CHAPTER – III
RECURRENT CULTURAL THEMES

After establishing the treatment of cultural themes in Tamil cinema, this chapter proposes to focus on the recurrence of these cultural themes and related analysis. Firstly, it presents the summary of the themes already indicated under thematic significances. Secondly, based on the observation made on the summary of the themes, it presents and analyses the dynamics of recurrence in the treatment of cultural themes.

3.1 Constant Cultural Themes

As summarized under thematic significances in the last chapter, there are themes, which are constantly recurring in all decades. For an overall understanding, they are collectively presented as follows:

1. *Kaathal* operates in the dynamics of challenge, tactic and result, facing the key issues of non-reciprocity and unequal status, particularly casteism. Its operation establishes man’s emotionality and supremacy, and woman’s rationality and victimization.

2. Treatment of *Karpu* as burden, weapon and status establishes woman’s vulnerability and victimization in relation to man’s supremacy and conflict with other women.
3. Treatment of *Maanam* involves the dynamics of deformation of identity and reformation of identity. Respectability is achieved through reclamation from humiliations, establishing that *Maanam* is superior to life.

4. *Mozhi* is treated as a tool for communication, constructing or affirming linguistic identity, and establishing supremacy. Tamil is treated as winner in spite of being non-profitable, low status, inferior, and victim in the conflict with other languages.

5. *Nilam* is treated as a base for identity and production-relationships implying class differences. The treatment, in general, facilitates the maintenance of status quo related to feudalism and casteism.

6. Creed, cult and celebration are the constituents of *Samayam*, establishing the supremacy of God and dependence of human beings with the attempts of defending and transforming religion

7. Treatment of *Veeram* involves reduction of social issues to personal issues, reaction through physical ability, and reclamation of property, persons and honor. It laudably narrates revenge and masculinity against fear and femininity.

8. *Virunthompal* remains a compassionate attitude to outsiders, cautious between the clans and instinctual within the clan in a non-threatening context against the threatening factors of suspicion, anti-status quo and betrayal.

Observing the components and pattern of constant cultural themes, they converge towards the triple linking themes: Identity – Relationship - Status quo.
Hence, most of the storylines of Tamil cinema have the undercurrent of these three linking themes. The details are given below.

1. Identity is one of the linking cultural themes. Personality, community, communication, sex, gender, feudalism, caste, class, feudalism and profession are some of the issues discussed in the treatment of cultural themes. These issues are mostly treated towards the focus of constructing, affirming, maintaining, challenging, deforming and restoring identity. They are directly or indirectly linked to the elements of Tamil culture, contributing to the discussion of identity. For instance, identity of gender is linked to Kaathal, Karpu, and Veeram; identity of community is linked to Virunthompal, Mozhi, Samayam and Maanam; and identity of casteism, feudalism and class is linked to Nilam, Virunthompal, and Kaathal.

2. Relationship is another linking cultural theme. Production, clan, gender, sex, caste, class, communication, God, personality and community are some of the issues discussed in the treatment of cultural themes. These issues are treated with the focus of rephrasing, adjusting, threatening, abandoning, restoring, and maintaining relationship. They are directly or indirectly linked to the elements of Tamil culture, contributing to the discussion of relationship. For instance, production-relationship is linked to Nilam; relationship of gender is linked to Kaathal, Karpu, and Veeram; relationship of caste is linked to Virunthompal, Kaathal, and Maanam; relationship between God and human is linked to Samayam, and relationship of
(linguistic) communication and (linguistic) communities is linked to Mozhi.

3. The third linking theme is status quo. Casteism, feudalism, class, God–human relationship, gender, and community are some of the issues discussed in the treatment of cultural themes. All these issues are treated with the focus of maintaining, justifying, disturbing, modifying, and subverting status quo. Particularly, the aspect of casteism is significantly treated under status quo. All these issues are directly or indirectly linked to the elements of Tamil culture, contributing to the discussion of status quo. For instance, status quo of feudalism is linked to Nilam; status quo of caste is linked to Virunthompal, Kaatham, and Maanam; status quo of gender is linked to Kaatham, Karpu, and Veeram; status quo of God-human relationship is linked to Samayam, and status quo linguistic communities is linked to Mozhi.

4. Some issues are overlapping and prevalent connecting the three linking themes. For instance, casteism and gender are prevalent highlighting caste and gender-based identity, caste and gender-based relationship, and caste and gender-based status quo.

3.2 Inconstant Cultural Themes

As summarized under the thematic significances, there are cultural themes inconstantly recurring or elements leading to inconstant cultural themes. They are given below in terms of decade wise trend.
3.2.1 First Decade (1936 - 45)
   1. Domination of Religiosity
   2. Domination of Karpu as Divine
   3. Domination of Sanskritized Tamil

3.2.2 Second Decade (1946 - 55)
   1. Introduction of Social Themes
   2. Rise of Classical Tamil
   3. Introduction of Inter-religious Harmony

3.2.3 Third Decade (1956 - 65)
   1. Introduction of Inter-religious Conflict
   2. Assertion of Tamil Linguistic Supremacy

3.2.4 Fourth Decade (1966 - 75)
   1. Justification of Status quo
   2. Continuing Tamil Linguistic Supremacy
   3. Progressing Inter-religious Conflict and Harmony

3.2.5 Fifth Decade (1976 - 85)
   1. Transgression, Resistance and Honour
   2. Language and Dual Identity
   3. Ethnicity and Inter-religious Interaction
   4. Subversion and Justification of Status quo

3.2.6 Sixth Decade (1986 - 95)
   1. Elimination of Life
   2. Continuing Inter-religious Interaction
   3. Transgression and Physical Vulnerability
   4. Rise of Middle Castes
   5. Rise of Status-English and Regional Tamil
3.2.7 **Seventh Decade (1996 - 2005)**

1. Increasing Elimination of Life
2. Rise of Gangsters
3. Transgression and Virginity
4. Growth of English and Regional Tamil
5. Anti-extremism and Religious Identity

3.2.8 **Recent Times (2006 - 2009)**

1. Popularity of Anti-hero and Profession of Gangsters
2. Nostalgic Memory of Adolescent Love
3. Vibrancy of Regional Tamil

In relation to socio-political-cultural factors, these inconstant cultural themes will be elaborately discussed later in this chapter.

3.3 **Dynamics of Recurrence**

Observing the patterns and nuances of various cultural themes constantly and inconstantly recurring, certain dynamics of recurrence is evident. The following diagram depicts the dynamics of recurrence indicating some features involved in it.
Diagram No.1: Dynamics of Recurrence

- **Cultural Themes**
  - **Construction**
    - **Constant Reinforcement**
      - **Constant Themes**
  - **Deconstruction**
    - **Temporary Reinforcement**
      - **Inconstant Themes**
        - **No reinforcement**
          - **Obsolete Themes**

- **Socio-political-cultural Factors**
  - (Implied Agents)
The diagram depicts the dynamics of recurrence. Accordingly, cultural themes do not operate in vacuum. They are subjected to or they imply socio-political-cultural factors. Theses factors are better expressed in terms of implied agents. In other words, the implied agents are the indicators of socio-political-cultural factors. The interaction between cultural themes and the factors activates certain modes of operation like construction, deconstruction, and reinforcement. The combinations and degree of these modes result in constant themes, inconstant themes, and obsolete themes. The elaborate description of this diagram will follow.

### 3.3.1 Cultural Themes

*Kaathal, Karpu, Maanam, Mozhi, Nilam, Samayam, Veeram and Virunthompal* are the eight cultural themes. The treatment of these cultural themes is perceived through their thematic unity, thematic binary continuums, and thematic significances. Their recurrence and non-recurrence can be well perceived in the context of socio-political-cultural factors.

### 3.3.2 Socio-political-cultural Factors

There are socio-political-cultural factors that facilitate or imply the dynamics of recurrence. As a result, there is a co-relation between the eight cultural themes in Tamil cinema and social-political-cultural realities. If one deeply analyses the eight constant cultural themes, the issues related to personality, community, communication, sex, gender, feudalism, caste, class, clan, profession, God–human relationship, production can be identified. These issues
are not just cinematic imaginations, but they have the implications of socio-political-cultural factors. Distortion may take place in the mode of presenting these issues. However, it is to be acknowledged that these issues imply these factors. For instance, casteism and gender are some of the social-political-cultural issues constantly discussed in society and manifested in the constantly recurring cultural themes. Moreover, the very treatment of cultural themes implies cultural factors.

