
A Study on Farmers Issues and Gaining Agro Wisdom through the Lens of Select Tamil Films

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Abstract: Films are one among the media which play a significant role in capturing the attention of the audience and drawing them towards a particular message or an issue. They have the capability to create a higher level of impact in the minds of the audience. Similarly, Tamil films that were released in India have portrayed various issues and themes. There are pertinent Tamil films which represent problems related to agriculture and farming. They have had some justice to their objective of making the audience aware of the issues and with a few possible solutions. India, which is called an Agrarian Nation, has farming as its primary profession. Ironically, the situation of farmers and food production is in a pitiable state and deserves our care and attention. This paper analyses the various representation of issues related to agriculture and farmers in the select films and also intends to analyze the awareness and wisdom related to agriculture that are conveyed to the audience through select Tamil Films.

Key words: Tamil films, Agriculture, Farmers, Issues and Agro-wisdom.

Introduction: When compared to other genres of literature or media, films are watched by larger audience as it also serves the purpose of entertainment. It has various elements like direction, setting, characters, plot, problem and solution which conveys of the intended message with great impact. Moving upward from the bottom of hierarchy of Maslow's definition of basic needs, food, shelter and clothes are considered as the basic need for human survival. Even among the three, food stands first. Unfortunately, the situation of agriculture and farmers who are the key elements of food production face numerous issues like land grabbing, excess chemical usage, less or no profit, insufficient knowledge, natural calamities like storm, drought, climate change, irregular rainfall, impacts from corporate, private moneylenders and so on. It is crucial to address the above mentioned issues and avoid any major world-wide crisis related to food. In order to focus on the difficulties and to support the farmers, people must be aware of the difficulties that farmers face and the issues that cause these predicaments. Problems connected to agriculture may lead to alarming situations

such as food shortage and selling of agricultural lands which may further pave way to rural labour's unemployment and destruction of agriculture, and so on. We may even have to migrate to other nations where food is available and survival is possible, only if the people of the host countries express their willingness to help. The future is dismal if this pathetic situation of agriculture persists. It faces several threats along with existing problems. Tamil film industry has been witnessing a series of films on social issues, predominantly on the environment, agricultural crisis, and protection of ecosystem. It is vital to understand the extent to which these films reflect global concerns in relation to social development (Bathran and Goswami 1). This paper sheds light on the Tamil films *Bhoomi* (2021), *Merku Thodarchi Malai* (2018), *Kadaikutty Singam* (2018), *Kanne Kalaimaane* (2019), *Kanaa* (2018) and *Thavam* (2019) which represent and discuss several matters related to agriculture and also provide the audience with awareness and wisdom related to agriculture.

Objectives of the Study:

- a) To explore the issues related to farmers and agriculture as portrayed in select Tamil films.
- b) To identify the nature of representation of problems faced by farmers in their daily life.
- c) To analyze the Agro-wisdom and awareness that the select films offer to the audience.

Review of Literature:R. Chitra Mai and B. Senthil Kumar (2020) in their research titled "Recent Changes in Contemporary Tamil Cinema" have examined the recent changes and developments that could be witnessed in the Contemporary Tamil Cinemas. They have proved the hypothesis that the films like *Kadaikutty Singam*, *Kaapan*, and *Kanaa* have included themes, concerns and contents which are farmer centric.

Karupiah, P. (2022) in the research paper "Singappenne": Women's Sports in Tamil Cinema has analysed the portrayal of women characters in Sports in *Bigil* and *Kanaa* film. A similar research by Amaljith N.K (2021) titled "Gender and Film: Representation of Gender in Indian Regional Sports Films" has also focused the nature of representation of problems faced by sports women in their daily life, the gender representation and women empowerment in Tamil sports films *Kanaa* and *Irudhi Sutru*.

