CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATUS OF ECOLOGY IN INDIA

India, renowned for its richness in flora and fauna and also home to myriad cultures, is in the midst of an ecological crisis. The declining status of ecology is a growing concern in India. With a record of being the second most populated nation in the world with over 1.2 billion people, and with the status of the fourth largest economy in the world (World Bank 2012), India’s ecological concerns are overshadowed by its development priorities. For a nation whose civilization was founded and deeply rooted in eco-centric ideologies, this transformation to anthropocentric ideals is having a devastating effect on the natural ecosystem.

In the state of Tamil Nadu, situated in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent, the situation is not any different. Tamil Nadu’s development agenda over the years, characterized by industrialization and urbanization, has resulted in the state becoming a pioneer in the nation, in terms of social mobility and economic empowerment of its people. But in terms of environment, the state has suffered devastating and immeasurable destruction of its ecology and biodiversity, a cost it pays for its developmental achievements. With a population of 72.1 million, and record of being one of the fastest developing states in India, Tamil Nadu, in the words of Gadgil & Guha (2013), is actually “eating at an accelerated rate, into capital stock of renewable resources of soil, water, plant and animal life”.

Historically, societies in India were shaped by their natural environment and environmental sustainability was the way of life. Land and people were interdependent and their lives were intertwined with nature (Davidson 2012). The balancing acts of the ecosystem were done through religious rituals, traditions, culture and customs. Ecological conservation and oneness with nature were the essence of the religions which had its origin in India like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. This bio-centric or eco-centric belief systems that promotes the ideology that “nature should be preserved and protected for its intrinsic value instead of any utilitarian value” (Curry 2006), enabled conservation of natural environment and also prevented conflicts arising out of sharing natural resources.

There was a fundamental change in eco-centric ideology, with the arrival of the European colonizers who attached monetary value to nature and natural resources. From being bio-centric with deep ecological values, the nation had slowly shifted to anthropocentricity. The post-independence era also witnessed the state prioritizing its development and modernization agenda which again reiterated the anthropocentricity view “that man is the paragon among all organisms and the only one that merits serious attention” (White 1967).

As a consequence of this widespread and indiscriminate use of natural resources and abuse of ecosystems over the past decades, the state of Tamil Nadu, like the rest of the nation, is awakening to a host of ecological problems. Degradation of environment and natural resources has had its impact on socio, economic, political, cultural and even health aspects of life in India. According to the “National Environmental Policy Report of 2006”, prepared by the Government of India, “Environmental degradation is also a major causal factor in enhancing and perpetuating poverty, particularly among the rural poor, when such degradation impacts soil fertility, quantity and
quality of water, air quality, forests, wildlife and fisheries”. India is home to one third of the world's poorest, says World Bank, i.e. one in three of the world's poorest people are living in India, the world's second-fastest growing economy (Nelson 2013). The priorities of India’s poor population of 354 million is food, shelter and clothing (Times 2012). The poor are the most vulnerable group of people and will take up any employment, even if it is in a hazardous polluting industry, to feed their hungry family, rather than getting the factory shut down for environmental violations.

The traditional ecological ethical value system attached to Indians is no match when it comes to battling hunger, disease and oppression every day. This doesn’t automatically qualify India’s economically better privileged classes as conscious about ecology and environment.

Reasons for the sorry state of environmental affairs can be attributed to systematic loss of the traditional ecological knowledge, values and ethics, lack of awareness and lack of sufficient initiatives to promote sustainable development, and institutional failure in the enforcement of environmental protection laws.

