Chapter IV

Cinema Flashes
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Ever since its inception of ‘The Thina Thanthi’ (TAMIZHAN), prominence has been accorded to films. Films are the only diversion and recreation in a poor country because they come relatively cheap. The watch films, discuss their merits and debate on the performance of the artists could be seen as a popular pastime. Aditanar knew that people would be interested only in news about the things they know, things that have a preference for. So, he decided that film news should be an integral part of ‘The Thina Thanthi’s’ coverage.¹

Indians in general and Tamils in particular are addicted to films. They evince great interest in watching and discussing films. In the decennial report on specialised Magazines, it was noted that film journals outnumber the rest. Out of the 265 film tabloids, published in a variety of languages, English magazines lead with 63, followed by Tamil with 43.²

² Cinema Express, Madras, 6 November 1986, p.4.
Statistically Chennai leads the country in the issuance of the largest number of film magazines, 71. Bombay comes next. Tamil Nadu has the largest number of theaters. Film personalities have a vast following. The admiration and trust film stars evoke from the public is proved by the fact that several film stars have become legislators and two of them in Tamil Nadu alone, M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jeyalalitha have become chief ministers. N.T. Rama Rao, a great thespian of the Telegu Screen, was Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.\(^3\)

Taking cognizance of the immense popularity of films, all newspapers set apart a day for projecting film news on a grand scale. ‘The Thina Thanthi’ issues its weekly supplement (Velli Malar) every Friday and packs it with film news, titbits and reviews. On Tuesdays, a couple a pages are assigned exclusively to film news and allied items. Even on the other days there is news about forth coming films in the form of advertisement. Besides there are special references made to films running for over 50 days or approaching a hundred day run. In the issue dated 16.9.1996, there was an ad. declaring the triumphant march of ‘Kaathal Kottai’.\(^4\) Even in the supplements ‘Muthucharam’ and Youth Supplement, film reviews and titbits are given prominence.


The same applies to ‘Kuduba Malar’. Even on other days, under the
caption ‘Cinema News’, there are film reviews once or twice a week.\(^5\)
At the end of these reviews, a tense one line reference is made about
the film. Questions connected with films are published every Sunday
along with answers, some times by film personalities.\(^6\) There are also
cinema snippets. On Fridays, under the caption ‘Know these V.I.Ps’, a
large number of film personalities, film stars, directors, dance masters,
script writers, technicians and Music masters have been introduced to
the readers.\(^7\) Besides Bio-data, a host of interesting details, connected
with the subjects are also provided. Even though non-film V.I.Ps also
feature in this section, the majority of these V.I.P.’s are film
personalities.\(^8\) In the weekly interviews published on Wednesdays, film
artistes take the readers into confidence about their families, preferences
and aspirations.\(^9\) Also under the title ‘Muthu Chitharal’ (a scatter of
pearls) several film titbits are presented in a succinct manner.\(^10\) In

\(^5\) Ibid., 26, September 1977, p.11.
\(^6\) Ibid., 21, June 1998, p.10.
\(^7\) Ibid., (Velli Malar), Nellai, 9 August 1996, p. II.
\(^8\) Ibid., 12 September 1997, p. II.
\(^10\) Ibid., (Muthu Charram), 30 June 1988, p.9.
anyone of ‘The Thina Thanthi’s’ festival issues, there would be a special feature “Here are my answers”, in which some leading film personality would answer questions from readers.11 ‘The Thina Thanthi’ projects its news spread on films from several perspectives. 1. Film making (shooting) 2. Interviews 3. Reviews 4. Titbits 5. A glimpse into the personal life of artistes. 6. Questions/Answers. 7. Films on view. 8. Films to come.

1. Location Shooting

Whether on floors or on location, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ keeps pace with the film production all the time. It keeps its readers posted with all available information on the progress of shooting. Adding visuals to its reports, often giving the item an arresting title, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ mentions the name of the film and the sequence thereof.12

In the issue dated 10.3.1962, under the caption “A film completed in the shortest time”, there was an article on Sridhar’s “Nenjil oru Alayam”, (A Temple of the Heart) a film shot on one set

11. Ibid., (Depavali Malar), 15 August 1996, p.II.
and completed in 18 days. It is well to remember that this was a jubilee hit.\(^\text{13}\)

In a recent issue (5.10.2001), the ‘Velli Malar’ contained a report on film shooting involving “Shahjehan”, under the captain “Hand in Hand” (Kyeotdu Kye) in which the happenings on the set have been detailed and an appropriate text given underneath the visual. The fictitious events filmed are presented as if they were real life happenings in the case of the artists concerned. For example