These socio-political-cultural factors are vibrant and tangible in the study of inconstant cultural themes. In other words, the inconstant cultural themes vary according to the resonance of these factors. Based on this assumption, in order to understand the dynamics of cultural themes inconstantly recurring, its decade wise trend is presented with possible socio-political-cultural factors and implied agents.

1. **First Decade (1936 - 45)**

A. **Domination of Religiosity**

There was a range of themes treated during this decade. At the same time, there was an apparent domination of religious themes during this period.\(^1\) The impact of myths and folk stories has been obvious. For instance, though the film *Chinthaaamani* (1937) deals with the issue of sex work in society,\(^2\) the issue is presented from the perspective of a myth related to Krishna. Similarly, the film

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\(^1\) As the most of the religious myths and folk stories reflected the ethos of Hinduism, it is remarked that such films have alienated the audience belonging to other religions. See Ravikumar (ed.), *Mihai Naadum Kalai, Kaalachuvadu Cinema Katturaikal*: 1993-2003 (Tamil), Kaalachuvadu Pathippagam, Nagercoil, 2003, p.35.

\(^2\) “One should not undermine the significance of the movie *Chinthaaamani*, which hit the screen at a juncture when heated and intense arguments for and against enacting a law for the abolition of Devadasi system was unfolding in the Tamil-speaking region.” Bharathi, K. Portrayal of Women in Tamil Cinema – Their Political Economic and Socio-Cultural Identities (*From 1931 to 1981*), Department of Economics, University of Madras, Chennai, November- 2001, p. 29.
Nandanaar (1942) discusses the issues of caste, untouchability, and feudalism. At the same time, it is a remake of a popular religious folk story, “Nandanaar Charitthiram”, meaning the history of Nandanaar.

Domination of religious themes during this decade is understandable. As people were already quite familiar with the popular myths and folk stories through various folk art forms, it was convenient for the early filmmakers to opt for such stories and give them a cinematic interpretation. The success of such films is an additional factor. The critics observed that cinema theatres drew huge crowds and there was less attendance of audience for various other cultural performances related to religious myths during this period. Moreover, it was the pre-Independence period. Hence, the attempts at treating themes related to freedom struggle had to encounter censorship of the British. In this context, religious themes became safe zone to subtly deal with the current issues. For instance, the film Chinthamani (1937), centres on a popular story related to Krishna. However, it preaches Gandhian ideology related to abolition of Devadasi system.

B. Domination of Karpu as Divine

In the thematic unity of Karpu, discussed in the previous chapter, it was established that Tamil cinema treats Karpu as status on the third level. This status is interpreted as divine and such interpretation takes dominant position in the first decade. The characters portrayed as chaste women either are divine women or

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3 It is a poignant story of the lowly leather tanner Nandanaar whose devotion was so great that the Lord Himself appeared to him and blessed him.


5 Devadasi system is a socially institutionalized structure of sex work. It is a Hindu religious tradition in which girls are “married” and dedicated to deity or temple. Originally, in addition to this, taking care of the temple and performing rituals, these women learned and practised classical fine arts related to dance and music. This system was outlawed in all of India in 1988.
blessed by God. For instance, in the film Chinthamani (1937), Rukmani is the chaste spouse of Krishna, and the sex-worker Chinthamani is blessed by Krishna. The film Saavithri (1941) which is based on the mythical story of Satthiyavan Saavithri⁶ could be cited as another example. Though the film Mangammaa Sapatham (1943) does not have an obvious base of any religious theme, initially it is established that the heroine is a devoted woman or blessed, as she goes to the temple for worship and, at the end, she is praised as “queen of women” who cleverly remained chaste.

As mentioned earlier, initially Tamil cinema relied on religious myths, folk stories, and epics glorifying Karpu for construction of cultural themes. It is generally remarked that popular religious myths and epics advocate the status of Karpu as divine. In the history of cinema theatres, initially, men audiences filled them. Later, women audience started thronging to theatres. Either to vibrate with these women audiences or to reinforce the theme of Karpu, the treatment of Karpu as divine is typical in the first decade.

C. Domination of Sanskritized Tamil

In the first decade, the conversation in Tamil is very much Sanskritized because, there was an apparent domination of Sanskrit during this period. Comparing to the later decades, no single word in English is heard during this period.

Firstly, as most of the mythical stories had the influence of Aryan tradition, the domination of Sanskritized Tamil has been inevitable. Secondly, even in the

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⁶ It is a story of a chaste woman Saavithri who reclaimed the life of her husband Saytavan from the clutches of Yaman, the God of death. The legend of Saavithri is one of the supplementary stories found in the Mahabharata.
world of Tamil literature, writing Tamil in the style of *Manipravalam* was popular during this period. Thirdly, as this period witnessed a shift from silent cinema to talkie cinema, surprise about ‘talking’ cinema was more important than commenting on the type of Tamil spoken.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the first decade, there are six possible implied agents.

1) Audience’s familiarity with religious stories, folk myths and epics
2) Filmmakers’ dependence on religious stories, folk myths and epics
3) Factors related to the British rule
4) Women audience
5) Influence of Aryan literary tradition
6) Surprise over talkies

2. Second Decade (1946 - 55)
A. Introduction of Social Themes

Though there were social themes in the first decade, it was not a trend as such due to domination of religious themes. Hence, this decade witnesses a major shift in introducing the trend of social themes. Poverty, dowry, casteism, feudalism, inter-religious harmony and women liberation are some of the social themes to be noted in this decade.

Primarily, weariness over religious themes is one of the main reasons for the emergence of social themes. People started looking for new elements. Secondly, critical views on religion and related dogmas were promoted due to the impact of Dravidian parties and their filmmakers. Thirdly, it was the beginning of

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7 *Manipravalam* literally means ‘gem and coral’, meaning a mixture of two languages, Tamil and Sanskrit. It was a kind of Tamil literary style characterized by a large number of Sanskrit words.
post-Independence. Relieved from the censorship of the British, filmmakers had freedom to express and boldly deal with social issues. For instance, the film *Eazhai Padum Paadu* deals with the issues of pre-independence. However, the film was relelased in 1950, the period of post-Independence. All these factors make the domination of religious themes obsolete and their space is replaced by social themes. However, the religious elements are incorporated into social themes.

**B. Rise of Classical Tamil**

Excepting the characters, which play comedy role, most of other characters during this decade speak classical Tamil. Even if the characters tend to speak ordinary spoken Tamil, it is highly mixed with classical Tamil. Here, classical Tamil implies more of written Tamil than spoken Tamil⁸. Promoted by Dravidian parties, such classical Tamil was popular in political platform too during this period. Dravidian parties also made attempts at cleansing Tamil by way of safeguarding pure Tamil from the mixture of other languages. Moreover, the presence of the cine artists associated with Dravidian parties is felt during period.⁹ All these aspects lead to the treatment of linguistic supremacy of Tamil over other languages, particularly against the supremacy of Sanskritized Tamil. Though it was perceived as a protest against Aryanism and Sanskrit, it remained alienated from the popular and subaltern spoken Tamil.

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⁸ The margin between spoken Tamil and written Tamil is wider. Such difference could be observed in Arab too. See Baskaran, S. Theodore, *Em Thamizhar Seitha Padam* (Tamil), Uyirmai Pathippagam, Chennai – 18, 2004, p. 110.

⁹ The sample films during this period indicate the presence of the key figures like Scriptwriter M. Karunanidhi, and actors N.S. Krishnan, S.S, Rajendran, Sivaji Ganesan, and M.G.R. who were associated with Dravidian parties.
Lengthy dialogue was a characteristic in Tamil cinema during this period. Apart from the promotion of classical Tamil and the treatment of linguistic supremacy of Tamil, the influence of English over Tamil just begins in this decade. Social themes handled and the characters influenced by English culture are the possible reasons for the beginning of English in Tamil cinema.

C. Introduction of Inter-religious Harmony

This period introduces the theme of inter-religious harmony. The emergence of social themes creates space for the interaction with religions particularly between Hinduism and Christianity. Such interaction leads to the treatment of inter-religious harmony. The film *Eazhai Padum Paadu* (1950) is an example. Such inter-religious interaction leading to harmony is a beginning of a trend as it continues in the forthcoming decades.

