RECURRENT CULTURAL THEMES IN TAMIL CINEMA AND THEIR IMPACT ON TAMIL SOCIETY: A FUTURES STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

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By

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1.0 Introduction

In the last century, Tamil cinema emerged as a dominant mass media and became an inseparable part of the social fabric in Tamil Nadu. It has undergone various changes in its history. The mode and context of watching cinema have changed in terms of touring talkies, cinema theatres, home theatres, television, computer, internet and mobile phone. Accordingly, the size of audiences simultaneously participating in the cinema experience in one venue varies from large number to small group or individual. The form of recording cinema varies from film roll to digital compact discs. To narrate the story, Tamil cinema has applied various forms like drama, melodrama, semi realism, and realism. It has been updating itself in the milieu of emerging technologies. The changing socio-political scenarios also have the implications in the process filmmaking. In the context of various developments and changes that have been taking place in the history of Tamil cinema, Tamil identity of and in Tamil cinema is a topic for discussion.

Although Tamil cinema appeals to the sentiments of Tamil culture, one is yet to be scientifically sure if Tamil cinema reflects, promotes, and degrades Tamil society. It is generally believed that the cultural symbols, values and indices are being made, unmade, reinforced and reinvigorated by the content of cinema continually. Tamil cinema frequently refers to Tamil language, Tamil identity, Tamil culture and Tamil society. Hence, there is a need to understand the undercurrent behind these phrases in its thematic construction. ‘The impact of Tamil cinema on Tamil society’ has been a popular topic for debate and research. In this regard, there is an impression that
relationship between Tamil cinema and audiences remains in the level of cause and effect, or action and reaction. In other words, Tamil cinema sets the agenda for discussion and the audiences have to respond. To break this impression, there is a need of paradigm shift to proactively predict and decide the future direction of Tamil cinema, and explore appropriate and alternative action for the pro-active participation of the people. Based on these needs, this research attempts to study recurrent cultural themes in Tamil cinema and their impact on Tamil society with future orientation.

2.0 Hypothesis

This research began with the following hypothesis: ‘Cultural themes in Tamil cinema are recurrent and they make and will make impact on Tamil society’. This hypothesis implies the following elements.

1. Tamil cinema is stereotyping some basic themes and sustaining them.
2. Certain cultural indices and values are recurrent, remade, and reinforced.
3. Cultural themes treated in Tamil cinema make impact on Tamil society.
4. There is a space for proactively predicting and designing the futures of Tamil cinema in relation to cultural themes and impacts.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify, record and analyse the predominantly recurring cultural themes of Tamil cinema
2. To study the impact of cultural themes on Tamil society
3. To predict and design the future trend of cultural themes in Tamil cinema in relation to Tamil society

4. To indicate the characteristics of multiple future scenarios for future course of action

4.0 Research Methodology

This research is basically exploratory and multidisciplinary. For in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and identifying trends over a long period from 1936 to 2021, this research chiefly employs qualitative content analysis. In some places, quantitative data are added to supplement the qualitative analysis. Pilot studies were conducted to experimentally collect data from films, in-depth interviews with select filmmakers and audiences, and brainstorming session with select audiences. For selection of sample films, the method of stratified random sampling was applied. For the selection of filmmakers and audiences for in-depth interviews and audiences for brainstorming session, purposive sampling was applied. Based on the experience of pilot studies, data were systematically collected. During the process of analysis, certain tables and diagrams were generated for better understanding of the data. With the help of these data, tables and diagrams, the findings were descriptively written.
5.0 Chapters

1. Tamil Cultural Elements

‘Tamil culture’ in this thesis is a connecting thread between the study of ‘cultural themes in Tamil cinema’ and the study of ‘impact on Tamil society’. Hence, a basic understanding about Tamil culture is inevitable. As Tamil culture by itself is a vast and separate area for research, only eight Tamil cultural elements are selected for the purpose of in-depth study. These elements are selected for they are popularly and traditionally referred to, and discussed. Thus, *Kaathal, Karpu, Maanam, Mozhi, Nilam, Samayam, Veeram* and *Virunthompal* are the eight cultural elements selected reflecting respectively gender, familial, psycho-social, literary-linguistic, material, religious, political and social spaces of Tamil culture. These cultural elements serve as eight key factors to study cultural themes of Tamil cinema.

2. Cultural Themes in Tamil Cinema

The thematic unity of each theme highlights the basic constituents or core elements of each cultural theme. The binary continuums highlight the dynamic operation of each theme and issues, revealing the hidden messages and deep structure. Summarizing and observing the findings of thematic unity and binary continuums, thematic significances present the constant features and decade wise trend in the treatment of themes in Tamil cinema. Thus, applying three units of analysis, this chapter establishes that Tamil cinema treats cultural themes in its content and studies the characteristics, dynamics and trend of each theme.
3. Recurrent Cultural Themes

Based on the observations made in the thematic significances, this chapter summarizes and documents constantly recurring cultural themes and inconstantly recurring cultural themes of Tamil cinema. Identity-Relationship-Status quo are identified as three linking cultural themes. The dynamics of recurrence of cultural themes are 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 is analysed in relation to socio-political-cultural factors indicating the implied agents. Mode of operation is analysed in the 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. Thus, this chapter identifies, establishes, and analyses the pattern of recurrence of cultural themes in Tamil cinema.

4. Impact on Tamil Society

To understand the relationship between Tamil cinema and Tamil society, this chapter presents the impact of recurrent cultural themes of Tamil cinema on Tamil society. Observing and summarizing the findings, the impact is predominantly realized in the factors related to politics, language, fan, hero, gender and caste. These factors reflect the dynamics of three linking cultural themes, Identity-Relationship-Status quo. The role of cultural themes in making impact is perceived in constructing, or reinforcing or popularizing certain elements. Thus, the dynamics of cultural themes in Tamil cinema do make impacts on Tamil society.
5. Futures of Cultural Themes and their Impacts

Studying futures of cultural themes of Tamil cinema and their impacts on Tamil society, this research identifies and predicts stable futures as probable futures, degrading futures as possible-pessimistic futures, progressive futures as possible-optimistic futures, and desirable futures as preferable futures for the next decade. Each future highlights implied agents to be monitored, or modified or replaced or activated towards our choice of futures. Each future indicates the characteristics of constant cultural themes, inconstant cultural themes, role of implied agents, signals of implied agents, culture in Tamil society and tasks for Tamil society. Based on the characteristics of these futures, four future scenarios provide space for future course of actions. In particular, preferable futures indicate the reasonable desire of the people and the filmmakers, offering wider opportunity for pro-active, innovative and collective participation.

6.0 Conclusion

Tamil cinema treats cultural themes in its content. In its predominant treatments, there are themes constantly and inconstantly recurring. Theses themes are documented for analysis. The analysis on the dynamics of recurrence indicates socio-political-cultural factors, implied agents and mode of operation in terms of construction, deconstruction and reinforcement. Recurrent cultural themes do make impact on Tamil society and play a vital role in constructing or reinforcing or popularizing certain elements. There are probable, possible-pessimistic, possible-
optimistic and preferable futures of cultural themes in Tamil cinema in relation to Tamil society. The characteristics of these multiple future scenarios provide space for future course of action.