1.1.1 Impact of Development on Ecology in India

With globalization, historic changes are unfolding and unleashing a host of new environmental challenges. The country is in the midst of a massive wave of urbanization as some 10 million people move to towns and cities each year in search of jobs and opportunity - the largest rural-urban migration of this century (World Bank 2012). A December 2012 report of the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR) — a part of the Indian Planning Commission — puts it this way: “India is losing 2000 farmers every day to services and industry”. It speaks of “an absolute shift in workers from agriculture of 15 million to services and industry” (Sainath 2013).
According to environmental activist Vandana Shiva, land is life which supports the livelihood of peasants and indigenous people across the Third world nations. With globalization, land is viewed as an important asset and a valuable commodity, an essential resource needed for industrial processes like mining, laying roads and highways, for setting up new townships, for biofuel plantations and so on. For sixty five percent of the Indian population whose livelihood is based on agriculture depend on land. Conflicts arise when land is taken away from them for development projects.

In modern India, a construction of dam means relocation of the people from their land which they had inhabited for generations. Apart from the loss of ecology and the disturbance of biodiversity due to the construction of dam, this mass migration of people to cities means loss of wealth of traditional knowledge systems which had so far safeguarded the ecology of this land. “It is an acknowledged fact that much of world's biodiversity has been in the hands of the traditional people, societies of hunters and gatherers, herders, fishers, agriculturalists for a great many generations. Traditional knowledge systems have been the main means by which societies have managed natural resources” (Berkes et al. 1995).

The erosion of traditional knowledge and practices meant dependency on and dominance of western scientific knowledge system which might not in most cases be suitable to indigenous conditions. A classic example of this inequitable and irreversible blunder is the “Green revolution” in India, which unlike traditional knowledge systems was based not on cooperation with nature, but on conquest, which meant use of fertilizers and pesticides, thus making the farmers not self-reliant but dependent on exogenous aid agencies and multinational companies (Shiva 1991). In traditional farming communities, seeds are never sold or bought for money, seeds are often donated or given as assistance to fellow farmers in need, who
will return the seeds multifold after harvest to the donor. It is a system evolved to support the farming communities at times of distress and a successful system of interdependence among farming communities, making them self-reliant and self-sufficient. But, this system is replaced today by multinational companies selling seeds at a premium cost, burdening the already distressed farmers. Commodification and corporatization of seeds meant farmers today are not self-reliant and self-sufficient.

Health experts also attribute the change in traditional seeds and methods of cropping as a major cause of dietary diseases among Indians. The monocropping methods, introduced during green revolution, meant that the traditional food grains like cereals and millets were replaced with rice and wheat. The replacement of cereals and millets by hybrid rice in the diet by Indians over the years meant that today India is in race with China to become the diabetic capital of the world (Chakrabarty 2012).

“Globalization economics has attached a monetary value to everything under the sky like land and water, plants and genes, microbes and mammals” (Shiva et al 2001). So nature has evolved from being a brute matter to a natural resource with commercial value. Thus, the value of nature depended on its ability to feed the insatiable appetite of the development machine. Modern science replaced the traditional values on nature and provided the rationality, competence and power to exploit nature for its monetary value, thus revealing its colonizing mentality over nature (Melkote & Steeves 2001).

1.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING ECOLOGICAL IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE

Indian nation has always been in a transitory phase, undergoing constant change in terms of foreign conquests, colonization, modernization,
liberalisation and globalization. With the erosion of traditional ecological beliefs, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the people of the Indian subcontinent to live up to the inheritance of this great civilization. The reasons for this erosion of environmental consciousness among all classes of people can be attributed to few events in history of the Indian nation in transition.

1.2.1 Disconnection with Land

According to D'Souza (2010), “for people, land is the umbilical cord that ties them to this world. Cutting it means certain death. This belief has been influential for people all over the world to defend their land, non-violently if possible, violently if necessary, because land is life itself. A civilization is what defines people’s place in the world, provides people with their conceptual resources, their languages, forms their relationship to their natural environment, and helps people to locate themselves in society and to make sense of the world they live in” (D'souza 2010).