It was popular among the political circle to associate Christianity with the British during this period. In order to build up religious harmony among Indians, attempts have been made to dissociate Indian Christianity from the British. Although harmony between Muslims and Hindus was not treated in this decade, inter-religious harmony was a matter of concern after partition of India to create Pakistan.10

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10 “The Partition of British India in 1947, which created the two independent states of Pakistan and India, was followed by one of the cruelest and bloodiest migrations and religious and ethnic cleansings in history and resulted in the forced transfer of an estimated 14 to 18 million people between the two countries. The ensuing religious animosity and communal strife resulted in the deaths of some two million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and abduction, rape and killing of countless women and children. It was indeed one of the most inhuman manifestations of religious and communalism tolerance with few parallels in history.” Ahmed, Ishtiaq. “Memorial at Wagah to the Victims of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan”, http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/mar/wagah.htm, 19.10.2010.
Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the second decade, there are four possible implied agents.

1) Weariness over religious themes
2) Influence of Dravidian parties
3) Factors in the post-Independence era
4) National need for religious harmony

3. Third Decade (1956 - 65)

A. Introduction of Inter-religious Conflict

Inter-religious conflict symbolically begins during this decade. Associating Islam with criminals is the characteristic of such conflict. For instance, in the film *Karuppu Panam* (1964), stereotypical presentation of *Purdah* as dress for escapism and criminal activities begins. It sets a conflict because one who uses *Purdah* or other Islamic dress is not a Muslim. The criminal woman who uses *Purdah* to escape from the police is a Christian, namely Lucy. Later, her father Thanikachalam, a Hindu, justifies her activities. Moreover, there is no Muslim character observed in this film. Such conflict and conflicting portrayal is a trend as it continues in the ensuing decades.

However, the theme of inter-religious harmony continues in this decade. Harmonious relationship is maintained particularly between Hindus and Christians, as mentioned in the second decade. For instance, in the film *Karuppu Panam* (1964) a Christian brings up the daughter of his Hindu friend.

Although there is no specific implication of this trend cited, it is possibly the continuing impact of partition of India. Moreover, both at the national and state level, people have made various efforts to maintain inter-religious harmony.
B. Assertion of Tamil Linguistic Supremacy

Due to the influence of social themes, spoken Tamil occupies the script. Yet, the influence of classical Tamil on spoken Tamil is obvious. While delivering the dialogue in spoken Tamil, the characters suddenly shift to classical Tamil in between, especially during emotional scenes. For instance, in the film *Saanthi* (1965), a dream scene has been exclusively created for the hero to melodramatically deliver dialogue in pure classical Tamil.

Rise of classical Tamil paved the way for linguistic supremacy of Tamil in the second decade. As a follow-up to this phenomenon, assertion of Tamil linguistic supremacy over other languages begins. Indicating the antiquity, advancement and richness of Tamil adds to this assertion. This sort of treatment could be situated in the context of anti-Hindi sentiment propagated in Tamil Nadu in 1960s which ended up as anti-Hindi movement in 1965.11 The presence of cine artists who are associated with Dravidian ideology continues in this decade.12 Such trend asserts Tamil identity.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the third decade, there are three possible implied agents.

1) Continuing national need for religious harmony
2) Dravidian politics
3) Anti-Hindi movement

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11 Anti-Hindi agitation was launched in opposition to the introduction of Hindi language in the schools. It involved several mass protests, riots, student and political movements. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, the founder of D.K., launched the first anti-Hindi agitation in 1937. Later the agitation was resumed by D.M.K Party, a break away party from D.K. and initiated the movement in 1965.

12 Actors S.S. Rajendran, M.G. R. and M.R. Radha, Lyricist and scriptwriter Kannadasan were key figures associated with Dravidian ideology. Their presence is indicated in the sample films.
4. **Fourth Decade (1966 - 75)**

A. **Justification of Status quo**

In the socio-economic scenario of Tamil Nadu during this decade, several incidents have been noted related to uprising of working class against feudalism. One such major incident took place in *Keezha Venmani*, a village near east Thanjavur district in 1968.\(^{13}\) Such events and incidents have disturbed the fort of feudalism coupled with casteism. However, Tamil cinema sets a trend in justifying feudalism in this decade.

Justification of feudalism takes place on four levels: firstly, sympathizing with and defending landlords; secondly, defining the character who challenges feudalism as culprit and the landlord as victim, thirdly, interpreting the abundance of feudal property as gift of God; and fourthly, maintaining status quo. The films *Kadavul Maamaa* (1974) and *Ingeym Manitharkal* (1975) are two examples to this sort of justification.

Such justification of feudalism is also a justification of casteism, as both are intrinsically connected to each other. For instance, the film *Ingeyum Manitharkal* (1975) indicates the caste of the landlord.

B. **Continuing Tamil Linguistic Supremacy**

In the political setting of Tamil Nadu during this decade, the Hindi agitation movement ended in anti-Hindi riot, which broke out in 1968. As a result,

\(^{13}\) Agricultural workers belonging to S.C. in the village called *Keezha Venmani*, were in the midst of a struggle for wage increase. As a result, the intolerant dominant caste landlord in this village burned 44 workers including 20 women and 19 children alive. This incident made a political impact that the state government announced a commission for deciding wages for agricultural workers. This incident is described as one of the major events in the history of atrocities on Dalits in Tamil Nadu.
the state government put an end to Hindi instruction in all government-aided
schools and suspended the screening of Hindi movies in cinema theatres. In 1969,
the conflict between the state government and central government abruptly ended
in a stalemate. No progress has been witnessed since the assurance of Nehru in
1959 “that English would continue for official purpose until people in the non-
Hindi states decide otherwise”. As English replaces Hindi in the political
settlement, the role of English is prominent. Hence, the growing impact of English
in Tamil Nadu is understandable.

This trend reflects in Tamil cinema, the treatment of linguistic supremacy
of Tamil over other languages continues, by way of indicating the antiquity,
advancement and richness of Tamil against the backdrop of Hindi agitation. In
addition, the use of English or English in Tamil is more progressive in nature.
Moreover, English is reinforced as a status language. At the same time, the pro-
Hindi tone is exceptionally heard in the film Sooryakaanthi (1973). It sets a trend
for discussing the dual identity of Tamil and Indian later.

C. Progressing Inter-religious Conflict and Harmony

Conflicting portrayal of Islam gradually continues, as Hindu characters
carry out criminal activities misusing Islamic dresses. The villainous portrayal of
Hindus who use Islamic dresses for their criminal activities intensifies the conflict

At the same time, love affair between Hindu and Christian, partaking in the
inter-religious celebration, philanthropist being inter-religious, and openness to

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inter-religious symbols are some of the significant events to present the inter-religious harmony during this decade. As mentioned earlier, interaction between Christians and Hindus are dominant in the treatment. In such treatment of inter-religious harmony, Christian forgiveness, Christian compassion, and the theology of incarnation are mentioned and discussed. The films *Saathu Mirandaal* (1966), *Thavapputhalvan* (1972), *Kadavul Maamaa* (1974) and *Ingeyum Manitharkal* (1975) are some examples treating inter-religious harmony under *Samayam*. As a rare element, the inter-religious nature of Muslims is portrayed to the extent that a Muslim family performs the folk drama of *Mahabharata* in *Ingeyum Manitharkal* (1975).

Though implications of the theme of the inter-religious interaction are not sure, it is possibly a common need of the socio-political scenario in this decade. The intensity of the treatment of such themes progresses in the fourth decade.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the fourth decade, there are three possible implied agents.

1) Inferred response to *Keezha Venmani* tragedy
2) Continuing impact of anti-Hindi agitation
3) Common need for inter religious harmony

5. **Fifth Decade (1976 - 85)**

**A. Transgression, Resistance, and Honour**

The decade witnesses the wave of new directors entering into the field of Tamil cinema. The popularity of directors challenged the hero-oriented films and some films were identified as directors’ films. During this era, the films of Balu Mahendra, Bharathiraja, K. Bhagyaraj, Devaraj-Mohan, and T. Rajendar were
noted as directors’ films. This era creates space for the introduction new actors in the field. The decade sets the trend of moving from studio-based indoor shooting to outdoor shooting for film making. In addition, seventies also witnessed many social changes like increasing women’s education and feminist movements in India picking up momentum.