1. Conflict between father and son - Sivaji Ganesan’s family - ‘Deiva Magan’\(^\text{14}\)

2. M.G.R.’s concern for the well being of others - The film ‘Idayakani’\(^\text{15}\)

3. Vijay dancing despite injury sustained during shooting - ‘Selva’\(^\text{16}\)

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4. Grand celebration of ‘Vallai Kaapu’ for Charan Raj’s Sister” - Annan Thangachi Pasam”.17

5. Kausalya’s anger against Goddess Amman - ‘Raajakalamam’.18

So realistic in the reportage, it almost appears as if the artistes themselves go through these experiences in real life. It is therefore a great impetus to reading right through. Only after going through the entire report does the reader realise that it was news item on what had happened on the floor. This good humoured hoax is well received by all readers. For instance, the report on Vijay suffering a bleeding accident would have initially caused his fans considerable anxiety but the relief they experience at the end of the report - it was only a sequence shot for ‘Selva’ would more than compensate the early unease of mind. This is a speciality with ‘The Thina Thanthi’. It is the only paper that flashes such reports which creates a make-believe situation out of tinsel simulations.

‘The Thina Thanthi’ incorporates all the juicy titbits spread about actor and actresses whenever opportunity offers itself. For instance, lady artistes are prone to make several statements concerning

their intentions. If in a film something happens to justify or negate such statements, 'The Thina Thanthi' makes use of the film situations either to prove or disprove some of the statements. If an unmarried actress 'gets married' in a film sequence, 'The Thina Thanthi' reports the marriage, mentioning the name of the artiste first, giving the momentary impression that the star was no longer a spinster!

'The Thina Thanthi's' announcements regarding the films under production are typical, flashy, exciting and assertive. In the issues dated 14.1.196, there was an exciting report on the first MGR Starrer 'Anbe Vaa' produced by AVM co-starring Saroja Devi and directed by Thriloka Chandar. This roused great expectations.

Even 'The Thina Thanthi's' titbits on cinema, (Cinema Thunukkugal) can be absorbing. It gave several exciting bits of information regarding M.G.R.'s block buster, 'Ulagam Sutum Vaaliban' and episodes connected with location shooting in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Japan.

There are also reports on film shooting published every Tuesday and in the 'Muthucharam' released on the same day, there are

sundry bits of information about film personalities. For instance, in the issue dated 16.1.1999, there was an item under the caption ‘Thamizhal Innaippu’ (a union facilitated by Tamil) there was a report of Producer, Director Manirathnam and Music Maker, A.R. Rahman, jointly going abroad for shooting on ‘The Thames’ for Alai Payuthey’.21

It was ‘The Thina Thanthi’ that splashed the first news of the gigantic set put up on a 50 acre site for the shooting of ‘Marudanayagam’, Kamal Hassan’s first directorial venture on location at Sriperumbudur.22

Earlier it had also given details of the making of ‘Paasam’ a film whose date of release was also announced by the paper-19.5.1967.23

In providing news about film making, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ adopts a mode that is unique. It begins with what happened on the floor. Then the name of the film and the details of the episode are presented. Finally the name of the artistes, the producer and the director as also the technicians and other are provided.

22. Ibid., (Velli Malar), 12 September 1997, p. I.
23. Ibid., Madras, 13 April 1967, p.3.
Special Interviews

In the special interviews with leading film personalities, there is such an abundance of information that the reader comes to know all that he wants to about the subject. under the caption “Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal”, (Know all about this person), a feature which is part of the Velli Malar (Friday Special), exhaustive interviews with film personalities are published. Also, in the column, ‘Ithoh enn Pathil’ (Here are my replies), some film star replies to reader’s questions.24 Every Wednesday an interview with film artistes is published under the captain ‘Nakshatra Peitti’25

Such interviews have been a feature of ‘The Thina Thanthi’ since its inception. However, from the early sixties, with the film fever touching higher pitches, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ began offering more and more ‘interviews with stars’ for their readers. For instance, on 13.3.1960, a special interview with Sivaji Ganesan was published under the same name. In this interview there were references to Sivaji’s Kattabomman winning a prize at the film festival at Cairo and

24. Ibid., (Pongal Malar), Nellai, 14 January 2002, p. IV.
Ganesan himself being awarded the prize for the best actor. And, for the past 10 years, these interviews have proliferated.26

‘The Thina Thanthi’ which follows certain norms, leads the rest in projecting well conducted interviews. In particular the preference has been for film artistes - young, aspiring artistes, veterans, new entrants with communication problems, those who have missed out and also those who are retired. A scrutiny of ‘The Thina Thanthi’ methodology in this regard could be gauged with reference to the issues published between 1996 and 2001 revealing a clear cut pattern:- In a three way approach, this paper provides all the required information.

1. ‘Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal’ (Know all about this man)

2. ‘Nakshatra Petti’ (Interview with a star)

3. ‘Ithoh en Pathil’ (Here’s my answer)

The first two are direct, factual reports of interviews conducted with film personalities. The third is a compendium of

answers to queries raised by the readers and addressed to a particular film star (Who himself provides the answers).