With independence from colonial rule and adoption of modern democratic system in India, the concept of citizenship evolves. Citizenship, in contrast, is a relationship of individuals to the state which is an institution, a constitutional order that oversees a range of economic and political institutions. Clearly, this form of governance has discharged people from their affinity towards land, as in a capitalist economy, the state looks at land as a commodity, prompting industries even if it means confiscation of lands, resources and labour of its citizens (D'souza 2010).

Apart from the forced relocations, there are also great many people who migrate to cities willingly, seeking employment and better quality of life. Education also leads to mass migration of people away from the land. The rise in educational institutions, especially professional courses, means that the newly educated class do not want to go back to their villages or their
communities and they aspire to achieve success in the modernized world. So, both the educated and uneducated move to the cities and are left to fend for themselves under the vagaries of global markets (D'souza 2010).

1.2.2 Loss of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Loss of land and displacement of people also means loss of their culture, tradition, language, religion and Traditional Ecological knowledge (TEK). Customarily, ecological knowledge is incorporated with tradition, culture and religion, and is communicated through oral tradition or performing arts from one generation to another. Like science, TEK is also based on direct experiences, experimentations and observations in nature through history by elders in communities and handed down through generations by cultural transmission (Eyssartier et al. 2008).

Interweaving of ecological concepts in religion was another approach handled by religious, spiritual and community leaders to schematize the usage of natural resources and to instill a sense of conservationism among people. Following the rules laid down by their ancestors, and practicing the traditions prevented the destruction of nature. The Bishnoi community in India is an exemplary example for practicing nature conservationism through religion. The Bishnoi community practice a religion called Bishnoism. The community lives in the north Indian state of Rajasthan, right in the Thar desert. For the Bishnois, it is religiously compulsory “not to cut trees” and to “be compassionate to all living beings”. Inspite of living in very harsh conditions, the Bishnois follow these principles and live in harmony with trees and wildlife. So herds of deers, black bucks, chinkaras and birds freely roam the villages. Bishnoi women are known even to breast feed orphaned deer calves to save its life.
In the year 1730, people from the community led by women are known to have sacrificed their lives to save the trees from being chopped by army men who wanted the wood for building a new palace for a king. The sacrifice of their lives in order to save the trees has been recognized and respected historically that even in today’s modern India, the government has declared Bishnois forest as reserved forest where hunting and chopping of trees are banned and will invite severe punishment (Bishnoi 2010).

Even in Hinduism, the religion practiced and followed by a majority of the population in India, worshipping nature is a vital part of the Hindu belief system. Everything in nature is considered sacred and protecting nature is a fundamental principle laid down in Hindu scriptures. A disconnect with their land means parting with the natural surroundings, neglect of rituals and practices associated with the land and taking up newer ideologies in the urban environment.

1.2.3 Shift of Focus in Formal Education System

The third reason is the introduction of English education during the beginning of the 19th century, based not on the needs of the Indian nation but that of the colonizers. For millions of Indians, the education introduced by the British and the missionaries was a blessing and only way of redemption from the miserable, stigmatized and discriminated lives they were leading in a caste and class stratified society. In ancient India, not everyone had access to education. The society practiced a discriminatory caste system, where only certain castes were given access to education. The Webster Dictionary defines caste system as a system of rigid social stratification, characterized by hereditary status, endogamy and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion.
English education, introduced during the colonial era, meant education became free for all. Though the benefits of the British education system are innumerable to Indians, on the other side, this education system lacked in the spirit of enquiry and instilled among its students an ideology that anything indigenous is of inferior value. Infact, when Lord Macaulay introduced English education, it was with an aim to create manpower for the colonial government who would adopt British culture and tradition and be loyal to the British rulers. Lord Macaulay had this trust in the Filtration theory that educating the rich would mean that the mass would also follow suit and become loyal to the British (Sharma & Sharma 2004). The British allotted very little money for educating the people of India during the colonial regime, this meant that very little was done in terms of research to find an apt education system for Indians. This led to a colossal damage in terms of denigrating Indian knowledge systems as inferior, superstitious, low cultured and lacking scientific basis. Hence, an entire wealth of knowledge on nature and environment were lost in this melee of adapting to a western education system.