In this context, this decade is significant for various experimentations in Tamil cinema. Transgression takes place in the traditional understandings of various themes related to Kaathal and Karpu. Eloping assertively begins in relation to Kaathal. The traditional understanding of Karpu is ideologically and practically challenged. Sexually victimized woman leading normal marital life with some other man, woman breaking the oppressive marital bond, and disobedience to husband are some of the elements of transgression. Related to this transgression, extra marital affair, premarital relationship, premarital pregnancy and sexual immorality related to Kaathal are some of the dominant issues in this decade. All these issues are seriously discussed and debated as matters of cultural concern.


16 “The new wave of films of the seventies, the affair and relationships that the heroines are forced into by various circumstances and their causes and effects formed the central themes. The unshakable forts of ‘Karpu’ (Chastity) were bombarded and new definitions of morality were offered. People relished such new ideas about various aspects of life.” Bharathi, K., op. cit., p. 163.

Though the issues of extra marital affair, premarital relationship and premarital pregnancy are openly discussed, the treatment of the issues is threatening for the future of woman. For instance, if woman transgresses in the matter related to sex or marriage, her end will be as follows: frustration in life, question mark about the future, dependence on another merciful man, responding to compulsion, and death.

Complementing this fear, the highest number of rape scenes occurs during this decade. Manliness of villain contrasting physical vulnerability of women is reinvigorated through rape. It also becomes an occasion for exposure of woman’s body for visual taste. It is proper to note that the late 1970s Mathura rape case was the one of the first national level cases that united many women's groups. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl in Mathura in a police station, led to wide-scale protests and wider coverage in the national media. The government was forced to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code, and introduce the category of custodial rape.

Apart from the highest number of rape, victimizing women, this decade begins the sexual overtone in terms of exposing woman’s body as a matter of fun and teasing. Hence, rape and sexual overtone in the form of exposing woman’s body for fun can be interpreted as ‘resistance to transgression’ of women in Tamil cinema. To justify this interpretation, it is proper to note that the discussion of

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Maanam (honor) is dominant in this decade. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the discussion of Maanam, sex related reclamation is mostly a burden of woman, implying Karpu. In other words, woman’s Maanam is linked to her Karpu.

B. Language and Dual Identity

The dual identity of Indian and Tamil, slightly mentioned in the fourth decade, takes a definite form in this decade.

M.G.R. always projected himself as a defender of Tamil language and its culture. He discloses his dual identity of Tamil and Indian, in the film Navaraththinam (1977), by way of incorporating non-Tamil languages including Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, and English. He, being the popular cinematic image of Dravidian ideology, had used national icons like Gandhi in his earlier films. However, this film is significant for his national outlook because he dances for a Hindi song. When this film was released, he was already the General Secretary of a political party namely, ‘All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam’. The words ‘All India Anna’ are new prefixes to D.M.K. party from which he was expelled. As Anna was his mentor, the name ‘Anna’ becomes one of the prefixes. The other prefixes of ‘All India’ give national outlook of the party. It is a shift from exclusive regional outlook to inclusive national outlook. Hence it is a political need for him to emphasize the dual identity of Tamil and Indian. Similar dual identity is perceived in the use of national icons and use of Hindi in

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20 Requested by a Hindi actress, a character in the film, the hero substitutes the male dancer by dancing with her for a Hindi duet song in a cultural show.

21 Anna is a short form of C.N. Annadhurai, the founder of D.M.K. party.

This trend widens the already existing entry for non-Tamil languages, particularly English. Hence the use of English or English-Tamil is progressive in Tamil cinema. Such use is prominent among urban-based films and the educated characters. Moreover, the illiterate or under educated hero or heroine speaking in English is treated as an act of excitement as narrated in the case of *Mayor Meenaatchi* (1976) in which the undereducated heroine unexpectedly reads in English. It is presented as a scene of excitement and surprise. In turn, such trend leads to ridiculing classical Tamil, which was popular in second and third decade, as portrayed in *Chinna Chinna Veedu Katti* (1980). This indicates that classical Tamil becomes outdated in this decade. However, the treatment of linguistic supremacy of Tamil and its ultimate victory over other languages continues especially in some hero oriented films.

C. **Ethnicity and Inter-religious Interaction**

Through this decade, it is commented that the gradual erosion of the *Nehruvian* secular-nationalist ideology was one of the factors responsible for the reemergence of caste and religion in public discourse. This decade also witnessed several public debates in India on religious conversion. For instance, an event of mass conversion in 1981 at Meenakhsipuram in Tamil Nadu ignited

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23 1150 out 1400 of Hindu Dalit inhabitants in the village of Meenakshipuram of Thenkasi district converted to Islam in a mass ceremony and renamed place Rahmatnagar.
communal riot between Muslims and Hindus. Another major incident that took place in Tamil Nadu was the clash between Christians and Hindus at Mandaikadu in Kanyakumari District in 1982. One of the alleged reasons for such riot is conversion.\(^\text{24}\)

The trend of critiquing Christianity in Tamil cinema begins during this decade. The films *En Kelvikku Enna Pathil* (1978), and *Anbulla Rajinikanth* (1984) subtly present the converting nature of Christianity. In addition, associating non-Indian ethnicity with religion begins in this decade. The film *Naam Pirantha Mann* (1977) interprets the British as Christians and anti-Hindus, who are a threat to Tamil culture and Indian national integration. This film could be compared with *Eazhai Padum Paadu* (1950) in the second decade, in which the treatment of the British never had any explicit religious connotation. Similarly, Arabian smugglers invading Indian territory are presented with Muslim identity in *Mayor Meenaatchi* (1976). Hence, it is a new trend of associating ethnicity with religion.

The themes of inter-religious harmony also continue from the earlier decades. In the political context, both the incidents of Meenakshipuram and Mandaikkadu also demanded the need for inter-religious harmony.

D. **Subversion and Justification of Status quo**

The issues of feudalism, low wage, caste and mass struggle related to *Keezha Venmani* atrocity mentioned earlier, are treated in the film *Jaathikkoru Neethi* (1981) after a gap of 13 years. Absolute subversion of the status quo by

\(^{24}\) In the 1980s, the conversion spree did trigger communal riots in *Mandaikaadu* and *Melmanalgudi* where six persons died in police firing. And, indeed, the Justice Venugopal Commission of Inquiry in its 1986 report on the riots had recommended a ban on conversions "by fraudulent and foul means" [http://www.thehindu.com/2002/10/20/stories/2002102001631700.htm, 25.02.2010.](http://www.thehindu.com/2002/10/20/stories/2002102001631700.htm)
ideologically motivated action is discussed in this film. The film also introduces the concept of eliminating the individual representing the ruling class. However, the film in this decade remains as a rare element.

In this decade, the trend of creating rural-based film stories begins. It is claimed that the director Bharathiraja who set this trend from his first film *Pathinaaru Vayathinile* (1976).\(^{25}\) Hence, what was new to Tamil cinema was rural nativity which is popularly spelt as “Mann Vaasanai”.\(^{26}\) The films with rural nativity presents the issues of status quo related to feudalism and caste. Of these, some films challenge the hierarchy of feudalism and casteism to some extent. However, these films ultimately justify the status quo. Hero belonging to feudal family, villain being anti-status quo, philanthropy of landlord, victimized landlord, and adjustments against subversion are some of the factors supplementing justification of status quo. Though wider discussion takes place on relationship based on caste hierarchy, justification of status quo is a continuing trend from the fourth decade. Only the rural nativity makes the difference in this decade. Such rural nativity also provides space for discussion of *Maanam*, which is very dominant in this decade. The discussion of *Maanam* is considerably centred on status quo.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the fifth decade, there are five possible implied agents.

