For instance, Cameraman Karnan was a renowned stunt film cinematographer. Stunt Master Somu, M.K. Radha and Ranjan were all his disciples. By then it became common in Tamil films to give credits to stunts and the fourth phase witnessed people like Judo Rathinam, who was a stunt director.60 That whether cinema incites violence and provokes the common man or social reality evokes the industry to make films on them has always been a matter of serious debate. It is beyond this chapter to discuss whether the ‘reel’ imitates the real or vice-versa. But the general trend in Tamil films was one of finding out faults and loopholes in the Constitution and in law, depicting social ills, and portraying corruption. These aspects have been the permanent ingredients in most of the films produced during this era. For instance, from Annadurai to S.A. Chandrasekhar, this formula has been explored.

In the modern era, Muktha Srinivasan considers certain names in Tamil cinema as being important. ManiRatnam and Vasu. Though he attributes Vasu’s prominence because of his blockbuster *Chinnathambi* he does not elaborate in case of Maniratnam. The probable reasons could be that Maniratnam’s films have a pan Indian appeal and has left the Tamil shores. In what would constitute a successful formula for a commercial success Nagi Reddy delineates that casting would constitute fifty percent, story thirty percent, music

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60 Ibid. p.67
ten percent, and the rest ten percent. The contemporary trends in Tamil cinema and the priorities have changed since then. And it is in this pattern of formulation movies are made; casting, music and songs, stunt sequences, sex related sequences and an added advantage would be cinematography. On the industry’s business, Muktha Srinivasan is of the view that that the present day’s producers cannot reap huge profits because the money spent on production is huge. For instance, the shooting film ratio is 1:10 that means the shots are not predetermined and everything is left on the location.

Muktha Srinivasan categorises directors into two folds, one who believes in business and the other in self-belief. The first category of directors make only ‘masala’ films which most of the time tend to make profits and the second type of directors whose movies are often commercial failures, are not bothered about the reception of the audiences. It is important to locate the entire process of cinematic continuity or the precursor of cinema and the relations it had with that art form called drama in Tamil Nadu. Drama is a general term that is used in discussion. Otherwise drama per se was one such performance which contributed to the growth of films in Tamil Nadu. There are numerous performances and performative circumstances, which belong to the folk tradition from which both the early and the contemporary cinema have drawn experiences. One of the main ingredients of folk arts is Threukoothu, which is street theatre. Koothu literally translated from Tamil means fun and most often in the common parlance is used in a derogatory sense as in koothadi, who is jobless and a vagabond. Koothu Kottagai was the performance site of these performances. Within the folk arts there were numerous forms of dances like Kavadiyatam, Karakattam, Kummi, Oyilattam, Mayilattam, Pulivedam, Puraviattam, and Villupattu. Acting was associated with the growth of drama. Drama as such was divided into two types in Tamil Nadu. One was the professional or commercial and the other one was the amateur. The amateur drama groups were in the hands of the Brahmins and they were termed as Nadaka Sabhas and were purely classical, in the sense that it used Carnatic music, spoke the Brahmin dialect and patronised only to Brahmins. Most of the members were from the same community and the cultures of nataka sabhas were limited to a few places mainly in Madras and in few other cities. The professional troupes were called company dramas.
or drama companies because they addressed themselves as companies and it functioned as an organisation or a corporation where there was clear division of labour. The source of drama, Muktha observes, is associated with the city of Madurai and later it spread to Burma, Ceylon, Malaysia, and Singapore. It all started with the Boys Company, it consisted exclusively of boys, hence the name and later also inducted adults into the company. Ananda Naryana Iyer, Ramasamy Pillai, Nawab Rajamanickam, Velu Nair, Viswanandha Das and etc., were in the forefront leading the company. Then came Pammal Samabanda Mudaliar’s Saguna Vilas Sabai. For instance, one of the leading villain characters, MN Nambiar came from Nawab TS Rajamanickam’s production ‘Iyappan’, staged during this time. TKS Brothers Drama Company, Devi nadaka Sabha, KR Ramasamy company, NSK Nadaka Sabha and other companies and sabhas were formed.