In the post-independence Indian context, one can attribute this general lack of awareness on environment to the lack of formal education in environment in both schools and higher educational institutions. Inspite of the Supreme Court of India issuing directions in 1991 and again in 2003 to all educational institutions to impart environmental education in all academic institutions, the absence of proper resource materials, textbooks and trained teachers in the area of environment education makes it very difficult to implement this direction in its full meaning.

1.2.4 Replacement of Traditional Art Forms by Mass Media

Fourthly, the replacement of indigenous traditional art forms by mass media added to the woes of the already suppressed and forgotten
indigenous ecological belief systems and practices. Indigenous communication includes the transmission of entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements and social exchanges of every type. These traditional modes of communication includes street theatre, puppet shows, dance, songs, storytelling, poetry, debates, proverbs, religious rituals, festivals and gatherings, parades, initiation rites, art, stone carving, palm leaf writings etc., (Mundy & Compton 1991).

Even though, today mass media has replaced folk media, mass media with its limited range is no way comparable to these indigenous methods of reaching out to people. Folk arts are considered by experts as an efficient mode of communication in this globalized era to reach the masses in India. “Indian society is a complex social system made up of different castes, classes, creeds and tribes. As mass media has this peculiar feature of compartmentalization and churning out content to the urban masses, it never is an appropriate medium for the complex Indian society. Since folk communication have sociological roots, their relevance and impact is much greater when it comes to education and initiating social change” (Mason & Torres 2008).

Mason et el (2008) states that, “Indian folk performance is a composite art, that fuses elements from music, dance, pantomimes, versification, spic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, religious and festival peasantry. It has deep religious and ritualistic overtones and can also be used to project social life, secular themes and universal values”.

But these diverse indigenous communication channels are slowly facing extinction due to the onslaught of television. For example in Tamil Nadu, the state government had given free television sets to its people. Hence instead of watching these traditional forms of art, villagers all over Tamil Nadu are glued to television sets to watch soaps (Frontline Magazine 2013).
Television and cinema has become the new age story tellers, ripping people away from their real existence and real issues and into a distant dream world. Mass media especially television and cinema has opiated the masses in India, by making them live in a dream world.

The displacement and movement of people voluntarily and forcefully, the disconnect with land and erosion of traditional ecological knowledge, industrialization, introduction of English education system, the replacement of traditional communication forms by modern media has had its impact on the ecological consciousness of the people.

1.2.5 Role of Media in Ecological Conservation and Sustainable Development

It is a well-known fact that faced with increasing anthropocentric activities, ecosystems are depleting at a rapid rate. It’s important to identify the various ways through which humans will eliminate systematically all natural resource draining and pollution triggering practices of development. Involving in sustainable and environmental friendly practices is crucial for the survival of this planet earth. Decision makers in governments, environmentalists and researchers worldwide have acknowledged that out of the many ways to promote ecological conservation and sustainable development, the most important and strategic part rests with the media.

Media’s role is crucial in creating public awareness and shaping people’s attitude in favour of sustainable development. With media replacing other forms of traditional communication in today’s world, it plays a very crucial role in creating an ecological conscious citizenry. Media is the modern story teller and performs the task of elders and leaders in the communities, who were earlier entrusted with the responsibility of handing down moral values and tradition through the art of storytelling. Today mass media like
television and cinema tell the stories, replacing the crucial role of elders and leaders in both family set up and in communities.

Media’s role in environmental education has received emphasis at a global level as media is perceived as a source of “informal education” (UNESCO & UNEP 2005). The media can play a strategic part in both raising the environmental understanding and awareness at global and local levels. Media role is crucial for exposing environmental abuses like water pollution, exploitative real estate projects, deforestation and extinction of species. A strong news media can enable debates, spread knowledge and help citizens to hold decision makers to account and influence policies (Panos London 2008). Hence, journalists are not only considered as ‘public educators’, but also ‘social engineers’ who can effectively help to transform the values and ethics of society (Friedman & Friedman 1989). Mass media can inform the general public and help the audiences understand what is at stake and how to act. So, the adoption of sustainable development for the planet’s survival rests as much on media as it does on national leaders.