1) Entry of new filmmakers and experimentations


\(^{26}\) Rural nativity is expressed as Mann Vaasanai meaning ‘fragrance of soil’. The Director Bharathiraja has directed a film with the same title. It was released in 1983.
2) Publicity of rape incidents, legal amendments and rise of women movements
3) M.G.R.’s political ideology
4) Inter-religious conflicts in Tamil Nadu
5) Rural-based stories

6. Sixth Decade (1986 - 95)

A. Elimination of Life

Death penalty has been considered by most civilized nations as a cruel and inhuman punishment. Campaign against death penalty gains momentum in 1990s. It was abolished de jure or de facto, by 106 nations, and 30 countries have abolished it since 1990.27

In contrasting to this, Tamil cinema begins the trend of eliminating human life in the sixth decade. Studying the conflicts between hero and villain, it initially appears to be a policy conflict. Later, it ends up testing each one’s physical power. Success in such conflicts defines heroism. Such heroism projects super humanness of an individual. Killing used to be an act of villainy and killing by the hero used to be unintentional and accidental in previous decades. Now, as fighting spirit of hero ends in killing villains, killing is intentional and direct in this decade. Hence, killing is a mark of heroism interpreted as an act of Veeram. It sets a milestone in the historic discussion of violence in Tamil cinema. The role of law and legal system are underplayed in these films and the belief in these system decreases. Reacting to such films at the international level, Jayne Loader remarks, “When we study these films, we find that most of them support the social order, offering

individual solutions to complex social problems: kill criminals rather than abolish
the causes of crime, kill rapists rather than rearrange the sexual power structure
that necessitates the act of rape”.

Suicide is not a new phenomenon in Tamil culture. It has a long history in
which people committed suicide for various socio-political, familial and personal
reasons. Total number of incidence of suicide deaths in India between 1989 and
1995 is 5,63,871. Corresponding to this number, the suicide rate gradually
increases every year. Next to West Bengal which has the highest number of
suicide having 15.9 percent share in the total suicides reported in the country,
Tamil Nadu stands second with 11.7 %. According to an estimate taken during
1990, some causes for suicide are cited as poverty, dreadful disease, quarrel within
the family, lover affair and insanity. Unemployment and urbanization are added
causes in this list.

As far as Tamil cinema is concerned, either attempt or committing of
suicide for safeguarding Karpu, retaining Maanam, and succeeding Kaathal is a
constant feature in all decades. Yet, they are dominant in this decade. At least 13
out of 21 films (61.9%) place the issue of suicide related to Kaathal, Karpu, and
Maanam. Proposing suicide, attempting suicide, committing suicide and resisting
suicide are vibrant for the discussion of this issue in this decade. Unrequited love,
love failure, unequal status, rape, premarital-sex, forced marriage, dowry, poverty,
humiliation and unemployment are cited as various causes for the issue. The film

29 Aravan, Ka.Pa. Thamizhar + Thannamippikai - Tharkolai (Tamil), Pacchai Pasel, Puthuchery,
1998.

B. Continuing Inter-religious Interaction

In this decade, destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992 was a major event widely debated in the country. It constituted an impetus for Hindutva ideology in national level. This period became crucial for inter-religious harmony in Indian political scenario.

Though the impact of this development is yet to reflect as a trend in the next decade, the theme of inter-religious harmony continues between Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Sikhism is added in the process of harmony to break the prejudice against Sardarjis as narrated in the case of Mauna Raagam (1986). It is proper to note that anti-Sikh riot broke out in 198432 in north India, particularly in Delhi, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India.

Continuing the usual and stereotypical association of Purdah with criminal activities, now it is additionally used as a tool for eve-teasing, as indicated in Eeramaana Rojaave (1991). The ongoing critical portrayal of ‘converting Christianity’ is noticed in Rojaavai Killaathe (1993).

C. Transgression and Physical Vulnerability

Physical vulnerability of woman has been a problem for feminism. The concept of the third wave feminism33 began in the early 1990s as a response to

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32 http://info.indiatimes.com/1984/, 20.03.2010
33 First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It focused on officially mandated inequalities, particularly, in the United Kingdom and the United States. The second-wave began during the early 1960s and lasted unto
perceived failure of the second wave. It stands on the idea that all women have the freedom to make any priorities they so wish and to control themselves, their lives, and their bodies in any manner they see fit. It celebrates sexuality as a positive aspect of life and advocates the joy of embracing traditional feminine appearances and attributes. It was also aware that traditional feminine appearance may increase their vulnerability.\textsuperscript{34}

In this decade of Tamil cinema, the issues of women breaking the oppressive marital bond, disobedience to husband, extra marital affair, premarital relationship, premarital pregnancy and sexual immorality that emerged as acts of transgression continue. However, the treatment of woman’s physiology as ‘weaker sex’ exposing her physical vulnerability is reinvigorated in this decade on three levels: eve-teasing, premarital sex, and dependence on God.

Firstly, Tamil cinema has traditionally depicted eve-teasing as a part of initiation of love affair along with the usual accompaniment of song and dance routines, which invariably results in the heroine submitting to the hero. Adding to this, targeting woman’s cleavages, attempts to kiss, and demanding kiss are part of eve-teasing in this decade. To some extent, eve-teasing in this decade has replaced rape, which was dominant in the fifth decade.

Secondly, the issue of premarital sex, what was discussed as a matter of cultural concern, becomes an act of manliness and tool for revenge against villain in this decade. This intensifies the portrayal of woman’s vulnerability.

\textsuperscript{34} Crawfold, Bridget J. Toward a third wave feminist legal theory: Young women, pornography and the praxis of pleasure, Michigan Journal of Gender & Law, Vol. 14, 2007, p. 121.
Thirdly, woman’s dependence on God in killing villain is dominant in the sixth decade. In other words, women possessed with divine power are empowered to eliminate villains. Thus, physical vulnerability of woman is stressed.

D. Rise of Middle Castes

The decade encounters a lot of political developments. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted by the Government of India, in order to prevent atrocities against Dalits and Tribals. In 1991, the birth centenary celebration of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar becomes an occasion for the emergence of new subaltern movements and the already existing movements gained momentum. In the literary world, the concept of Dalit literature is widely discussed.

Among the films presenting the issue of caste and untouchability, *Ithu Namma Aalu* (1988) stands out for qualitative and ideological debate on the issues of caste and untouchability, and challenges Brahmin supremacy. Otherwise, it is a decade of rising middle castes comprising non-Brahmins and non-Dalits with emphatic caste identity. These castes are treated either as a symbol of glory or threat. Presenting the conflicts of caste and untouchability, the films openly assert the caste identity of middle castes.

In this context, feudalism remains as a supportive system in the assertion of caste identity. Though there are films, which do not verbally assert this identity, in such films assertion takes place indirectly and subtly in the way the characters represent caste-based feudalism, treat the oppressed castes, and practise untouchability. Education, urbanization, particularly, inter-caste marriage are portrayed as prominent threats to feudalism in many films. Moreover, sympathetic
treatment of the downfall of feudalism and victorious retaining of the same justify its status quo as narrated in the case of *Mahaanathi* (1994). It is critiqued that most of the scriptwriters and directors of such films hail from feudal and dominant caste families.  

In this decade, a lot of political debates and conflicts arise due to implementation of Mandal Commission report in 1990, which recommends reservation for O.B.Cs politically ensuring the identity of middle castes. Irked by this implementation, F.Cs all over India, raise their voice against such reservation. Reflecting this mindset, the film *Vaaname Ellai* (1992) directed by K. Balachandar, represent the voice of F.Cs and *Indiraa* (1995) directed by Suhasini Manirathnam, cynically makes passing comments against reservation.

**E. Rise of Status-English and Regional Tamil**

Globalization was a new catchphrase in the dynamics of the world economy, dominating the globe in the nineties of the last century. The wake of globalization was felt in India. Language was one of the elements influenced by globalization. The term ‘globalization of English’ was widely discussed. It can be interpreted in three angles. Firstly, it can refer to the intrusion of English into lives of the people. Secondly, it can refer to rapid spread of English as a second language. Thirdly, it can also refer to changes taking place in all varieties of English due to contact with other verities.  

As far as India is concerned, English

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has an official status. In Tamil Nadu, the assurance of Nehru in 1959 that English would continue for official purpose until people in the non-Hindi states decide otherwise continues. In this context, the impact of globalization boosts up the role of English in the social life of the people in India.

In Tamil cinema, though the use of English and English in Tamil has been increasing in the previous decades, English assertively becomes a status symbol in this decade. As referred to in the case of Mayor Meenaatchi (1976) in the fifth decade, the fluent rendering of English dialogue by the popular hero Rajinikanth in Mannan (1992) in a particular scene to prove his status of being cultured, excites and surprises the audience. It is one of the examples for such rising assertion. Mostly urban-based films and the characters with educated background provide space for English.