1. Know all about this person ('Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal')

In the early days, 'The Thina Thanthi' offered news about film stars under the caption 'A few points on actors and actresses'. Now the same information comes under the title 'Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal' (Know all about this person). This is a weekly feature that appears in the Velli Malar. Mostly it is about film stars, a comprehensive report. In between 1996 and 2001, there is plenty of material for research and analysis.27

There was the report under the caption, 'Ivara Therinthu Kollungal', published on 30.8.1996. Beginning with the change of name, consequent on joining films, this report on Abbas referred to his induction, the first film he acted in, his native place, parentage, education, hobbies, tastes and preferences. There were also references to his emotional involvements.28

27. Ibid., (Velli Malar), Nagercoil, 12 September 1997, p.II.
28. Ibid., 30 August 1996, P.I.
In another report under the same caption on 12.9.1977, Vaiyapuri, a comic star, when asked whether he had ever fallen in love, replied that love had been part of his life but had come to an end.29

In another report on 20.9. 1996, Abbas had declared that there had been plenty of ‘love’ in his life and that it was only a pastime. In reply to another question, he said that ‘Love’ could be expressed on. It could be noted that ‘Love’ can prompt more than one question, in this instance, three.

As film stars voluntarily divulge information on all the events of their lives, this feature always contains such captivating details such as the subjects most unforgettable day/event in his/her life, the most painful experience and the turning point in his/ her career.

Asked about the most painful day in his life, Vaiyapuri, the comedian, gave a cinema-oriented reply. He declared that his most painful day was the one where which he couldn’t see ‘Kaathal Palli’ because of a fracture in his mother’s arm.30

29. Ibid., 12 September 1997, p. II.
30. Ibid.,
In the set questions addressed to the actor or actress interviewed for this feature, certain personal questions relating to the subject’s weakness and evil habits are also raised. In the feature involving Abbas, dated 30.8. 1996, he was asked whether he was a smoker, Abbas refused to answer the question saying his father might read the report.\textsuperscript{31}

‘The Thina Thanthi’ also provides interesting fact files on film personalities for the benefit of its readers.

\textbf{2. Nakshatra Peitti}

Literally an interview with a star, this is a weekly feature in ‘The Thina Thanthi’ that appears every Wednesday. It contains everything readers would like to know about stars, their families, private relationships, preferences and how they came to chose films as a profession. Apart from sidelined artists who hope to make a comeback, there are others who share information about prospects in films made in other languages and about their targets in life.

A close look at the reports of such interviews in ‘The Thina Thanthi’ over the last 5 years leads one to the conclusion that

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 30 August 1996, p II.
questions asked of the subject (the star in this case) always pertain to his /her pre-cinema days and of how he/she made use of the opportunity to join films.

In the issue dated 7.8.1996, Livingstone, who began as a villain and became a hero after starring in ‘Sundanthira Purushan’ shared information on his parentage, family, a photograph showing him with his mother Rachel, elder brother Milton, elder sister Roubella and younger sister Mary was also published.32

One of the matters readers are most curious about is how a film star got the chance to join the industry. In the issue dated 17.6.1998, actress Sruthi expressed her gratitude to Director K. Balachandare for giving her a chance to make a film debut in ‘Kalki’, a picture in which she won the award for the best actress.33 Banupriya, a very popular star between 1990 and 1995, said he made a comeback after two years in the wilderness with a stellar role in the film ‘Aha’ which pushed her stocks very high indeed.34

33. Ibid., 17 June 1998, p. II.
34. Ibid., Nagercoil, 10 September 1997, p.12.
Artistes also make use of this column to interact with their fans by telling them how and why things happened to them. In one of the issues 'Suruthi' heroine of the sensational 'Kalki' told her fans whatever happened at the function in which she was conferred an award for best acting. In the issue dated 10.1.1999, actor Prabhu spoke elingly of having won the M.G.R. Prize for acting. As Prabhu had always considered M.G.R. and Karunanidhi as uncles, he said that it was gratifying to receive an award, the award instituted in the name of another.35

This weekly feature had proved to be a great favourite with all readers.