The categorisation of actors and their typologising in the formative years of dramatic and cinematic tradition came from this period of drama. They are categorised into three types 1. Acting cum music artists 2. Dramatic and Melodramtic artists 3. Realist artists. The first categories of artists belong to the period from 1900-1940, the second type belonged the period from 1940-1970 and the third type belonged to the seventies. The artists came to the film industry and each couple was identified as the quintessential prototype pair. For instance, VA Chellappa and DP Rajalakshmi, Velu Nair and Velamma, Kittappa and Sundarambal, KS Ananthanarayanan and KS Chellamma, Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar and SD Subbulakshmi. The musical artists who featured in films were both males and females. Some of the musicians who dominated the industry were VA Chellappa, Velu Nair, CS Jeyaraman, MK Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar, Puliyananagar Pulikutti, PS Govindan, TR Mahalingam, PU Chinnappa, MR Krishnamurthy, Kothamangalam Seenu, Ganesa Bagavathar, Honnappa Bagavathar, Subbaiah Bagavathar, MM Dandapani Desikar, Serkulathur Sama, GN Balasubramanian. Among the females, prominent singers and actresses were KB Sundarambal, DP Rajalakshmi, SD Subbulakshmi, PS Rathhnbai, PS Saraswathibai, TR Rajakumari, KLV Vasantha.

61 Ibid.p.85.
The audiences were more concerned with songs in the films and nothing else. The audiences located a particular artist, both a male and a female and it was the male actor who was popular because of various reasons. And in each period of Tamil cinema there appeared a charismatic figure and the idea and tradition of a charismatic actor was born in Tamil cinema. This cultural discovery was only possible with the help of the audiences. The audiences and the artist had an emotional bond between each other in that they enabled to build the larger than life figure of the artist in society. In fact Muktha Srinivasan observes that in each phase of Tamil cinema, along with a charismatic figure there is also an actor figure, hence there is a dichotomy between the charismatic and the actor figure. Srinivasan identifies in the first phase it was located in MK Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar and PU Chinnappa. Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar was always the hero of the masses whose behaviour, actions were imitated by the masses. The actor who did not possess the charm and the mass appeal was PU Chinnappa but was recognised as an actor. MG Ramachandran and Sivaji Ganesan dominated the next phase of Tamil cinema. Though the concept of fan following had started right from the birth of cinema but it took a tangible form during this period where fan clubs started originating and fan clubs were organised on the lines of actor's names. MG Ramachandran went on to have the largest fan following and only to be surpassed by Rajanikanth's fans and their clubs. Though there were actresses from Andhra and Karnataka, Tamil actresses reigned supreme. For instance, actresses like Kancahanmala, Pushpavalli and Pushpalatha and Aswathama prevailed during the dominance of T.R. Rajalakshmi, M.S. Saroja S.D. Subbulakshmi and M.S. Subbulakshmi and K.L.V. Vasantha. Baliah was the popular villain during this period. The main comedians Sammna, K Sarangapani, V.M. Elumalai, NS Krishnan, M.E. Madhavan and Kali N Ratnam, were introduced during this period. And among the comediennes T.A. Mathuram, CD Rajakantham, P.S. Gnanam, and Angamuthu were introduced during this period. N.S. Krishnan and T.A. Mathuram and Kali Ratnam and Rajakantham were the prominent pairs during this period.