At the same time, English is resisted in Mahaanathi (1994) and Rojaavai Killaatthe (1993). In both the films, the hero resists villain speaking in English and demands him to speak in Tamil. In all these films, English knowing villain is defeated by Tamil speaking hero. Hence, the supremacy of Tamil over English is symbolically established. Moreover, varieties of regional Tamil, though begun earlier, get prominence from this decade onwards. Mostly rural-based films and their characters provide space for varieties of regional Tamil. In addition, Chennai Tamil is spoken in Chennai-based films related to slums.

38 http://realstar.in/real/english_in_india.htm, 17.03.2010.
39 When the researcher watched this film at a cinema theatre, it was observed that the theatre was filled with whistle and claps during this scene.
40 This scene also evokes approving response from the audience in the form of whistle.
Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the sixth decade, there are five possible implied agents.

1) Campaign against death penalty and increasing suicide
2) Rise of Hindutva ideology
3) Rise of third wave feminism
4) Political awareness of caste system
5) Globalization

7. Seventh Decade (1996 - 2005)
   A. Increasing Elimination of Life

   Tamil cinema continues the trend of eliminating human life through murder and suicide. However, the acts of murder dominate over suicides in this decade. As far as murder is concerned, the difference in this decade is made at two levels: introduction of encounter killing, and visual and technical description of killing.

   Firstly, this decade introduces the concept of encounter killing in the name of maintaining law and order and punishing the villains without formally undergoing any legal procedure. This extra judicial killing is justified from the perspective of hero who represents legal system. On the one hand, the reasons for such killings convince the audience about the failure of legal and judicial system. On the other hand, the reasons justify the power of police force. For instance, encounter killing is intelligently and systematically done in Vaanjinaathan (2001), in which the hero, Deputy Commissioner of Police, masterminds six encounter killings. Such killings are interpreted as acts of Veeram. In Indian legal scenario, between 1994 and 2008, there were 16,836 custodial deaths in India – an average of 1,203 persons a year, or more than 100 a month. Such killings are justified to
prove the strength of police force. The introduction of extra juridical killing should be situated in the context that the voice against death penalty was progressively raised all over the world, as it was considered as an ultimate denial of human rights. As of 2001, 108 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, up from 62 in 1980.

Secondly, fighting scenes in earlier films were reasonably filled with traditional martial art forms. Contrastingly, this decade displays unconventional methods and weapons for attack with a single intention of terminating the opponents. As a result, what was symbolically expressed in previous decades is visually described in this decade. In other words, the symbolic presentation of killing or violence becomes outdated. The tendency of breaking the stereotypes in killing and violence and technical improvements in cinema supplement this trend. In addition, the influence of non-Indian films is obvious, as non-Indian films were hits among Tamil audience in this decade in both theatres and satellite TV channels. The process of dubbing non-Indian films in Tamil became technically easier and popular. Remaking non-Indian films as Tamil version, imitating certain scenes, or taking inspiration from such films were sporadically done all along. For instance, in the film *Naam Pirantha Mann* (1977), the patriotic hero, during his encounter with a villainous British officer, raises long sickle in the first shot. In the second shot, blood stain is shown. In the editing of these two shots, it is well understood that officer was killed.

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42 “The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state. This cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment is done in the name of justice. It violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to kill the prisoner.” http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty, 21.01.2010.


44 For instance, in the film *Naam Pirantha Mann* (1977), the patriotic hero, during his encounter with a villainous British officer, raises long sickle in the first shot. In the second shot, blood stain is shown. In the editing of these two shots, it is well understood that officer was killed.
instance, the film *Aaitha Ezhuthu* (2004) has drawn inspiration from the film *Amores Perros* (2000)\(^{45}\) directed by Mexican film maker, Alejandro González Iñárritu. Hence, the visual and technical description of violence in line with non-Indian films was inevitable. In studying such visual descriptions of violence and killing, elimination of life is strikingly present in this decade.

**B. Rise of Gangsters**

“Organized crime is on the rise in Chennai. Recent murders in the city have either have been a fallout of inter-gang rivalry or mercenary killings. In the last few months at least five prominent gangsters were slain…..The gangs have hierarchy, territorial limits, and strike strategic alliances…. Chennai may not be as bad as Mumbai, where the mafia has a large presence. It is a fact though that many gangs have emerged in Chennai in the last few years. These gangs indulge in various crimes like mercenary killings, robbery, theft, dacoity, bootlegging and drug peddling” is a finding reported in 2002 based on a doctoral thesis.\(^{46}\) On the other hand, the encounter killings of gangsters by police were subjected to criticism in Tamil Nadu in 2003. Analyzing ‘unlawful killing by the police in Tamil Nadu’, it is remarked, “What concerns us is that in none of the encounter incidents have the police been able to nab the main person highlighted by the police by catchy soubriquets like ‘kingpins’, ‘desperadoes’, ‘gang lords’ and so on. In all the cases the police have painted a picture of the persons killed as being major underworld dons or gang leaders who shot at the police who retaliated

\(^{45}\) It is an anthology film containing three distinct stories, which are connected by a car accident in Mexico City.

killing them on the spot. The repeated failure of the police in not being able to apprehend the main culprit…”

In the context of the facts related to gangsters and encounter killings, the inspiration on the history of real life dons, and Hollywood movies, Tamil cinema gives rise to gangster movies in Tamil cinema. Though the subject dealing with gangsters is not new, this decade boosts up the profession of gangsters. Clash between two groups of gangsters, clash between police force and gangsters, and attacking or defending the vulnerable people are the major activities in the operation of gangsters. As hero-actors like Satyaraj, Prasanth, and Mathavan play the role of leading gangster in Adithadi (2004), Thamizh (2002) and Aaitha Ezhutthu (2004) respectively, this profession gets significance. In addition, this profession is sympathetically justified from the perspective of such heroes who were vulnerable at young age and inevitably opt for this profession for the sake of livelihood. Thus, the gangsters, who were part of villainy and remained alien to the audience in previous decades, come closer to them. In other words, this profession gets approval in Tamil cinema as inevitable.

C. Transgression and Virginity

“Women in Chennai were lagging behind Bangalore in expressing sexual desires. But Chennai women are now coming out of hibernation. I see a lot of women going out, in pubs and discos here. Women are able to talk about sex without inhibition. Given our conservative Indian backdrop, women are slowly coming out…. Our society should liberate itself from such ideas that the brides

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should all be virgins at the time of marriage. No educated man will expect his bride to be virgin at the time of marriage. But when indulging in pre-marital sex, the girl should guard herself against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.” This guest column by Tamil actress Khushboo appeared in the weekly magazine, India Today.48 Her remark on pre-marital sex and virginity set off a major controversy and the issue took a political turn with the political parties P.M.K. and V.C.K. backing protests against her ‘derogatory remarks about the chastity of Tamil women’. Later, cases were filed against her in the court of law.49

This decade in Tamil cinema presents the issue of premarital sex in terms of premarital pregnancy, and suspicion about premarital virginity with the stress on Karpu. The film Aaitha Ezhutthu (2004) in the data sets that premarital sex as a part of youthfulness, which has nothing to do with marriage contract. However, from male point of view, premarital sex in young age is a freedom of man and Patthini should remain virgin before marriage.50 The code of virginity subtly remains as a condition even for second marriage of woman as indicated in the case of A.B.C.D. (2005). The sadist and villainous husband in this film, deprives her of

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48 See the interview in India Today (Tamil), September 28, 2005. p. 23.
50 Premarital sex has taken a new turn. It could be between the lovers who need not become life partners in future. Premarital sex is also described as a time-pass and part of teenage affair in Aaitha Ezhutthu (2004). In this film, Arjun, a college student, indulges in sex with his girlfriend whose name was not mentioned, at a toilet in a running train. After this affair, she reminds him about his promise and both depart. Arjun, later, loves and marries Meera who has nothing to do with any premarital affair. What is to be noted is that no discussion is set on this issue of premarital sex both from man’s and woman’s point of view. It is treated as only a casual act and part of teenage affair. However, there is an undercurrent message in this film is that premarital sex is a freedom of man. The characterization of Meera convinces the viewer that she remains a virgin until marriage. It affirms that female partner in marriage should be a Patthini.
sexual relationship as an act of punishment for not paying dowry. Hence, the heroine Chandira transgresses from the bond of the first marriage and opts for the second marriage with her new lover. What is stressed in this transgression is that she remains virgin until her second marriage. Thus, the traditional value of Karpu, reserved for woman is maintained. In these two films, all the characters related to this issue are educated. Situating this finding in the context of Kushboo’s statement that no educated man would expect his bride to be virgin at the time of marriage, Tamil cinema takes freedom of promoting transgression in terms of premarital sex and breaking marriage, but maintains the traditional value of Karpu.