3. Ithoh en Pathil (Here is my Answers)

This Question-Answer feature appears on important days when special issues are published. On such days, prominent film personalities answer queries form readers with alacrity. For the purpose of this study, the Independence Day Number 15.8.1996 and the Deepavali Number 7.11.1999 were chosen. On the strength of these two interviews, it could be inferred that those to whom questions were

addressed, confined answers only to the questions raised and they did not volunteer information. Reader’s queries are mostly concerned with the stars and their families. In the Independence Day issue dated 15.8.1996, a reader asked film star Ajit how many brothers and sisters he had. Ajit had dutifully replied that he had an elder brother a younger sister. His father and mother made the rest of the family he said.36

Forty percent of the questions relating to the star’s family ties and 30% of the questions are about the subject’s film involvements and experiences. In the issue dated 7.5.1995, Kamal Hassan answered queries from readers. To a question on the possibility of his entering politics, he says that, at that point of time, he had no such plants. To another question whether he would produce his own film, he replied in the affirmative. It could be seen that besides other things, readers are also interested in film details from the film stars.37 Twenty percent of the readers raise questions on the private affairs of the actor. One fan asked Ajit about his first love affair. To this Ajit replied that he hadn’t as yet, had that experience but he couldn’t predict the

36. Ibid., (Sudanthira Thina Malar), Nagercoil, 15 August 1996, p. II.

37. Ibid., (Deepavali Malar), 7 November 1999, p.II.
future. Kamal Hassan also answered a question whether he had relationship with first wife.

Only 10% of the questions addressed to film stars are connected with their political ambitions. Kamal Hassan, in answer to a question firmly denied any interest in politics. So, this section could be said to satisfy all film fans about whatever they might like to know.

III. CINEMA TITBITS

A for non-news items, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ allots more space for films and filmy affairs than any other paper in Tamil Nadu. Every Friday, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ publishes a cluster of varied cinema ‘titbits’ under the caption ‘Cinema Thulligal’ (literally little drops of film news). Besides, ‘Muthu Charam’ published every Tuesday, a number of film tit bits are provided.

38. Ibid., (Sudanthira Thina Malar), 15 August 1996, p.II.
39. Ibid., (Deepavali Malar), 7 November 1999, p.II.
40. Ibid.
These film titbits could be classified under two heads

1. Those concerning old films

2. Present day film titbits

1. Old Film Tit Bits

From its very inception, 'The Thina Thanthi' has been publishing a number of tit bits about cinema. There have been a large number of such pieces about Sivaji Ganesan, M.G.R., Muthuraman and several other male and female artistes of the veteran category. In the issue dated 13.6.1965, 'The Thina Thanthi' put out the news that B. Saroja Devi was playing the female lead against M.G.R. in A.V.M's 'Anbe Vaa'. In the issue dated 19.8.1966, it was announced that the M.G.R.-Jeyalalitha starers, 'Thani Pravi' was due for release on 16.9.1966. In the issue dated 3.1.1974, it was announced that a Sivaji Starrer, 'Vani Rani', scripted by Arurdoss, was on the floors and that the release date was 12.1.1974, the Tamil New Year Day. In the titbits column of the issue dated 1.10.1986, the news, of felicitations to

42. Ibid., Madras, 13 June 1965, p.3.
43. Ibid., 19 August 1966, p.4.
44. Ibid., 3 January 1974, p.6.
Sivaji Ganesan, completing 50 years in the field was flashed, and also the presentation of a 41 Sovereign bracelet to the Thespian.  

**Recent Cinema Tit Bits**

The little bits of filmy information, published under the column ‘Muthu Chitaral’ pertain to artists, their engagements, their personal life and individual preferences. For the sake of this study, issues of ‘The Thina Thanthi’ from 1998-2001 could be gainfully looked into. In the ‘Muthu Chitharal’ section of the ‘The Thina Thanthi’ dated 13.6.1998, under the caption ‘A Fortress of Dreams’, news about the stupendous success of the Tamil film Kaathal Kottai (A fortress of love) is given and also the information that the film was to be remade in Kannada. Another bit of information let out was that Sangeetha, who did a minor role in this film was to make her debut as heroine in Telugu Films.  

In the 23.9.1997 issue of the paper, this section carried a news item under the caption Rakshasa Villain (Demon Villain). An American actor, named Carlo, it was put out, played the villain in Vijayakant’s 125th film, ‘Ulavi Thurai’ (The Criminal Investigation Department / The Department of Espionage). Several

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sensational details about this actor's daily diet also appeared. He feasted on 61/2 kg of chicken each day and 3 kg bread and 50 full boiled eggs to boot. It was reported that Vijayakanth spent Rs. 10,000 a day just feeding this monster of a man.\textsuperscript{47} In the issue dated 16.1.1999, under this section, a news item with the caption “Thamizhal Innaippu” (a union effected by Tamil) conveyd the news of Maniratnam and A.R. Rahman, quietly leaving for England for a song sequence on the Thames for the film ‘Alai Payuthey’.\textsuperscript{48}

The foregoing discussion should be adequately illustrative of the manner in which ‘The Thina Thanthi’s’ ‘Muthuchitharal’ caters to the film-news-hungry readers in Tamil Nadu.