But in reality, what is the actual relationship between environment and media? Is media contributing to awakening the environmental consciousness and promoting sustainable development or is it the real cause for much of the anthropocentric activities?

Media researchers around the globe will agree that contrary to the promotion of environmental consciousness, media actually is responsible for the promotion of anthropocentric activities. A classic example would be the promotion of consumerist culture as media depends on advertising for its sustenance and profit. Also, there is general lack of understanding of environmental issues by the various stakeholders involved in media. For
example, a majority of news stories on environment are not issue based, but event based reporting.

According to the report “Whatever Weather” – Panos 2008, “Media attitudes to reporting climate change”, the following are considered to be the lacuna among news media professionals in reporting environment, especially on Climate Change issues: lack of in-depth knowledge or understanding of environmental issues by journalists and editors; lack of interest from or motivation by journalists; lack of specialized training for reporters; limited access to information for reporters; reporters consider environmental issues to be boring and lacking news value; scientists fail to simplify the language of research and finally that journalists do not understand the jargons used by scientists. To sum it, very few media practitioners have the interest, relevant training and understanding to cover environment issues. Despite the problems faced by various stakeholders in media in covering environmental stories, media in India has been churning out environmental stories, both factual and fictional, and these do have an impact on the environmental ideologies of the masses.

For example, in Tamil Nadu, a film on “human-elephant” conflict was released titled “Kumki” in 2012. The film, a romantic tragedy, is based on a romantic affair between a mahout and the daughter of a tribal chieftain set in the backdrop of a conflict between elephants and humans. Shot in picturesque mountains and valleys, the visuals of the natural setting with the elephant in the background awed the audiences. Not only was the film a phenomenal hit commercially, it also raised the ecological consciousness of the audience on man-animal conflict.
The film gave an insight into the plight of the villagers living near forests, who on an everyday basis have to deal with wild elephants killing villagers and ravaging their crops. The film also informed the audience about the traditional ways employed by villagers to counter this menace. The concept of using “Kumki”, a trained elephant to chase wild elephants back into the forests, has been in vogue for ages in Tamil Nadu, but this concept was not known to the general public. Inspite of the sporadic news reports on television and newspapers of wild elephants killing people and forest officers chasing wild elephants back into forests using ‘Kumki’ elephants, the general public was unaware of this concept. What news media or educational or knowledge based programs couldn’t do over ages, a commercial Tamil film with its fictional narrative did it in a month’s time, and such is the impact and reach of cinema in Tamil Nadu.

Julia Corbett, in her book “Communicating Nature”, states that “environmental messages are crafted from a perspective, informed by a worldview, reference personal relationships and experiences, and are used to justify words and actions” (Corbett  2006). The ideologies one receives from literature, education, film, news media, advertising and pop culture about the natural world shapes our attitude and behavior towards environment. So it is important to explore the particular mass media that is transmitting environmental messages and shaping environmental ideologies in society today.

1.3 CINEMA IN INDIA

In today’s world, media, with its tremendous reach regionally and globally, is considered the chief architect of public opinion. The media is inescapable and helps us to shape our identities and attitudes towards
everything in life. Living in a world without mass media is unimaginable. The innumerable media like books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, films, internet and computers occupy a central role in our lives, providing continuous and rapidly expanding flow of information and leisure. Print media requires moderate literacy, radio today is called background medium, and computers also need both language and computer literacy. But both television and cinema, on the other hand, require neither literacy nor technical skills and hence is considered the most popular media in a country like India where a sizeable percentage of the population is illiterate. Due to its visual nature, both television and cinema bring to life happenings from around the world to the audience. But viewing of television too needs an investment in a television set and electricity facilities in homes. In India, cinema is one medium which has transcended all these limitations of other media in terms of ease of access. Cinema, one of the oldest medium in India, is also considered to be the most popular medium.