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62 Ibid. p.91.
63 Fergus Thomas, Rajanikanth: The Tamil Film Star as Folk Hero and Social Bandit, unpublished independent Study Project, Dept. of South Asia, SOAS, University of London, 1997.
Playback system was introduced in the forties and playback singing in films changed the face of Tamil cinema and especially during the MGR- Sivaji Ganesan era. There were major changes in cinematic form and content as Tamil cinema entered the second phase. The leading cast during this period was MGR, Sivaji Ganesan, Gemini Ganesan, Muthuraman, Jaishankar, Ravichandran, AVM Rajan, Sivakumar, Lalitha, Padmini, Savithri, Devika, Saroja Devi, KR Vijaya, and Jayalalitha. This period lasted from 1950-1975. This period of film making in Tamil cinema constituted the melodramatic phase, excesses in acting and in all aspects of film making. This was the period in Tamil cinema where an opportunity to act by the artists were made possible because during the first phase it was dominated by musicals. A chance for acting really blossomed in the second phase. And hence the actors, most of them, who were in the drama companies, made efforts to mime what they did during the drama years acting. During the drama years there was no microphone on the stage and the artist had to deliver the lines so that the last row of the audiences had to be heard. This was true with their gestures also. The stories told and narrated were not realistic and all themes were overacted and overdone. Though this comparison wouldn’t have been possible during the drama years and only identified during the process of cinema’s growth and development. Thus a tradition of overacting has set in Tamil cinema.64

Film Dialogues in Tamil cinema.

During early years, there was no dearth of stories, as the themes would be drawn from mythologies and histories. All mythologicals were translated into drama episodes and then translated into films. Some of the authors of these plays were Sankaradas, Santhanakrishnan Naidu, Vadivelu Naicker, Lakshmandas and Acharya and others include TV Chari Ilangoovan, CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi A.S. Prakasam, K.S. Gopalakrishnan, Balachander, Mahendran, Visu, AL Narayanan, Sridhar, Ra Venakatachalam, Kothamangalam Subbu, Javert Seetharaman, Cho Ramasamy. From the Dravidian tradition those who have contributed this tradition apart from Anandurai and Karunanidhi were Murasoli Maran, Jalgandapuram Kannan, Asaithambi, Sittrasu, ASA Samy, AK Velan. During 1938-50, according to Muktha Srinivasan, one of the notable

64 Muktha, P.108.
writer was TV Chari who wrote *Mathabhoomi* and *Uithamaputtiran*. Ilangovan brought a literary trend in the dialogues of Tamil cinema followed by ASA Samy, M. Karunanidhi and Annadurai. From the literary stage Karunanidhi and Annadurai brought rationalism into Tamil cinema. Annadurai was an expert on the art of alliteration. Annadurai’s most important landmark film was *Velaikkari*, which was the turning point in terms of aesthetics and the tastes of the audiences. The Dravidian tradition in the dialogues of Tamil cinema started with people like ASA Samy started writing for films like *Rajakumari*, *Abhimanyu*. Prior to these films, the Brahmanic dialect was in vogue in the film industry. The writers who were responsible for change in the dialect were T.V. Chari and Ilangovan and later enhanced by the Dravidian writers. It was not only the writers who enhanced the Dravidian image but even actors like NS Krishnan, SS Rajendran, MG Ramachandran and Sivaji Ganesan were responsible in establishing such a tradition. Anna’s dialogues had beauty and intellect depicted in his writings and Karunanidhi’s, on the other hand was pacy. 65

**Nationalists and Nationalism in Tamil cinema.**

The endeavour of the Dravidian movement’s cinematic foray had its own limitations. The dialogues were considered repetitious and verbose. Almost all the writers at some point of time belonged to the Dravidian movement and other political movements. Writers from other political parties who excelled were AP Nagarajan from Tamilarasu, which was started by Ma. Po. Sivagnanam which were opposite to DMK’s ideas and ideals. Kothamangalam Subbu, who was the chief of Gemini’s story department and *Miss Malini* and *Avasiyar* were two successful productions from the studios. He was a staunch supporter of the *Iyakkam*. Another dialogue writer of repute was Pa. Neelakandan and Solaimalai was responsible in churning out family stories. For instance, *Needhipadhi*, *Padhibakthi*, *Paagappirivinai*. Muktha Srinivasan considers that *Samsaram* was a turning point in Tamil cinema and portrayed poverty in family, plight of women and was a big hit and success. Till 1960, Muktha calls this phase as the golden period of Tamil cinema.