**The Little Film Drops**

Another fact of ‘The Thina Thanthi’s’ projection of film titbits is the ‘Cinema Thulligal’ (literally little drops of film news). The issues of the years 1996 to 2001 provide adequate material for scrutiny of this section. Each cluster of these bits is given a suitable caption. Split into three segments, little bits of information on shooting on the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 23 September 1997, p.7.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 16 January 1999, p.6.
floor and on location (60%), news bits about the artistes (20%) and the rest little pieces of allied information (20%).

In the issue dated 5.1.1997, this section carried a few tit bits under the caption ‘Parakkum Nadigar’ (literally a trapeze artiste). It was about the shooting connected with ‘Hey Ram’. There was also a brief reference to Kamal’s Marudanayagam, completing 90% of shooting. In the issue dated 5.10.2001, a news item under the caption “a change in climax” conveyed the news that 30 days after its release, a new climax was shot and added.

The second aspect projected in this section pertains to artistes, their mode of life, habits, preferences, the articles they make use of, their liaison with fellow artistes and the like. In the issue dated 9.8.1996, this section, under the caption ‘New Car’, informed its readers of the Benz Car purchased by a music director. Under the caption ‘Anandam’ (ecstasy) a report on a new recording theatre got up by A.R. Rahman was provided. Concurrently similar acquisition by Ilayaraja was also mentioned. Also, it was reported that A.R. Rahman

had a recording theatre at his residence too.\textsuperscript{52} Such persistent reportage of cinema 'drops' has won great support from 'The Thina Thanthi's' vast readership.

**Film Reviews**

New film releases, presently on show at various theaters are reviewed in this section. Most of these reviews are superficial, not an in depth analysis of the film from all angles. To begin with a brief synopsis of the film's theme is given. There is a mention of the hero, the role he plays and the quality of his performance. This is duplicated in regard to the heroine too. The villain too is put under critical scrutiny. Directorial touches, the nature of the music, the quality of the songs, camera work, recording and editing are also commented upon. One of the special features of this review is the two line summary of the story content.

In the issue dated 13.12.1978, a review of the film 'Idyakani' was published. In this review it was commented that the entire film had political overtones and motivations and that the director, A. Jegannathan, had done a fair job. It was also mentioned that M.S.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 5 October 2001, p.I.
Viswanthan’s music was a special feature of the film and that the film’s denouncement would be most acceptable to M.G.R.’s vast army of fans and admirers.\(^{53}\)

In the issue dated 1.5.1995, a review of ‘Pasumpon’ in which Sivaji and Prabhu had played father and son. In this review, the film was referred to as Bharathiraja’s (The Raja of the country side) emotive masterpiece. At the end of the review, it was mentioned that the film was one that should not be missed.\(^{54}\)

The review of ‘Kaathal Kottai’ (Fortress of Love) which appeared in the issue dated 16.8.1996, it was said that those who questioned the quality of the story, in haste, would not even leave their seats during the interval, so captivating was the manner in which the Director had presented the theme. A more positive publicity could not be imagined.

Sometimes, these reviews could be in the nature of constructive criticism and of educative value to the director. For instance, in the review of the film, ‘Naattaamai’, it was pointed out that the comic track was a blot on the film and that the director could


have done some pruning of the comic scenes where the funsters made a mess of things and added nothing to the tempo of the film.55

Of the positive aspects of the film, there were several favourable comments. The story set on the domestic scene, the bond of love between brothers, the supremacy of the rustic justice administered in the villages over court decisions, senior Sarat Kumar's lordly gait and sensitive acting, the younger one's restrained performance were commented on using the right direction. A feature of 'The Thina Thanthi's' film review is the appropriateness of the concluding words to the title of the film.

55. Ibid., Nagercoil, 13 April 1995, p.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Film</th>
<th>Ending of review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pudhia Paravai (The new bird)</td>
<td>Comes flying to regale fans(^{56})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petraalthan Pillaiya (Is parentage dependent on paternity?)</td>
<td>to be seen by the entire family(^{57})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poovarasan (King of flowers)</td>
<td>Maindens like the king of flowers(^{58})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganga Gowri</td>
<td>Will find a place in our hearts (^{59})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannu Patta Poguthaiya (Beware, the evil eye)</td>
<td>The lucky ones to see this film, beware, the evil eye.(^{60})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the concluding sentences in these reviews are -

"On the whole, passable", "All in all comparable to pot gravy", and "Candy for stunt buffs", ‘The Thina Thanthi’s reviews in general and the concluding lines in particular are a guide to the film goer, whether or not to see the film. The purpose of these reviews is to guide the film fan on whether the film is worth seeing rather than a threadbase analysis of the film’s quality.

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56. Ibid., Madras, 13 December 1964, p.4.
57. Ibid., 8 October 1966, p.6.
58. Ibid., Nagercoil, 29 August 1996, p.4.
60. Ibid., 12, January 1999, p.11.
The performance of the artistes, the manner in which they fit the role, the director’s music and other technical aspects are also critically assessed and an overall evaluation - ‘Very good’, ‘good’ ‘fair’, ‘passable’ and not so satisfactory is made.