Shamitha and Divakar. A.K. (2021) in their research "Class and Tamil Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis on the Representation of Working Class" have taken "Merku Thodarchi Malai" film for their analysis and has addressed the lives of working class with the protagonist belonging to the working class. Divakar, A K. (2020) in the research titled "An Exploratory Research on The Relationship between Caste System and Tamil Cinema" employed case study method, and discusses different cases of caste's influence over diverse stages of different films which include Merku Thorachi Malai.

Aswathy Gopalakrishnan (2022) has presented her thoughts in the film journal *Ultra Dogma* titled "Digging Shallow and Deep—Portrayals of 'The Farmer' in New Tamil Cinema". She has expressed her analytical thoughts on how the recent Tamil films present the status of farmers and how the select Tamil films portray it. She has taken Kaththi, *Kadaikutty*

Singam, Kadaisi Vivasayi, *Bhoomi* and *Merku Thodarchi Malai*. There were only a handful researches found in the area revolving around the issues related to farmers and agriculture as portrayed in the select films.

Endeavors of Protagonists and Supporting Characters: *Bhoomi* is a film that follows the protagonist, Bhoomi, who changes his dream of becoming a NASA mission to prove that a farmer can make profit and pay more taxes than a corporate professional. He aims to save the Thamizh Community's first job, agriculture, from the pressure of debt. Velusamy who commits suicide rants to find a watchman's job due to his worship of farming and the Thamizh Community's primary job. He wonders if God can't save agriculture, whom to seek help from. In the film *Kanne Kalaimaane*, Kamalakannan is a farmer who gains inspiration from Nammazhvar, a green crusader and agriculture scientist, and Johan Frederick from Germany. He supports organic manure and earthworm manure, which are essential for saving soil from chemical damage. Kamalakannan acts as a Good Samaritan, rescuing betrayed families through cattle loans and a drunkard well digger's daughter. He conducts organic farming awareness camps and motivates people to work hard to save their land. Kadaikutty Singam emphasizes the connection between village farmers and their domestics, with agriculture-related themes prominently shown in the main character Guna Singam. He makes 1.5 lakhs a month and has no retirement for this line of work. In his motivational speech to college students, he outlines his goals and ideas, including encouraging farmers worldwide, bringing back individuals who left rural areas for urban areas, and promoting organic farming practices.

"It has become commonplace to ask children if they want to become doctors, engineers, or collectors, and we don't even give farming as an option." (*Kadaikutty Singam* 00:33:35-00:33:41) he says, expressing a stark truth.

Merku Thodarchi Malai follows Rengasamy, a diligent farmer who struggles to find land at the foothill. After overcoming numerous obstacles, he eventually purchases a plot of land and experiences some joyous moments. However, the drought perishes his crops, taking his life into an ordeal.

In *Kanaa*, Murugesan, the father of the protagonist, bemoans the lack of anyone left to take over agriculture, just like Ganguly, Sachin, Dhoni, and Kohli took over cricket during its decline. He frequently supports and encourages farmers, emphasizing the importance of gratitude for the farmers who cultivate food. A supporting figure steps forward to assist the main character amid the crisis, claiming that God is providing for agriculture rather than depositing in his undiyal (offers in temple).

Issues with Agriculture and Farmers as portrayed in the select films: There are numerous issues that Farmers face in their daily life such as lack of compensation, natural disasters, instability in price, debts, private moneylenders and the embarrassments they

cause, impact by corporate, pressure in different ways and so on. Many of the mentioned difficulties have been clearly represented in the select films which are as follows.

Inefficient Response of Politicians and Officials: *Bhoomi* depicts the laziness of politicians and government representatives in handling farmers' problems. Farmers contact the Tasildar to request compensation for failing harvests, but the Tasildar retaliates by claiming the government won't provide compensation simply because they filed a petition. The film also portrays the Collector office as lazy and insufficiently responsive to people. A private moneylender recites petitions submitted to the Collector's office which was in turn used to serve fritters in the nearby shop, promoting the idea that farmers are jobless and protesting. Velusamy, a traditional farmer, burns himself to death in front of the Collector's office, claiming he wants justice for the farmers. Officials argue that the suicide was due to trivial family matters and that the government has done a lot for the farmers. The agriculture minister praises corporations for their contributions by offering high salaries, taxes, and benefits.