Then came the amateur drama directors. The pioneer of this tradition who came to

65 Ibid. pp.137-147.
cinema was K Balachander. Sridhar was another writer cum director who was mostly known for his love stories. Muktha Srinivasan describes that though the stories were filled with emotion and sentimentality they were high flowing, repetitive, verbose, hyperbole. This seemed to be the limitation of the dialogue writers of this era. Another writer who is of importance is AL Narayanan who wrote for forty years. AL Narayanan worked with Moonas in the beginning when he started as a writer. Moonas came from Sri Lanka in 1949. The first artist to come from Sri Lanka was Nayakam. The production of Sri Lankan films used to take place in Tamil Nadu. AL Narayanan worked with Moonas and wrote through the years with artists like T.R. Mahalingam, MG Ramachandran, Sivaji Ganesan, Jaishankar, Muthuraman and even Kamalhasan and Rajanikanth.

After the sixties the Dravidian tradition of dialogue writing was replaced by the Balachander era. Muktha argues that K Balachander infused intellect into Tamil cinema. Before his entry point the audiences were enslaved by the emotional content in Tamil films. During and after this period the audiences became critical researchers observes Muktha Srinivasan. Other writers who excelled were Annakkili Selvaraj, Bagyaraj and Kalaimani whose creation was 16 vayadhinile. Kalaimani had a number of stories written for Kamalhasan. For instance, Aporva Sakotharargal and Guna. Muktha Srinivasan argues that Kalaimani's character creations had a bearing on almost all Kamalhasan's movies much later. Kalaimani came very close to the realist genre of cinema. Muktha Srinivasan is of the view that Bagyaraj was known for his clarity in his stories. This era dawned a new situation where real life styles and real life circumstances formed the main content and the core of the stories. They wrote and directed. But the entire trend nose-dived. From 1980 the story departments and dialogue writing were at cross roads. Not only those, during the early growth of Tamil cinema where a special department for story and dialogue writing were established in the lines of the studio system of Hollywood. This trend was in a state of crisis. The departments started breaking after the ushering of contemporary cinema after the eighties. Violence and sex were the main themes of the films directed during this time. Revenge stories formed the main theme. Cinematography became a marker for 'good' movies. Slick visuals were thought to play the lead role in the commercial success of the film. Along with attractive visuals, the movies relied on massive
sets which were supported by heavy budgets. Muktha Srinivasan argues that this period witnessed a complete decline in the essence and creativity of the stories and direction. Foreign films especially from Hollywood, which are obtained on video were the best guide for the directors and the crux of the stories were lifted from these films. And as a result the films released during this period were motley of songs and dances, fights and comedy scenes with no continuity. Even the entertainment value seemed to fade away from the films. Thus video culture had made a deep impact on the Tamil audiences which in more than one ways affected the Tamil film industry. Muktha Srinivasan argues that creativity in Tamil cinema was destroyed by the video culture. 66

**Lyricists in Tamil Cinema.**

Music, especially songs is a living proof to the development and posterity of Tamil cinema. Early years of Tamil cinema had no playback system and there was no role for music directors. The music department, as a specialised field and in the later years to dominate the Tamil cinema, was a creation of the post-playback system era. S.V. Venkatraman was the first music director in Tamil cinema for the film *Nala Dayamanthi* in the year 1935. During the early years lyricists were given importance for instance, CA Lakshmandas, Krishna Bhagavathar, Muthu Samikkavi, Santhanakrishna Naidu, Madhurai Bhaskaradas, Bhoomi Balakadas, Madurai Balasundaram dominated the field and prominent among them was Sundara Vathiar. During 1937-38, music department was influenced by the music of drama.