Some deficiencies in regard to continuity, appropriateness of the dialogue, songs, length of the action scenes, maintenance of tempo and the like are also pointed out. In one such review, published on 13.4.1995, there was a comment on the excessive use of English words in the film ‘Captain’ a criticism made in the contest of the modest literacy rates prevalent among the mass of film goers.

‘The Thina Thanthi’s’ film reviews are of a kind different from the mode adopted by other papers. Only in ‘The Thina Thanthi’ does review begin with synopsis and then goes on to assess artistes’ performances directorial touches etc. The comedy track is also reviewed.

Private Lives of Film Artistes

Several pieces of information regarding the private lives of film artistes are published in the ‘Velli Malar’ on Fridays and in ‘Cinema Drops’ and ‘Muthu Chitharal’ on Saturdays.

61. Ibid., (Velli Malar), Nagercoil, 13 April 1995, p.6.
Tuesdays. These are a collection of titbits but on Wednesdays there is more comprehensive newsprint on the same theme in the form of an exhaustive interview with some film personality. The ‘tit bits’ do not mention names but they only suggest the identity of the artiste. the Friday feature entitled “Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal” (Know all about this person), has no such inhibitions. Not only is the subject’s identity a vital ingredient of the report, an abundance of relevant information provides contentment of a rare kind.

In the issue dated 26.1.1966, the news of Sivaji Ganesan being conferred ‘Padma Sri’ was flashed on the first page, the issue also carried a detailed report on the great thespian’s film career and the long list of films he had featured in.

In the issue dated 4.4.1980, under the column ‘Muthu Chitharal’ there was a report about the Pasi (Hunger) actress marrying her uncle and setting up house in a banglow without severing ties with her parents. The actress in question was Shoba (but her name was mentioned) and the ‘uncle’ was ‘Balu Mahendra’ (often addressed as

64. Ibid., 4 April 1980, p.6.
uncle by Shoba). Projecting such snippets in the form of a ‘riddle’, easy to unravel, is a ‘Thina Thanthi’ speciality.

‘Cinema Thulligal’ (Cinema droplets), published on Tuesdays, is another source of very interesting titbits on film personalities and their private lives. In the issue dated 2.8.1996, under the caption ‘Vaarisu’ (Heir), several details concerning Sarat Kumar and his family were given.65

Every Wednesday, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ publishes an exhaustive interview with a reputed film star. In one such interview, published in the issue dated 24.11.1999, Ramya Krishnan shared information with the readers about her family, friends, engagements and the new house she had acquired in Ashok Nagar.66

In the Friday Feature, ‘Ivarai Therinthu Kollungal’ (Know all about this person), a great deal of information is provided about famous film personalities. In the issue dated 12.9.1997, so many interesting details were provided about comedian Vaiyapuri, his native place, parents, brothers and sisters.67

66. Ibid., Nagercoil, 24 November 1999, p.11.
Each Sunday supplement of 'The Thina Thanthi' features a write up on some film star, his professional career and other engagements. In the issue dated 16.12.2001, Ravichandran, the film Star was the subject. Details of his life and film career had been the theme of several parts of a serial.68

The Question-Answer Feature

This Question - Answer feature on films, which appears in the Sunday edition of the paper, provides a lot of information on the tinsel world, in the form of answers to questions from the reader. One who answers question goes by the pseudonym 'Kuruviyar' (The esteem able Bird).

As 'Kuruviyar' is an authority on cinema affairs, he has the knowledge and information to answer any question, clear any doubt connected with films and film personalities. Questions on cinema should be addressed to Kuruviyar, C/O 'The Thina Thanthi' and sent by post. Questions that are most suitable, Questions that elicit humorous answers are chosen and answered every week. This feature is most

68. Ibid., (Gnayiru Malar), 16 December 2001, p.III.
popular, not only among film buffs but with all the readers of ‘The Thina Thanthi’ in general.

If the readers wish to elicit answers from their favourite stars directly, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ facilitates such response from film stars and publishes their replies in issues released on festival days under the caption ‘Here are my answers’.