Embarrassment caused by Private Moneylenders: There are sequences in the film *Bhoomi* where Velusamy, a traditional farmer, and his family are seen pathetically apologizing to the moneylenders for not returning the money they borrowed three years prior. They ask,

“How will you return? Your farm is drowning in pawned debt, your crops are charred, and you live in a rented home.” (*Bhoomi* 00:23:14-00:23:24)
They brutally mistreat them.

Similarly, in the film *Kanne Kalaimaane*, we see a moneylender slapping someone for acting as the Karna Maharaja, a symbol of generosity, during the village festival when he was unable to pay the amount he had accrued. In a scene, the protagonist, a traditional farmer, begs the bank manager not to bother the other farmers, who become alarmed when they see bank officials, and he assumes full responsibility for the debts. The first question the heroine asks in the introduction is why there are so many outstanding loans that the farmers have kept without paying.

The parents of the main character in *Kanaa*, who were once well-liked in the community, are shown in the film working for daily wages after experiencing numerous humiliations and pressure to sell the agricultural land. The daily wagers and the farm owner, who treats them like slaves, are at odds in the film *Merku Thodarchi Malai*. When they inquire about the pay for their labor, he threatens them even to death. We can witness the labours' giving a lament reply,

“Why should we keep quiet for getting paid for the labour? What to do with this little money? Seems we should zip our lips for the salary they give.” (*Merku Thodarchi Malai* 00:59:03-00:59:20)

As they get offended, they also have the insecurity of losing the job and they intend to remain quiet and compromising as their work is essential to feed their family.

Protest as a means of Response: We witness farmers protesting and their angry conversations clearly highlight the pathetic situation of those who provide food for everyone on the planet. The farmers are beaten up in the film *Bhoomi* in order to chase the crowd. We hear voices saying,

“They only gave us the seeds, fertilizers. But the debt is on our head. When we request for compensation, we are ridiculed and beaten up.” (*Bhoomi* 00:27:41-00:27:50) They also complain that all they have left are burned crops despite having submitted multiple petitions for reimbursement till date. They claim that “We are not even blessed with one course meal, despite taking out loans on interest to do agricultural works.” In a protest supporting farmers, we see traditional farmer Velusamy burning himself and lamenting, “My death will bring two lakhs compensation for my family.” (*Bhoomi* 00:35:22-00:35:27). The film *Kanne Kalaimaane* makes reference to the farmers' protest that took place in Delhi. We discover a farmer yelling,

“We run without even a dress on us during the protest in Delhi. Even rat curry was consumed. Has anyone in our nation questioned why? Everyone merely gazed curiously at us. How can we endure in such circumstances?” (*Kanne Kalaimaane* 00:38:05 – 00:38:18)

Farmers need support as they are the people who work hard selflessly to feed their family as well as the people in the entire world. Every human being who eats food should show solidarity and be empathetic with the ones who feed them.

Inability to Standardize the Price: The inability of farmers to set a price for the harvests they generate is another significant problem they encounter. In a scene from the film *Kanne Kalaimaane*, farmers dejectedly state that half of their earnings go to the fertilizer vendor and the other half is used as interest for moneylenders. The farmers who are food producers hardly get one healthy meal every day. A farmer says,

“Look at the bulb hanging here. The manufacturer decides the price. Similarly we are unable to fix standard price for the crops we produce with our blood, sweat and tears. Neither the customer nor the farmers get the profit but all the benefits lies in the pockets of the middle man alone.” (*Kanne Kalaimaane* 00:37:48-00:38:05)

When farmers can fix price to their own produce, they would be able to find some income and satisfaction, which will further motivate them to work hard as they are already selfless people who toil hard to feed the entire world.

Impact of Corporate: *Bhoomi* is a film that portrays the negative barriers faced by farmers and agricultural lands due to unlawful corporate attempts to invade and seize land and labor. The film highlights the need for hybrid seeds provided by commercial companies, as well as the environmental impact of excessive water consumption due to farmers' extensive fertilization. The film also highlights the potential for water pollution and waste from businesses like Cola and other industries.

