INTRODUCTION

Historically Tamil society has had a rich heritage of varied folklore-based entertainments. In the last century cinema emerged as a dominant mass media and became an inseparable part of the social fabric. All these years, Tamil cinema has been one of the linking media among the Tamils all over the world. For instance, Sri Lankan Tamils are one of the transborder communities that are increasingly being linked by the global chains of various media, particularly cinema. Moreover, Tamil cinema occupies a prominent place in the lives of Tamil people. Songs, posters, newspapers, radio, television, advertisements and new media forms deeply imbued with the Tamil cinema invade the personal and public domains of people in contemporary Tamil society, Tamil Nadu in particular.

Looking back on the history of Tamil cinema, 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 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. Tamil cinema has been updating itself in the milieu of emerging technologies. The changing socio-political scenarios have implications of the filmmaking process.
For instance, the issues of pre-Independence days have been reflected in the Tamil cinema in the same period\(^1\) and the influence of globalization has been observed for the past two decades in filmmaking. The history clearly reveals the enthusiasm of the people regarding cinema, the rise of many talented artists and relationship between politics and cinema.

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 has been widely discussed. It is believed that arts, media and literatures have played a vital role in the dynamics of culture.\(^2\) Hence, for years, debates arise if Tamil cinema reflects Tamil culture or Tamil cinema makes impact on Tamil culture. Although Tamil cinema appeals to the sentiments of Tamil culture, one is yet to be scientifically sure if Tamil cinema reflects, promotes, or degrades Tamil society. Such scientific search with future orientation will be meaningful for the betterment of Tamil society and Tamil cinema. Moreover, film study has become a part of cultural studies, investigating the form and meaning of social relationships as manifested in the text of films. The study of film possesses significance only when it is drawn back into the general arena of culture and ideology.\(^3\)

\(^1\) “...Tamil film makers fought boldly and used the powerful medium to project and propagate the freedom movement against the tyrannical censoring system by subtly hoodwinking the British.” Guy, Randor. “The Freedom Movement though Tamil Cinema”, Galatta cinema, August, 2007, p.81.

\(^2\) “The “communication industry” also includes what has come to be called the “cultural industry”, meaning that it produces or transmits cultural products or cultural and artistic works by industrial techniques.” MacBride, Sean. Many Voices, One World, UNESCO, Oxford & IBH Co., New Delhi, 1982, p. 98.

Declaration of classical status to Tamil language in 2004 by the Indian government is considered a milestone in the cultural history of Tamils. This declaration is an additional impetus to study the relationship between Tamil cinema, Tamil culture and Tamil society with future orientation. Although there is a wide range of possibilities to understand this link, this research attempts to study ‘recurrent cultural themes in Tamil cinema and their impact on Tamil society’ under the discipline of Futures Studies.

1. **Need of the Study**

   The history of Tamil cinema starts in 1916 with the production of silent movies and the era of talkie cinema dawned in 1931 with the film *Kaalidaas*. In 2006, the industry celebrated 75 years of Tamil talkie cinema. Now, nearing 2011, it has a history of 80 years. The film industry is still flourishing in terms of huge investment, production and wide reach out. In this context, Tamil cinema deserves a study with a future orientation.

   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 beneath these phrases in its thematic construction. Though researches have been conducted on Tamil cinema from cultural perspective, they have largely focused on some cultural elements of Tamil cinema. Moreover, no significant study has been made on collective cultural themes of Tamil cinema from futuristic perspective. ‘The impact of Tamil cinema on Tamil society’ has been a popular topic for debate and research. Consequently, there is an impression that
relationship between Tamil cinema and the audiences remains at the level of cause and effect, 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.

Based on these needs, this research attempts to study recurrent cultural themes in Tamil cinema and their impact on Tamil society with a future orientation.

2. **Period of the Study**

This research treats only the period of talkie cinema that began in 1931. Although complete list of films from 1931 was collected, some films in the first five years of talkie cinema were not available and some are poor in audio-visual quality for reasonable study. Hence, the actual period of study begins from 1936.

From 1936 to 2005, totally the period of seventy years was divided into seven decades. In order to give a link between 2005 and forthcoming futures, the period of recent years (2006 to 2009) has been added to the study during the process of research. The coming decade (2011 to 2020) will be the period for future predictions.

3. **Scope of the Study and Explanation of Key Terms**

The research aims at study of cultural themes of Tamil cinema and their recurrence, impacts, and futures. Hence, cultural themes of Tamil cinema will be the focus of the researcher. This focus will be supplemented with various angles including the perspectives of culture, sociology, film medium, impact study, Futures studies, and related sciences. The study includes the exploration of the
researcher and the experiences and perceptions of the audiences and the filmmakers.

In broader sense, the phrase ‘Tamil cinema’ includes feature films, documentary films, and short films made in Tamil language. However, this study confines itself to Tamil feature films made in Chennai-based film industry.

There are films produced elsewhere in other languages, dubbed in Tamil and released in Tamil Nadu. This study limits itself to direct Tamil films.

The term ‘recurrent’ is the adjective of ‘recurrence’ to mean something that re-occurs or occurs repeatedly. The study of recurrence will also observe its related or opposing terms like ‘rarely occurring’ or ‘non-recurrent’ or ‘inconstant’ elements for deeper understanding of the subject.