A close study of Kuruviyar’s Question-Answer feature over the past four years, makes one infer that 50% of the questions pertain to film love affairs.69 Besides these 50% on love, some 30% of the questions are on the private lives of film artistes. Only 20% of the questions seek news about film under production, shooting highlights and the like. To take up questions of love affairs first, most questions pertain to rumours of emotional involvements between male and female film stars. The readers wish to know when, where and how the affair started, whether it would culminate in marriage and whether the lovers had gone on a picnic together. ‘Kuruviyar’ fashions his replies to suit the readers’ expectations. For example when a reader questioned ‘Kuruviyar’ on the longevity of the love marriage between Baggyaraj

and Premila, solemnized o 27.7.1980, the reply was that it would survive as long as the lady remained beautiful.\textsuperscript{70}

In the issue dated 21.6.1998, Kuruviyar, in answer to a question whether the love marriage of an actor would endure, said it all depended on the person overlooking a host of things.\textsuperscript{71}

In the issue dated 6.5.2001, to a question whether the Ajit-Usha affair would end in marriage, 'Kuruviyar' humorously replied that this love had already been consummated.\textsuperscript{72}

There are also question seeking information about the private lives of film artistes. In the issue dated 14.5.1988, while answering a question from a reader about the circumstances in which Sarat Kumar's first wife found herself, 'Kuruviyar' replied that it would be known when Sarat Kumar himself realised the nature of the situation he had created.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., Madras, 8 August 1980, p.6.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., Nellai, 21 June 1998, p.10.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 6 May, 2001, p.11.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 14 June 1998, p.11.
In the issue dated 14.11.1999, to a question on the prospects of Manoj, son of Bharathi Raja, ‘Kuruviyar’ came out with the reply that the offspring of tiger would never be a kitten.74 Answering a question on location shooting, ‘Kuruviyar’ clarified that the shooting of ‘Ulavu Thurai’ was taking place abroad.75 In answer to another question on the role of Director Maniratnam in the film ‘Alai Payuthe’, ‘Kuruviyar’ said he would express his views after watching the film.76

It is not enough for readers to be informed of the goings on in the tinsel world. ‘The Thina Thanthi’ believes that they should be helped to clarify doubts and suspicions regarding this vital part of life today. So, through the medium of ‘Kuruviyar’ this paper keeps its readers well informed about everything they want to know about cinema and cinema people.

In order to satisfy its readers’ curiosity regarding so many things connected with stars and their private lives, ‘The Thina Thanthi makes arrangements for the stars themselves to answer questions

74. Ibid., 14 November 1999, p.11.
75. Ibid., 14 September 1997, p.12.
76. Ibid., 16, November 1999, p.12.
addressed to them by their fans. In the feature, ‘Ithoh en Pathil’ (Here is my reply) popular film stars interact with readers and answer questions. For the purpose of this study, issues published from 1997 to 2000 and those in 2002 were chosen. A close look at this cinema feature in these issues reveals the fact that over 60% of questions related to the number of films the subject—the star who answered queries—had acted in and matters connected with those films. 20% of the questions were about the star’s political interest and about future films on line. The rest were of a general nature. Star questions are often boxed and are projected with line diagrams.

On 2.7.1977, Vijakumar and Manjula married secretly. In an interview in which both of them answered questions, the queries raised were intimate, personal and titillating. Both of them replied candidly on all subjects, including future film assignments.77

A repetitive feature in this column has been questions on films already made. In the Independence Day issue of ‘The Thina Thanthi’, dated 15.8.1996, a reader asked Ajit Kumar whether he expected a National Award for his role in ‘AASAI’, with typical modesty the star replied that massive reception the film had won

77. Ibid., 9 July 1977, p.6.
among the film goers was as good as a national award. In the issue dated 14.1.2002, when a reader asked Vikram in which of his three films, 'Sethu', 'Kasi' and 'Dhil' he had to exert himself, the star countered it with another question whether it was possible to answer the question with eyes shut.

In this section, it is also customary for film stars to share information with fans on future film assignments. In the 7.11.1999 Deepavali Issue, a reader asked Kamal Hassan whether 'Maruthananayagam' had been completed and the star's reply was that it was still being completed. To a reader's query on the role he played in the forth coming film 'Singh', Vikaram replied, 'Why don't you see the film and find out?'. Such questions on forth coming films are fewer than those pertaining to personal life and preferences.

Some other questions are of a general nature with a few of them having political undertones. In the issue dated 15.8.1996, to a question whether he was and Indian or a Tamil, Ajit Kumar replies

78. Ibid., (Sundanthira Thina Malar), Nellai, 15 August 1996, p.III.
79. Ibid., (Pongal Malar), 14 January 2002, p. IX.
80. Ibid., (Deepavali Malar), 7 November 1999, p. IV.
that he was a human being. In the Deepavali Number, dated 7.11.1999, answering a question on the possibility of entering politics, Kamal Hassan gave a one word answer ‘Kamkum’ (literally “this is confidential”),

**FILMS**

‘The Thina Thanthi’ has its own mode of flashing scenes from films on view and films on the anvil. Unlike other papers, this organ always gives the picture a suggestive caption and an explanatory note underneath. From its very inception, these visuals have been projected with an element of sex appeal.