In the movie *Thavam*, Natesan is an indigenous farmer who represents the village's agricultural torch bearer and questions the impact of building factories on agricultural lands. He believes that the entire country will be affected if everyone feels the same way about water scarcity. Water as a resource faces numerous challenges, such as pollution, drought, and the destruction of rivers and water bodies.

In *Merku Thodarchi Malai*, the proprietor of a fertilizer store who brainwashed Rengasamy would have demonstrated self-development as the film approached its climax. Under the same person's advice, the protagonist plans to sell the lands to a corporate when he returns to his home after five years of imprisonment to pay off his debts. The fertilizer shop owner would later become land developers, finance consultants, and developers private limited. In *Kanaa*, there is a search for agricultural land to construct a private medical institution in Kulithalai after receiving government consent. The politician contacts Sathyaraj, who is portrayed as Murugesan's father, who stipulates that they must remain hungry and without food to understand the value of agricultural land. He further emphasizes that hunger is the only way to do anything to agriculture, and until there is hunger, one cannot do anything to agriculture land.

Disillusionment and Displacement of Youngsters: In all the select films, many youngsters are portrayed as the ones who are being supportive to the endeavors of the protagonists. However, there is one scene in the film *Bhoomi*, where a youngster is portrayed to speaking against it. We can come across a scene where a youngster defends the corporate sector in which he is working. He states,

“No one is forced to take up agriculture. People should change according to time. I own 13 acres of land, but I didn't do agriculture. If I had, I would have been in debt like

Velusamy and ended up my life. The employees at our company have quit agriculture and joined there. We do eight hours shift, we are given uniforms, we get salary credited on time every month, and we are living a good life in peace.” (*Bhoomi* 00:31:38- 00:32:00)

His words clearly exhibit the ignorance and lack of awareness about the importance of agriculture and future of food and it denotes a selfish attitude of him.

Farmers quitting agriculture and people migrating to cities have become very common in the recent decade and the entire nation is facing the wave. The film *Bhoomi* offers a representation for the same where the protagonist presents a Farmer survey report from VAO office that states, Till 2010, there were 7498 farmers doing agriculture and at present, only 1350 farmers are left. Everyone has quit agriculture. Water which was once at 10 feet has now gone to 800 feet. It's because farmers have quit agriculture. We can also find a representation of the same but in a slightly contrasting angle in the film *Merku Thodarchi Malai*, in which we find the police officials asking villages to leave their land as a result of a GO that was passed. We can see the ladies in the households begging the officials for their kind consideration as they are clueless about where else to go along with their family members. The men get arrested for 5 years as they kill those who plotted against them to make them vacate the village for in favour of a corporate. Later after jail term, the protagonist finds his son going for studies and he gets appointed as a security to look after the same land which he sold out of debt, which had been taken over lately by windmills.

Propagation of Agriculture Related Wisdom and Awareness through the Select Films:

Apart from the representations of various issues related to agriculture and the difficulties that farmers face, there are useful points of awareness that the select films intend to convey to the audience related to the importance of agriculture. The protagonist of the film *Bhoomi* imparts a great deal of knowledge in a number of sequences, thus there is a lot to learn from it. He argues that birds are the first farmers and that they play a significant part in creating the forest. He claims that Velusamy, an organic farmer from Thirunelveli, is an inspiration to him. "Roots are the proof for groundwater and the medium for seepage of water into Earth," he states in the other scenes. We receive 22 lakh crore litres of water annually from the Western Ghats. 80% is wasted by contaminating the sea as a result of agricultural carelessness. The business companies use the remaining 20%. According to him, the finest source of organic seeds may also be the tribal group. He makes Rs. 6,22,000 a year and promotes country breed cows, chickens, cocks, bulls, goats, and honey bees in the film. According to him, a country's economy and ecology should coexist for its well-being. It should generate revenue and not harm the environment. Agriculture is the only occupation that can make it happen. He cautions the audience not to believe that we are any different from farmers and that if a farmer passes away from debt, we would all perish from a lack of food and water.