D. Growth of English and Regional Tamil

During this decade, Tamil movies had better overseas market to reach out to Tamil audience in various countries. Multinational companies occupy space in Tamil Nadu on various levels. The impact of English through media like satellite channels, F.M. Radio, and internet is felt among common people in daily life. English education has a market value and status in education system. Though the role of English in Tamil cinema has a long history, this decade witnesses its growing impact. Contact with foreign countries, characters of foreign return, educated characters, and non-Indians, stories based on foreign context add to the need for English in Tamil cinema. Contact with foreign countries and non-Indian characters, is one of the predominant characteristics of the seventh decade. Such intensive reference to non-Indian interaction was not observed in the previous decades. Moreover, titling to English for Tamil films like Ice (2003) and A.B.C.D. (2005) is a trend in this decade. 82 out of 819 films (10%) released during this decade have the titles in English. Though this percentage appears to be small, it is
significant in the history of Tamil cinema as supremacy of Tamil was claimed all along. Hence, Tamil nationalist organizations protest against this trend of giving English title to Tamil films. They even declared their protest as ‘third linguistic war’. In addition to this, giving English subtitle to Tamil main title also is a trend in this decade. For instance the film Adithadi (2004) means scuffle and its subtitle is ‘for love’. Similarly, the film Alaadudeen (2003) is a proper noun meaning the name of the hero and its subtitle is ‘Darling of the Masses’.

Simultaneously, regional Tamil prominently continues its presence. As the discussion of realism is initiated in Tamil cinema, the use of regional Tamil is striking in this decade. And the spoken Tamil in this decade is closer to the reality. The films based on not only rural context, but also of urban context focus on the regional Tamil.

Thus, the impact of progressive use of English and regional Tamil reduces the space for common Tamil. In addition, the pattern of Tamil hero winning over a non-Tamil villain continues the symbolic presentation of supremacy of Tamil.

E. Anti-extremism and Religious Identity

Following the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, the political alliance of N.D.A. headed by the B.J.P., captured power in the parliamentary election in India in 1998. In Tamil Nadu, the A.I.A.D.M.K. allied with the B.J.P. in the election and the ruling government. After the government was dissolved within a short period,

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51 The first war refers to anti-Hindi agitation, launched in 1937, in opposition to the introduction of compulsory teaching of Hindi in the schools of Madras Presidency by the first Indian National Congress government led by C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji). The second war refers to anti-Hindi agitation launched in 1965, which was explained earlier. For the details of third linguistic war, See Rajendracholan, Moontram Mochi Por: Thamizh Thiraipadankalukku Thamizh Peyar (Tamil), Udayam Veliyedu, Mayilam, 2005.
the N.D.A. came back to power again in 1999 in alliance with the D.M.K. in Tamil Nadu. Thus, both the major Dravidian parties had allied with the B.J.P. This electoral alliance and victory was a milestone in the history of Hindutva ideology led by the B.J.P., and in the evolution of Dravidian parties. The political analysts criticized this electoral compromise made by the Dravidian parties. It was critiqued as a setback for the values of secularism and of protecting religious minorities, traditionally claimed by these Dravidian parties.

Between May and July 1999, the Kargil War, an armed conflict between India and Pakistan that took place in the Kargil district of Kashmir and elsewhere along the Line of Control. As the war was fought when the N.D.A., led by the B.J.P. was ruling the country, the victory in Kargil became a political issue between the B.J.P. and the Congress party.

In the context of these crucial political developments, Tamil cinema continues the pattern of inter-religious harmony, particularly stressing inter-religious friendship and stereotyped portrayal of Islamic dress as a tool for impersonation and criminal activities. In addition, this decade vehemently advocates anti-extremism for destabilizing the country. The villainous extremists are depicted as associates of Pakistan or Afghanistan. And their religious identity is obviously depicted. Such advocacy against extremism associating religious identity is interpreted as patriotism. In was a trend in Indian cinema too. Till

“...The inheritors of the Dravidian movement find it a convenient option because the non-Brahmin social alliance that emerged from the Dravidian movement has disintegrated..... D.M.K. and A.I.A.D.M.K. have failed to resolve these contradictions because they did not complete the political project initiated by Periyar. His self-respect agenda was not only about capturing political power, but also the creation of a rational and egalitarian society.” Amrith, Lal. “When Myths Compete”, The Times of India, October 3, 2007, http://www.hvk.org/articles/1007/19.html, 27.03.2010
1990s, one of the important film censorship guidelines barred any mention of the ‘enemy nation’. After this restriction was lifted, a new wave was created in Indian cinema to openly yell out who the enemies are, vow to revenge them, and comment with communal dialogues against nations.\(^5^3\) The fighting spirit of hero against extremism is interpreted as patriotism and portrayed as an expression of *Veeram*.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the seventh decade, there are seven possible implied agents.

1) Rate of extrajudicial killings  
2) Impact of non-Indian films and TV channels  
3) Organized crimes  
4) Controversial discussion on *Karpu*  
5) Overseas market of Tamil cinema  
6) New media  
7) Political developments in India

A. **Popularity of Anti-hero and Profession of Gangsters**

According to the report presented by The Times of India dated April, 29, 2008, Chennai hosts the largest number of criminals in Tamil Nadu and indicates that there are more than 5,000 notorious criminals in the state.\(^5^4\) News items about


the activities of gangsters are inevitable features in the media. The names of popular gangsters are frequently mentioned in the media in relation to their activities or encounter.

In the seventh decade, there was a spurt in the number of gangsters and their profession was approved as an inevitable element in Tamil cinema. As a continuing element, this decade popularizes the profession of gangsters and anti-hero. The profession becomes very popular to the extent it does not need any popular hero to boost and justify the profession. Any new hero or new actor who is in the initial stage of the career is sufficient to present the theme of gangsters. The new actors like Karthi in Parutthi Veeran (2007), Jeevan in Thottaa (2008) and Hari Kumar in Madurai Sambavam (2009) are some examples. Traditionally, villainy has been associated with criminality and related activities. In the context of popularity of this profession of anti-hero, heroism is associated with justified criminality and villainy is associated with unjustified criminality. For instance, in the film Thottaa (2008), the innocent hero is brought up by a police officer and trained as a gangster. Hence all his criminal activities are justified under the imagery that he remains only a bullet\textsuperscript{55} in the gun operated by the police officer. At the same time, there is no justification or reason for why the police officer is a criminal. Crime, violence, blood, gore, elimination of life and a dose of sex are the inevitable ingredients for these gangster films. Though lacking the stereotypical characteristics of a hero and possessing the characteristics of villainy, the (anti)heroes in these films are protagonists. As a result, subjective morality from the perspective of gangsters is well established, sideling objective morality.

\textsuperscript{55} The word Thottaa means bullet.
As these films also record the fine sentiments of the gangsters, like love affair, longing for motherly love and humour, the possibility for the audience to vibrate with and side with the gangster heroes increases. In the recent times, there is a mushrooming release of films falling under the genre of realism, hailed by some critics and filmmakers. The genre of realism helps naturalize the characteristics and activities of gangsters and anti-heroes. Deviating from the urban-based gangsters, the treatment of anti-hero in rural context along with the genre of claimed realism, as narrated in Paruththi Veeran (2007), adds to this popularization. These are the factors popularizing the profession of gangsters and anti-heroes in the recent films. Such popularity reinforces the disbelief over the judicial system.

B. Nostalgic Memory and Adolescent love

In the new millennium, a tendency in Tamil cinema was to opt for remaking old Tamil films and other language films. Hence themes appeared to be either old or imported. What was missing in the trend was originality in themes. In this context, the theme of nostalgic memory combined with adolescent love appears to be a new element. Nostalgia is a regret of missing something that was in the past. It is a feeling of longing for the past when one was happy and contented. The success of movie Azhagi (2002), directed by Thangar Bachchan

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56 “The term realism come from a literary and art movement of the nineteenth century which went against the grand tradition of classical idealism and sought to portray ‘life as it really was’. ….However, because the narrative of closure of these films tends to provide easy solutions, this form of realism on the whole serves only to naturalize social problems and division and not provide any deep insight.” Hayward, Susan. Key Concepts in Cinema Studies, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 311.