1.3.1 The Popularity of Cinema in India

“Cinema in India is like brushing your teeth in the morning, You can’t escape it”

- Sharukh Khan, Famous Indian Actor

True to this quote, cinema in India is omnipresent. The film culture is all pervasive, its manifestations seen in every aspect of an average Indian’s life. The cinematic culture is part and parcel of everyday life throughout India. In India, one cannot miss the flamboyant 60 feet film cut outs and banners which stand out in all major traffic intersections and the colorful film posters which adorn walls of streets. Cinema is also part of all celebrations in India, with playing popular songs from Indian films and dancing to its tunes
being an unwritten tradition. Even funerals have their own share of cinema, with the band playing sad tunes from films. One cannot miss the film songs even on a visit to temples as along with the chanting of mantras there are these religion based film songs blaring.

Fan clubs of stars have built shrines for their actors and worship them. Film stars also turn into politicians and have successfully won elections. Cinema in India has added much spice to the socio-cultural, political and economic milieu. The three “c” theory put forth by a famous artist proclaims that India breathes three “C” that is; Cinema, Cricket and Curry (Sabih & Cheng 2010). Cinema is also the major content provider to all other mass media like television, radio and magazines in India. Film based content in other media are often the bestsellers in India. So, the Indian way of life subsists on the mass culture created by this century-old mass media – CINEMA.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, the film industry in India is the largest producer of films in the world, with around 1000 feature films in more than 20 languages to its credit every year. With 3.3 billion tickets sold annually, India also has the highest number of theater admissions (Young 2011). A whopping 23 million people, which possibly is the population of many established film making nations, go to the cinema every day in India (Rajadhyaksha 2008). Inspite of the onslaught of cable and satellite TV in India, the hegemony of film as the primary medium of entertainment is unshaken and till date unbeatable. Films provide content for all other media in India, as films are a major chunk of fillers for 24 hour entertainment channels.
“Cinema remains the cultural dominant of India, a realm of mass cultures through which all political struggle must necessarily pass” (Mishra 2002). Indian obsession with films and its stars has no boundaries. An average Indian would even forgo his food, but not his favorite star’s film. In a nation where the poor go hungry to bed and millions struggle to get just one square meal a day, the banners of film stars are showered with milk and thousands of coconuts smashed in front of theatres (a ritual done to deities in Hindu temples as a mark of worship) on a release of their favorite hero’s film. It’s not only the poor who are obsessed with cinema, but every class of people rich, poor, educated, illiterate, youth, children and the aged, almost everyone in India loves cinema and their stars.

1.4 CINEMA IN TAMIL NADU

Cinema has very deep influence and impact on every aspect of life of the people in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Theodore Baskaran, a film historian and author of several books on Tamil cinema, points out that over its years of existence, Tamil cinema has grown to become the most domineering influence in the cultural and political life of Tamil Nadu (Baskaran 2009). Socially, narratives in cinema have effectively erased the practice of untouchability, caste consciousness, religious supremacy and economic dominance in Tamil society. Politically, five Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu were actively involved in Tamil cinema, either as writers or as actors.

Cinema is the dominant content provider for other media like television, radio, magazines and Internet. Rather than as a competitor, television in Tamil Nadu is considered to be the apt medium to promote the films in terms of film trailers, interviews of actors, and a means of business wherein the rights of the films is first sold to the television stations even before theatrical releases. Tamil Nadu is the only state in the world where the government had distributed television sets free of cost to the people. Cinema
forms the major content of television in Tamil Nadu and television has become a medium which brings cinema directly into the homes of people in Tamil Nadu. Jesudoss (2009), in his article “Tamil Cinema”, notes that cinema has become a part and parcel of the life of Tamilians and television, known as small screen, lives at the mercy of cinema in terms of content and entertainment quotient and it still remains a poor substitute to cinema.