Mukha Srinivasan categorises film music into three phases of the Tamil cinema. 1. G Ramanathan - Papanasam Sivan - MK Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar 2. MS Viswanathan - Kannadasan - TM Soundaraajan - P Suseela 3. Ilayaraja period. One of the prominent musicians in the first phase was SV Venkatarama Iyer who had composed for *Meera, Kannagi* and *Manohara*. Others, who were prominent during this period were Govindaraja Naidu and Rajagopal Sarma. Muktha Srinivasan calls this period the golden period of Tamil cinema in film music and songs that he identifies from 1935-1960. G Ramanathan started his career as a musician in the amateur drama companies and involved in backstage singing and was a harmonium expert. His contemporaries were Rajeswara

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66 Ibid.p.177.
Rao, CR Subburaman, Gantasala, Subbah Naidu, Sudarsanan, DG Lingappa, and MD Parthasarathy. Rajeswasara Rao's Missiamma was a hit and the song 'Brindavanamum Nandakumaranum...' was a popular success. And on equal plane Papanasam Sivan composed great hits, for instance, Vaaraiyo Vennilave and Udumalai Naryanakavi. The first phase of music in Tamil cinema, which is called the Sahitya music, lasted till 1955. After this period MS Viswanathan entered the music industry along with Kannadasan as the lyricist and TM Soundararajan, P Susheela as the playback singers. Normally in the music industry a team comprising of the same members, for instance the music composer, the lyricist and the playback singers as a team, used to perform for successive movies. Another group emerged during the same period with K V Mahadevan, Sankar-Ganesh, TR Pappa, AM Raja, NC Pandurangan. Three lyricists who were prominent during this era were Kannadasan, Vali and Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram. Another creative effort was made from the music industry this time, when MS Viswananthan for the first time in the history of Tamil cinema played a live orchestra of film songs on the stage. The light music orchestra has blossomed into an industry. There are various groups spread over Tamil Nadu who make a living out of this profession. The orchestra groups apart from traversing within the state also travel abroad where Tamil population is present. Another music composer who was in the limelight during this era was K.V. Mahadavan. Film songs and film music that was despised, at least in the initial years of Tamil cinema acquired status and prestige during this period. And the competition to enter into the film music industry became very stiff. Film music attained its high point when he scored for his first movie during this time. This gave a fresh impetus to the formation of light music live orchestras who performed film songs in Tamil Nadu. Consequentially it has led to the growth of light music orchestra industry who perform throughout the country and overseas where Tamil populations are concentrated. Since the contemporary musicians and music directors do not have a hired team, professional musicians have become freelancers playing between orchestra groups and for film songs and background

67 The introduction of Ilayaraja not only witnessed a new phase in Tamil cinema but also witnessed the entry of songwriters and lyricists like Vairamuthu.
scores. The light music orchestras have been a constant source of employment for musicians who find it difficult to perform in film score and songs.68

Another aspect of Tamil cinema, which is of importance and relevance to this discussion, is Cinematography. Muktha Srinivasan again categorises Tamil cinematography into three phases. 1. 1932-1942 where no basic facilities were available 2. 1942-62 where the situation was better and minimum facilities were available and the third stage where sophistication in cinematography dawned a new period in Tamil cinema with attractive and slick visuals. The first stage only consisted of out door shooting, make shift tents, no indoor lighting facilities i.e. only sunlight. Most of the acting was done in a crude fashion and the reception of the audiences were more than welcoming because cinema was at its primary stage and the audiences were not exposed to this new medium before. Later studios were constructed and sets were erected in the studio itself. The studios came up in Salem, Kovai and at three or four places in Chennai. Modern Theatres in Salem, Central Theatres in Kovai, Gemini in Madras. The film industry started using artificial lights and 5kv, 2kv and rifle lights came up during this period. And with the help of these facilities ground lighting was made. Initially it started with ground lights and then the overhead lights. The first cinematographers in Tamil Nadu belonged the then Bengal Presidency and Maharasthra. For instance Sundarao Nadkarni and Jiten Banerjee. Cameramen who were later to become their colleagues learnt the technique from them. Sundarao Nadkarni worked with Chattappa Chettiar. Eminent cinematographers during this period were Jiten Banerjee, K Ramnoth, Cooper, Rehman, Bardle and among them the most eminent were Jiten Banerjee and K Ramnoth.69 The second phase saw performances of cameramen like Vincent, PL Roy, Masthan, GR Nathan and prominent among them were WR Subbarao and Vincent. Till 1962 cinematography and its associated techniques were to work within the confines of constrained facilities. After this period, the colour film was introduced into the industry and professional cameras of the make of Arriflex and associated equipment like filters, lenses, trolleys, cranes came into use. The spot meter replaced the light meter and this period saw cameramen like Vinayagam, Kannan,