‘Tamil society’ broadly means ‘Tamil people are all over the world’. However, Tamil Nadu is the age old home or native country of Tamil society and Tamil culture. Chennai, the capital of Tamil film industry, is situated in it. People in Tamil Nadu have been the immediate audiences of Tamil cinema. The history of Tamil cinema is inseparable from the history of Tamil Nadu. Keeping these significances in mind and being aware of the fact that there are non-Tamils in the film industry and Tamil Nadu, this study treats ‘Tamil society’ as ‘people in Tamil Nadu’.

In common practice, the term ‘impact’ is frequently used synonymously with ‘effect’ and ‘influence’. However, ‘its connotative meaning points to an effect or influence that is deep and long lasting’.

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In this research, the phrase ‘filmmakers’ means the persons responsible for or persons involved in the process of filmmaking.

4. **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.

5. **Objectives**

The research had four objectives for study. They were:

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
6. **Sources of Data**

6.1 **Primary Sources**

Selected Tamil films, in-depth interviews with select filmmakers and audiences, and brainstorming session with the select audience are the primary sources of the data. Of these, Tamil films are treated as any other literary text for the purpose of analysis and interpretation.

6.2 **Secondary Sources**

Books, published doctoral theses, unpublished doctoral theses, magazines, journals, newspapers and websites are the secondary sources of the data.

7. **Methodology**

This research is basically exploratory and multidisciplinary interconnecting wide range of disciplines like Futures Studies, culture, film studies, sociology, anthropology and political science. For in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation\(^5\) and identifying trends over long periods\(^6\), this research chiefly employs qualitative content analysis. However, in some places quantitative data are added in the footnotes to supplement the analysis.

7.1 **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to experimentally collect data from films and apply the method of qualitative content analysis. The results set the direction to collect data and helped in applying systematic approach of qualitative content analysis on sample films.

\(^5\) “Qualitative techniques can increase a researcher’s depth of understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.” Wimmer, Roger D. Mass Media Research, Wadsworth, Thomsan Learning, Singapore, 2003, p.47.

\(^6\) “One of the advantages of content analysis is its potential to identify trends over long periods of time.” Ibid., p.141.
Another pilot study was conducted for in-depth interview and brainstorming session to study the impact and futures. Based on the results of the study, a questionnaire was prepared for in-depth interview and brainstorming session with the sample persons.

7.2 Sampling

For the selection of sample films, the method of stratified random sampling was applied. Confirming from various sources, the total number of direct Tamil films released with the certificate from the Board of Film Certification during the period of 1936 to 2005 is 4,296. This period was divided into seven decades. Two percent of films in each decade, making 85 films in number were selected for study. In the recent period of time (2006 to 2009), totally 389 films were released. Of these, two percent of films making 8 films in number were added. Thus, totally 93 films were selected for the study.

For the selection of filmmakers and audience for in-depth interviews and audience for brainstorming session, purposive sampling was used. Thus, 14 persons, representing filmmakers and audiences were selected for in-depth interview. Representing various sectors of audiences, 12 persons were selected for brainstorming session and scenario building.

7.3 Collection of Data

Collecting data from films was done in several steps. Firstly, compact discs and digital video discs of films were collected and viewed. If films are not available in this format, the researcher watched the films in theatres. Secondly, after watching the movies for the first time, a detailed story outline was written for
each film. Thirdly, while watching the same movies for the second time, the researcher took necessary notes of striking content and theme. Fourthly, the written story outline and the notes were used for data collection. Fifthly, based on need, certain scenes in the discs were replayed for confirmation and comparison.

Based on the questionnaire, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews. The interviews were recorded in audio and written formats. With the help of a moderator and the questionnaire, brainstorming session was conducted. The session was recorded both in audio and written formats.

7.4 Analysis of Data

Qualitative content analysis with multidisciplinary approach was used to analyse the data. As the data were being analysed, the researcher prepared the notes for explaining them. 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.

8. Limitations of the Research

This study treats Tamil culture in relation to Tamil cinema. In this process, certain elements of Tamil culture may have similarity, relation and overlapping with other cultures too.

The period of study of films begins in 1936 and ends in 2009 in the first phase. In the second phase of futuristic approach, the period of 2011 to 2021 is projected. Hence, the year 2010 is inevitably left out, as it has been taken for synthesizing and presentation of thesis.
To increase the level of objectivity, some supportive quantitative data are mentioned in the footnotes. However, subjectivity of interpretation to some extent is inevitable in the process of qualitative analysis, in the sense that the researcher is involved in the process as a main investigator.

In order to decrease the degree of bias and non-generalization, efforts have been taken in in-depth interviews and group brainstorming session to rely on variety and multiple sources of information to provide as complete a picture as possible. However, the researcher is aware that these methodologies are not exhaustive.

The dearth of literature on ‘Futures Studies related to Tamil cinema’ is a limitation to be noted.

9. **Chapterization**

This thesis consists of five chapters excluding introduction, survey of literature, and conclusion. The first chapter introduces the Tamil cultural elements as a foundation for cultural themes to be applied for the study of Tamil cinema. The second chapter links cultural elements and themes, and presents the data and observations on cultural themes treated in Tamil cinema, particularly focusing thematic unity, thematic binary continuum and thematic significances. The third chapter analyses the dynamics and manifestations of recurrence in the treatment of cultural themes. The fourth chapter studies and analyses the impact of recurrent cultural themes of Tamil cinema on Tamil society and establishes the relationship between Tamil cinema and Tamil society. The fifth chapter presents and interprets the data related to future directions of recurrent cultural themes and their impact on Tamil society, and proposes various future scenarios.