1.4.1 Cinema and Social Change in Tamil Nadu

Myths, legends and folk tales based on heroic deeds of individuals, whose stories were popularized through the traditional media, were long considered as a role model for generations to imbibe values and morals. Today, cinema has replaced the traditional real life idols of myths, legends and history; an average film goer looks forward to inspiration and imbibes the values of film stars. For millions of Indians who watch cinema, they look at the stars for inspiration, and emulate the stars’ actions.

1.4.1.1 Smoking on screen

Imitating or following the film stars has its own advantages and disadvantages. There are numerous studies to prove that cinema in fact has very strong influence on the attitudes and behavior of youth in the society. In the state of Tamil Nadu, at a point of time, smoking cigarettes on screen was considered a style quotient enhancer for heroes and hence every film had the hero smoking in almost all important scenes. Actor Rajnikanth, who is worshipped by fans in Tamil Nadu, is known for his stylish flipping of cigarette in his mouth, an act imitated by youth across the state. As the WHO document “Smoke-Free Films: From Evidence to Action” indicates “Imagery emanating from motion pictures continues to provide misleadingly positive impressions of tobacco use. These images have now been identified as a risk factor for smoking initiation among adolescents.” A campaign was started by
the government to stop glorifying and smoking on screen as statistics showed that 52 per cent of children have their first puff because of film celebrities. This incident clearly denotes the way cinema impacts the society and after the government’s insistence, Rajnikanth in his latest films flips chewing gum instead of cigarettes (Kannan & Srinivasan 2010).

1.4.1.2 Transgender Issue in Tamil Cinema

Cinema is a powerful tool which can be potentially used to either promote a new culture or can challenge existing cultural beliefs and norms, which is evident from the example of portrayal of transgender community in Tamil cinema. Transgender community is a stigmatized and socially discriminated community in Tamil Nadu. Tamil cinema too, as a reflection of current beliefs and practices of the society, did not show them in good light and made a mockery of them on screen. The transgender community communicated their feelings in the form of appeals to film makers to stop the demeaning portrayal of them as mere sex objects intended to be mocked and teased.

Understanding and respecting their sentiments as fellow human beings struggling to get out of their ostracized situation, Tamil film makers started depicting transgenders in important positive roles, sometimes even as central characters in films like “Kanchana”, “Thenavettu”, “Nan Kadavul” and so on. This led to a sea change in the perception of the Tamil audience towards the transgender community. Today as transgenders are taking up respectable professions and jobs, the stigma attached to their gender is slowly vanishing and Tamil society has accepted them as they are, even though Tamil Nadu is still considered a conservative society where even discussing about a transgender was a taboo some time ago.
Cinema can be used as a powerful medium to initiate social change. In Tamil Nadu, the culture of learning through audiovisual images is an ancient one and they learn more by watching and imitating. This “culture of gaze” has given cinema a prominent place in society till today (Sivakumar 2003) (Jesudoss 2009).

1.5 NEED FOR THE STUDY

As Tamil Nadu moves forward with its development agenda, history, culture, religion, and literature are waning to influence and impress upon the ecological ideals of its citizens, thus passing on the huge responsibility of reinstalling the values of ecological conservation and sustainable development to media. The most popular, influential and all pervasive mass medium in Tamil Nadu is cinema.

The popularity of cinema in Tamil Nadu can be attributed to the unique characteristics of the medium of cinema (a) the escapist nature of films, (b) literacy not being a prerequisite for watching a film, (c) consumption of cinema not requiring a huge capital investment like purchase of a television set or radio, but anyone who can afford a ticket could go and watch a film.