68 Interview with Andrew, professional musician, Percussionist.
69 Muktha, P.233.
Sambath, Sundarababu, Balakrishnan, Nivas, Raghunath Reddy and Lohanathan. Prominent among them were Balumahendra who is also a filmmaker, PC Sriram and Raghunath Reddy. PC Sriram also ventured into directing films.

Another aspect of film making which needs discussion here is audiography or sound engineering. Talkies first emerged in Bombay and Calcutta and for record the first engineer was RC Willmen. Narayanan was a prominent sound engineer when audiography was employed in Tamil cinema and his wife became the first woman audiographer in Tamil cinema. Popular among the sound engineers in the first phase were Taylor, Figs, Dinshaw Tehrani, A Krishnan, Jeeva. Effect sound was not used during the first phase of Tamil cinema and it was used much later, that is in the second phase. Muktha Srinivasan argues that effect sound became very important during the phase where realist cinema was in vogue. Another department of the film making process is the editing department. The editor's job was to organise the shots according to the director and according to his own imagination and creativity. In the studio days each studio had its own team of editors, for instance Gemini had Chandru, and NR Kittu, AVM had Surya, K Shanker, and Ramamurthy, Vahini had Jambu, and Kovai Basheraja had Krishnan Panju, and the prominent editors during this era were Kasilingam, TR Raghunath and RS Mani.

As it has been argued that song and dance sequences form an intimate part of Tamil cinema it will be relevant here to dwell on the issue in brief. After the talkies, the songs came to films and cinema spoke a language. In the early years film artists sang and danced themselves. These songs were sung on the drama floors and the same was cinematographed. As Tamil cinema moved from photographed theatre or cinematographed drama, films contained songs, which were composed on vibrant tunes and then recorded. The art of dancing was practiced and the dance director choreographed it for the film. As a result a dance department was formed. The need for

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70 Effect sound adds an emotive appeal to the narrative of the film. Apart from the incidental sound which synchronises with imagery of the narrative, effect sound is the produced only to add effects to the narrative.
71 Interview with B.Lenin
the dance director was felt. 72 Earlier song and dance sequences were based on sashtriya dance practices, which was prevalent from 1936-1965 and followed the classical tradition of music and dance. During this period, mild traces of folk tunes were employed in the films. According to Muktha Srinivasan the post 1965 period became more sexual and vulgar and lasted till 1985. But this period witnessed a sea change from the earlier dance practices in that the film did not contain any classical music. The influence of classical music was on the decline and music of fusion was practiced and dance sequences were elaborate in the sense it involved numerous male and female dancers who assisted the hero and the heroine. From here Tamil cinema was influenced by the tradition of break dance. Tamil film dance, says Muktha Srinivasan progressed through three prominent dancers in Kumari Kamala, Vaijyanthimala and Lalitha-Padmini – Rakhini sisters. After this period, dance, according to him lost all its reverence and sacredness. In fact the classical tradition was replaced by a culture of pastiche in terms of music and dances which Muktha addresses it as having lost reverence. Another aspect of Tamil cinema, which is of importance, is the stunt in Tamil films. During the silent era most of the films used lots of stunts and these films were imported from the West. The audiences received these films with great interest. The earlier stunt films involve just sword fighting because the films told stories about kings. PK Sandow was one important name in the history of Tamil cinema that infused glamour and pace into Tamil films. Sandow was making films in Bombay during the silent era and after the talkies came he went to Madras. Somu was a popular stunt director in the early days and the stunt department as such was not formed. Nambiar was another popular director who moved from Kovai to Madras and along with Somu started directing stunt films.