He claims that Thamizhan was the one who taught agriculture to this earth when the dispute between him and the corporate adversary was taken to court. "When a foreigner claims that such land cannot support agriculture without his assistance, it is unfortunate. The deities are not the only things housed in temples. People can gain from certain types of science. The rulers of the older era constructed lofty towers and placed urns on the top them when constructing temples. Agriculture shouldn't be destroyed, even if natural calamities devastate villages. As a result, they kept seeds in the urns that are affixed to the towers. These seeds are native to our nation and are incredibly powerful. Temples that were not anointed for more than 100 years still have the seeds stored inside them." At the end, he gains the

support of the entire people and he promotes that agriculture can create job opportunities for youngsters and the price of any agricultural product must be fixed by the farmers.

The protagonist of the film *Kanne Kalaimaane* promotes the idea that the world is becoming greener and that even Americans use neem sticks as toothbrushes. He voiced his opposition to chemical fertilizers. The father of the main character, Natesan Master, is killed in the film *Thavam*. He practiced organic farming and promoted the idea that every food item comes from the blood and labour of a farmer's family. According to the tale, he taught us that we would have to travel in search of food if farmers and agriculture were eliminated. There will be a third world war, but it will be fought to end food deprivation and hunger rather than with weapons. Farmlands were turned into real estate, while green spaces were left without water. He asks "Who said agriculture is not profitable?" and advocates that Chinese people are tearing down buildings to create farmland, while Japanese people are doing it in ships. In our nation, Americans are selling their harvests. It will be for food and water if there is another world war. We shall either acquire food or starve to death if the nation with the most food decides to govern the world. We should all be aware that if the food shortage continues, it will become a serious concern in the future. When they give petitions to the collector stating that people intend to sell their land out of ignorance about the situation and their fall pray, the collector rightly give a sensible knock to explain the situation by stating that, "The Britishers came to India to buy pepper and elachi. At that time we were exporting them today we are importing them."

The protagonist in the film *Kadaikutty Singam* inspires the college students with a speech. He talks on the state of farming and farmers in India and encourages young people to pursue careers in agriculture. He claims that we have concealed agriculture at the back of everything by bringing up the fact that it is the backbone of India. We continue without understanding the significance, and those who do so are branded as "Ignorant" or "Not knowing how to survive" when they return to work in agriculture after leaving corporate positions. There are regressive people who opine that they believe their daughters shouldn't marry farmers. Even the educated are pleased to be farmers in other countries. The literate should avoid getting their hands dirty only in India. It is the lot of the ignorant to be farmers in our soil. Our nation will only prosper if its citizens, government, and scientists work together as one. India won't become a superpower until students consider farming and politics to be their top priorities and careers. Each and every agricultural product ought to have its own government market. Only then will the number of farmers who commit suicide decline. Millions of people will die tomorrow as a result of the death of one farmer today. The protagonist believes that the number of people who will become farmers in the next generation is more significant than the number of medals won at the next Olympics. That is the need of the hour for every house and our nation as a whole.

Conclusion: The research paper has analyzed the way that the select films play a significant role and did justice in conveying awareness to the audience by representing the ordeals that agriculture and farmers face in their day to day life. The films clearly depict that the issues

faced by farmers need immediate attention and the matters have to be made known to all the people. The writers and directors have used different scenes, characters, dialogues and portrayals to represent the theme and issue in a vivid way, which in turn would impact a lot of audience's minds, which may further lead to sufficient awareness and initiation of endeavors in saving farming and farmers. Dialogues from various scenes from all the select movies are drawn from Subtitles and translations and they are paraphrased by the authors. It is implied that possible solutions must be discussed and implemented at the earliest in order to save agriculture and farmers as food is the basic essential for every living being to survive. The films act as a call for immediate attention and actions that are required.

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