Tamil cinema promotes the identity of Tamilians and it doesn’t stop with entertainment alone. The themes handled by Tamil cinema are often based on social issues like caste discrimination, corruption, illiteracy, droughts, man-animal conflict, water conflicts, violence against women, care of elderly, to name a few. For its viewers, this plethora of themes serves as a source of information about what’s happening locally, regionally and globally.
Tamil cinema narratives are complex and multi-dimensional in structure and unlike other mass media has layers of meanings super imposed on every action it portrays on screen. The subjects addressed by Tamil cinema are based on the Tamil society, its people and culture. Being a product meant for commercial use, the filmmakers handle subjects that are largely acceptable to a mass audience” (Velayutham 2008).

Cinema as an art form is actually a representative of the social, political, economic and cultural life of a nation, where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected” (Chakravarty 1993). Also, the medium of Tamil cinema, with its mass appeal and reach, has the potential to promote a new culture or challenge existing social, cultural and political beliefs and norms.

Ecological issues like man-animal conflict, deforestation, pollution and water scarcity too have formed the crux of narratives in many Tamil films since the beginnings of Tamil cinema. The ecological ideologies and discourses in these films become the lens through which the audience perceive and shape their views on ecological issues. “Representation of nature in popular cinema creates a lasting image of reality that shapes our ecological attitudes and beliefs” (Oppermann 1999). The mediated messages “shapes our perceptions of nature, perceptions that in turn inform and pattern our actions in relation to nature; our actions, in turn, shape nature by preserving ecosystems or by despoiling them” (Maricondi 2010).

Cubitt (2005), in his book ‘Eco media’, states that “one can understand current ecological politics by studying popular mediations of bio-security, anthropomorphism, environmental ethics, over-exploitation of resources, eco-terrorism, genetic modification and global climate change. Popular media think aloud and in public about who we are, where we are
going, and what debts we owe to the world we live in”. Contrary to belief that media distorts the truth or shuts down relationships between us and our environment, Cubitt argues that popular media is integral in sustaining the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Films that won commercial success can be a valuable source for study and are “a potential source of information about the shared, collective concerns of the group to which these films appeal” (Monaco 1976). How directors handle the concept of ecology and nature in their filmic discourses certainly has a big impact on the environmental ideologies and beliefs of viewers. As film medium has a major influence on the people of Tamil Nadu, a state which has undergone major ecological stress, it is imperative to study the ecological discourses in the popular medium of cinema.

The relationship between cinema and ecology is well researched and documented in the West. But, there are no studies on how Indian or Tamil cinema in particular, approached the theme of nature and environment. This study aims to examine and understand the representation of nature and ecological issues in popular Tamil films and analyse the relationship between humans, nature and cinema.

1.6 AIM

To ecocritically analyze the ecological discourses in Tamil cinema.

1.6.1 Objectives of the Study

- To ecocritically analyze the framing of nature and ecological issues in Tamil films.
To examine the cinematic depiction of social behavior of individuals and groups in response to an ecological crisis.

To analyse the views of Tamil film directors and film scholars on the depiction of ecological issues in Tamil films.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTION

- How are ecological issues framed in Tamil Cinema?
- What is the dominant ecological ideology in Tamil cinema?

1.8 SCHEME OF CHAPTERISATION

- The study comprises of seven chapters.
- The first chapter introduces the topic under study with its aim and objectives.
- The second chapter presents the ‘Review of Literature’. This chapter has studies related to the ecological history of India, the significance of Indian cinema, introduction to Tamil language, culture and cinema, impact of Tamil cinema on society, relationship between cinema and ecology and ecocriticism of films.
- The third chapter explains the theoretical framework and methodology adopted for the study.
- The fourth chapter provides the analysis and interpretations of content analysis done on chosen films in which an
environmental issue is raised explicitly and is central to the narrative.

- The fifth chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of discourse analysis done on the chosen films.

- The sixth chapter presents the interviews of film makers and film scholars. The interviews of film makers present their perceptions on ecology and the challenges faced by them in making ecological issue based films.

- The seventh chapter provides the summary of the findings and the conclusion of the study along with scope for future research.