It is interesting to document the history of Tamil films or the interesting part of documenting Tamil film history is to implicitly document the socio-political history of Tamil culture. The exercise enables us to unravel the meaning cinema as an institution helps to produce. Cinema, thus resembles a body of elements which produce and reproduce certain values. Production and reproduction form the important constituents of cinema. The cultures produced are disseminated through the medium of film.

72 Baskaran, p.258.
Tamil cinema had a long pre-film history. The British rule in the Madras Presidency helped a great deal in buttressing the pre-cinema years. The State was closely trailing behind Europe and America in trying to establish an indigenous industry. There was a constant effort in trying to build and develop a cinema of their own. After the advent of sound a truly Tamil cinema arrived. The advent of sound facilitated other departments in the film industry and led to the complex growth of the Tamil film industry. There was a close association with the administrative and state structure of the state and cinema. The importance and pervasiveness of the image was realised by the political parties. Cinema was thus used as a tool for political propaganda. The conscious intervention of politics led to a new phase in the history of Tamil cinema. Cinema manifested the language and grammar of the establishment. Apart from manifestation there was a constant reproduction of the motivations of the establishment. The Dravidian politics in the state changed the face of Tamil cinema. In trying to use cinema as propaganda machinery, it led to a marked shift in the genre of filmmaking. This led to the birth of rebel cinema. Simultaneously the cinema was growing as a huge industry. The written word was considered important during this period. The writers became recognised and were acknowledged. The print industry supplemented the growth in cinema by disseminating popular and trivial information about the film industry. As a result there has been a phenomenal growth in the popular press which publish magazines of various duration. The popular film magazines have devoted separate magazines on film artists. Fan clubs were born out of the film industry. There is a school of thought which argue that the fan clubs were engineered and manufactured by the film industry itself. There are numerous fan clubs through out Tamil Nadu. This has helped build a star system in the state. There has been a non-discernable relationship between the actors and the masses. Music is another important aspect that has contributed to the growth of film industry. Film music in Tamil Nadu has been very vital for the success of the film. The entry of Ilayaraja marked a decisive shift in Tamil cinema. The audience appreciation for film music grew during this phase. Maniratnam was decisive for a different reason in that he was instrumental in visualising the narrative on a pan-Indian plane. This led to a problematic in the conceptualisation of culture and nation. His themes dealt with the problems of
nation and integration at cultural and political levels. The locality of the culture is lost in such narratives. Since the implicit assumption of such movie work on the logic of profits it inherently destroys and ruptures the form and content of the film. *Roja* in Tamil will alone can make sense. Since the motive for choosing such theme is to cater to a national or global audience it loses its finer points. The *Roja* dubbed in Hindi will lose its sting because the leading lady role in the film is from Uttar Pradesh unlike the Tamil character that is lost completely in Kashmir with the handicap of not knowing Hindi. That apart, it is the homogenization of cultures that pose the main problematic in his films.

Films in Tamil Nadu have been a part and parcel in the every day culture. Cinema in general has had one of the most significant impact with the masses in Tamil Nadu. Though the relationship between politics and cinema had been clear at the outset, the reasons for such an association either with politics or with the masses is beyond typolised constructs. After understanding the growth of Tamil cinema and analysing its relationship with culture and politics, it is important to study the formal contours of cinema and that brings us to the next chapter of this thesis.