In the issue dated 12.11.1999, a colour photograph of Karthick and Roja in the film ‘Santhitha Vellai’ was published with the

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82. Ibid., (Sudanthira Malar), 15 August 1996, p. III.
83. Ibid., (Deepavali Malar), 7 November 1994, p.IV.
84. Ibid., Madars, 9 December 1966, p.4.
sexually suggestive caption "Roja's cheeks are like apples to Karthik. Even the picture was sexually suggestive."\(^{85}\)

In the event of more than one film not being featured in visuals, the captions are so chosen that there seems to be a continuity of intention and effect. For instance, the issue dated 9.8.1996, two amorous shots published together had the captions 'Kaathal Rasi' (Propitious love) and Illamai Thaagam (Yearning for love in the young).\(^{86}\) Some of the sexually suggestive words used in these captions are 'Panchannai' (a soft bed), 'Savaari' (ride), Swargam (heavenly bliss) 'Soodu' (warmth) Pazham /Kani (fruits) Killi (Parrot) and Kaathal (Passionate love).

The caption (at the top) and the note at the bottom do not convey the same message. The caption gives a real-life slant to what is in fact a make believe. Instead of the names of the characters they play in the film, real life names are used.

In the issue dated 5.10,2001, a visual from 'Asokavanam' in which Livingstone was seen to abduct Rajashri, it was put out as if Livingstone had indeed abducted Rajashri after doping her. The caption

\(^{85}\) Ibid., (Velli Malar), Nagercoil, 12 November 1999, p. 1.

read “Rajashri abducted after being drugged”. Also raising a provocative question “What really happened to Rajashri?” the answer is also given. One would find out if he watched the film ‘Asokavanam’.87

‘The Thina Thanthi’ has its own way of creating anticipation and expectancy among its readers about films due to be released. Its foretelling of the release of a film ‘Love Marriage’ under a caption ‘Festival of Love’ appeared in the issue dated 16.12.2001. The release of Thiru Annamalai was also given a colourful aspect. It was projected as the story of a Siva Baktha that had endured for centuries, a film due for release on Pongal Day under the patronage of ‘Sri Annamalaiyar’.88

From its very inception, ‘The Thina Thanthi has evinced a special interest in keeping its audience well informed about films and everything connected with the industry.

Films in the making

As regards films on the anvil, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ has evinced keen interest in keeping its readers posted with the latest

87. Ibid., 5 October 1968, p.4.
88. Ibid., Nellai, 16 December 2001, p.16.
information on the films that are being made, the names of the cast, plot, Director, Musical score and the date of release. In a sense, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ serves as a foreteller of film events in Tamil Nadu.

As an example, it was ‘The Thina Thanthi’ which foretold the New Year Day release (1.1.1969) of the film, ‘Anbalippu’ produced by Sadasivam and directed by Thirlokachandar with Sivaji and Saroja Devi in the lead. Once again, it was ‘The Thina Thanthi’ that announced the release of ‘Thangai’ scheduled for 15.5.1967, a film scripted by Aaroordas and starring Sivaji Ganesan. It is significant that ‘The Thina Thanthi’ made the forecast three months ahead of the release. In the issue dated 26.9.1997, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ reports on the progress in the production of ‘Inniyavalle’ a Prabhu starer, produced by M. Veda and directed by ‘Seeman’, due for release on Pongal Day.89

In the same way, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ gave its readers some advance intimation on the fast progress in the production of an Arunkumar starer ‘Kannaale Pesa Vaa’, throuth its Velli Malar.90

89. Ibid., Madras, 6 October 1968, p.4.
Also through the weekly feature film news every Tuesday, ‘The Thina Thanthi’ printed news about the progress in the production of three films featuring Ajit. Produced by ‘Oscar Movies’ and directed by S.A. Chandrasekar, the first was ‘Vishnu’ to be followed by ‘Kaathal Rojave’ and then ‘Ententum Kaatham’. Even the release date was announced well in advance.\(^{91}\)

‘The Thina Thanthi’s Cinema News also provides news about information shooting schedules, those films in progress and those that are yet to begin. About the film ‘Kaathala Kaathala’, this paper provided every relevant information, the cast which included Kamal Hassan and Prabhu Deva, the leading lady ‘Ramya’, the director and the date on which shooting was to commence, 1.10.1997. It was specifically mentioned that the director was Sangeetham Srinivasa Rao.\(^{92}\)

There was also a report about the shooting of ‘Good Luck’ in Malaysia. A juicy tit bit was that one of the sequences filmed was the arrest of ‘Parasaanth’ for eve teasing.\(^{93}\)

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 23 June 1998, p.10.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 23 September 1997, p.11.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 2 January 1999, p.14.
In the issue dated 30.6.1998, there was a report about the shooting of Kavithaalaya’s Pooveli and an announcement that the film would be released shortly.94

These bits of film news put out by ‘The Thina Thanthi’ on Tuesdays and Fridays have been very well received by its readers for years.