57 Thangar Bachchan himself has directed Pallikoodam (2007), reflecting the element of nostalgic adolescent love. It is one of the sample films.
set the trend for nostalgic memory of adolescent love. Though themes of teenage love and nostalgia have been treated separately in previous decades, it seems to be the beginning of a trend as both are combined to give an impression as original. Moreover, the age for initiation of love affair has considerably come down to early teenage or school level. In the recent times, such type of love is presented in the genre of realism, claiming closeness between the text and world.

In general, adolescent films emphasize the teen-age point of view and the nostalgic teen movies narrate the tensions between youth and adulthood. In such narration, this tension can be seen as a quest to contain adolescence. Adolescence being the last stage in the loss of innocence, initial freedom from psychological contradiction, and threatening current social issues are the characteristics of these adolescent movies. \(^{58}\) Such movies serve as an opportunity for the matured viewers to re-live and long for the past adolescent love, particularly, the first love and fascinate the teen-age viewers.

C. Vibrancy of Regional Tamil

The recent years of Tamil cinema have certain peculiarities or developments. Firstly, as mentioned in the seventh decade, the discussion of realism in Tamil cinema becomes popular. While the films of high budget, hero-oriented stereotypes and melodramatic nature generally become flop, the films with moderated budget and shot in the form of realism hit the box office. \(^{59}\) So, the films based on the genre of realism dominate in the recent times. Secondly, there is a welcoming trend for the director-oriented films, sideling hero-oriented films,


and giving space for the genre of realism. Such trend of realism operates not only in the script, but also in spoken Tamil. Thirdly, the context of the script is very much situated in the particular region and focused in particular geographical location. For instance, the context of Chettinadu, Usilampatty, Kadaloor-Panrutti, Sivakasi and Madurai regions are treated in the sample films. Fourthly, studying the dynamics of regional Tamil, which emerges in the sixth decade, so far regional Tamil has been generally restricted to the regions of Madurai, Coimbatore and Tirunelveli and Chennai. Hence, regional Tamil has been popularly known as Madurai Tamil, Coimbatore Tamil, Tirunelveli Tamil, and Chennai Tamil. In a way, it was a stereotype in the treatment of regional Tamil. Now a shift has taken place. The regional Tamil has more focused identity as Chettinadu Tamil, Usilampatty Tamil, Kadaloor-Panrutti Tamil, and Sivakasi Tamil as treated in the sample films.

These developments and peculiarities give rise to vibrancy of regional Tamil. The recent years witness more films with regional identity and fine-tuned way of speaking regional Tamil. Thus, regional Tamil in the recent years is vibrant in nature.

Summarizing the socio-political-cultural implications in the recent times, there are five possible implied agents.

1) Media publicity for gangsters
2) Genre of realism
3) Newness in the theme of nostalgia
4) Success of director oriented films
5) Focused geographical location
3.3.3 Mode of Operation

Following the interaction between cultural themes and socio-political-cultural factors, mode of operation is involved in the dynamics of recurrence. Such operation takes place on three levels: Construction – Deconstruction - Reinforcement. Here are some examples to understand it.

1. The scene in which ‘illiterate heroine unexpectedly communicating in English’ constructs her new identity based on Mozhi. It is a mode of construction.

2. Rationally challenging the supreme image of God over man is a deconstruction of relationship between human and divine in the understanding of Samayam. It is a mode of deconstruction.

3. Repeated portrayal of physical vulnerability of woman reinforces gender-based status quo in the understanding of Karpu. It is a mode of reinforcement.

Various combinations and degrees of interaction between construction, deconstruction and reinforcement result in constant cultural themes, inconstant cultural themes and obsolete cultural themes.

1. Constant Themes

Based on the mode of operation, certain themes are re-occurring in every decade. Studying the overall pattern of this re-occurrence, they remain constant in all decades. Constructed at one point of time, the constant themes are mostly the result of constant reinforcement. In other words, sustainability of constant themes depends on constant reinforcement. For instance, ‘maintaining status quo related
to feudalism and casteism’ is one of the treatments of *Nilam*. Such treatment is constructed or begins in the first decade and constantly reinforced in every decade. Thus, it becomes a constant theme. Such constant themes can be interpreted as stereotypes.

Scholars and historians of Tamil cinema have classified the history of Tamil cinema into various periods. Based on the subject matter, mythical period deals with the stories of myths; nationalistic period deals with national issues like freedom struggle and Gandhian ideology; Dravidian period deals with Dravidian ideology; familial period deals with family issues; social period deals with social issues; regional period deals with regional issues within Tamil Nadu; and hero-centric period deals with personality cult of the hero. Based on the style of treatment, dramatic period deals with the subject in the style of drama, melodramatic period deals with the subject melodramatically with the overtone of action and emotions, semi-realistic period deals in the style of partly dramatic and partly realistic, and realistic period deals with the subject in genre of realism. The point is that constant themes are constant in the dynamics of recurrence irrespective all these classifications. In other words, socio-political-cultural factors sustain the constant themes.

2. **Inconstant Themes**

In the mode of operation, certain themes flux, become vibrant only in particular period and do not re-occur constantly. Such inconstant features are called inconstant themes. They are the results of
A. Deconstruction of certain old construction, and

B. Temporary reinforcement

Deconstruction of already constructed elements gives birth to new elements or new understanding. If such deconstructed elements are temporarily reinforced, they become inconstant or alive only in a particular period. Here is an example to understand this mode of operation. Sanskritized Tamil, which was in style in the first decade, is deconstructed in the second decade by popularizing classical Tamil in Tamil cinema. In other words, the construction of classical Tamil deconstructs the image and popularity of Sanskritized Tamil. The rise of classical Tamil is reinforced in the second and third decades. However, such reinforcement is temporarily vibrant only for two decades. Thus, classical Tamil is an inconstant theme in the overall and constant pattern of cultural themes. Here the shift from Sanskritized Tamil to classical Tamil is not just the change of scripting and speaking. It decides thematic construction in relations to linguistic identity, linguistic relationship, and linguistic status quo, particularly in the context of Dravidian ideology.

These inconstant cultural themes are indicators to study the varying trends in Tamil cinema and have the potentials to disturb and modify the cultural themes through deconstruction. In fact, the inconstant themes give variety and innovation in the treatment of cultural themes. Changing socio-political-cultural factors imply the durability of reinforcement, deciding the sustainability of inconstant themes.

Unlike in constant themes, certain classifications on the history of Tamil cinema influence or imply inconstant cultural themes. For instance, mythical period is related to the inconstant themes of domination of religiosity, Karpu as
divine, and Sanskritized Tamil in the first decade. Due to temporary reinforcement for only one decade, these themes become inconstant.

3. **Obsolete Themes**

In the mode of operation, if deconstructed or newly constructed themes are not sufficiently reinforced, they will become obsolete in the course of time. In other words, inconstant themes, after a period of temporary reinforcement, lose their sustainability due to lack of reinforcement and become obsolete themes.

For instance, the ideological attempt of absolute subversion of status quo is a new and rare element in the fifth decade. Such attempt deconstructs the maintenance of status quo and is an inconstant theme applicable only to fifth decade. Moreover, it is a sudden eruption and is not reinforced further. Hence, it becomes an obsolete theme in the following decade.

**Conclusion**

Based on the observations made in the thematic significances dealt with in the previous chapter, constantly recurring cultural themes and inconstantly recurring cultural themes of Tamil cinema were summarized and documented. Identity, relationship, status quo were identified as three linking themes. The dynamics of recurrence of cultural themes were analysed in terms of socio-political-cultural factors along with their implied agents, and mode of operation. The trend of inconstant cultural theme in each decade was analysed in relation to socio-political-cultural implications indicating the implied agents. Mode of operation was analysed in various combinations and degrees of interaction.
between construction, deconstruction, and reinforcement. Such operation results in constant cultural themes, inconstant cultural themes and obsolete cultural themes. Particularly, constant cultural themes are constant, irrespective various classifications in the history of Tamil cinema. Thus, this chapter identifies, establishes, and analyses the pattern of recurrence of cultural themes in Tamil cinema.