



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

South Indian Cinema: A Catalyst for Social Change

Ms.Jeevitha.S ¹

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science for Women

Coimbatore, India.

Ms.Judith Petricia.D ²

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science for Women

Coimbatore, India.

Abstract

This paper signifies South Indian films especially focusing on Tamil films as a catalyst to spread social change with the means of SDG goals inculcated within the films. While Tamil films are primarily made for entertainment, several filmmakers have used their platform to address various SDGs, from poverty alleviation to climate action and gender equality. By addressing pressing issues and challenging societal norms, these films have empowered audiences and fostered a more inclusive and equitable society. As the industry continues to evolve, it holds the potential to further amplify its voice and contribute to a more just and equitable future. The Tamil language films like Aruvi (2016), Karnan (2021), Kaala (2018), Maamannan (2023) portrayed various themes of SDG.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Poverty, Social Injustice, Inequality, Importance of Education, Reduced Inequalities, Peace, Poverty, Marginalized people, Economic growth, Awareness through Tamil Language Films, Cinematography, Spreading Awareness through Cinema and SDG Narratives in South Indian Films.

Introduction

South Indian cinema, an influential medium in the socio-cultural landscape of India, has played a pivotal role in advocating for these goals by embedding themes of sustainability, equality, and justice into its storytelling. South Indian cinema, encompassing Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam film industries, has a rich history of reflecting societal issues and driving change. With a massive audience base across India and abroad, these films hold the power to influence public opinion and behavior significantly. By leveraging narratives that resonate with diverse audiences, filmmakers have effectively highlighted various aspects of the SDGs, often intertwining entertainment with strong social messages.

Films acting as catalysts for change in society – a brief on selected films

Aruvi (2016) -

Aruvi (2016) is a powerful and thought-provoking Tamil film that addresses several important social issues. The film, which deals with the life of a young woman, Aruvi, and her struggles in a society that marginalizes and exploits her, explores themes of gender, mental health, poverty, and social exclusion.

Aruvi is a film that centers around a woman's journey through a society that marginalizes women, especially those who are non-conforming to traditional gender roles. The protagonist, Aruvi, experiences deep humiliation and rejection due to her unconventional behavior and the shame society places on her (Gender Equality - SDG 5).

Social Stigma against Women: Aruvi is a victim of sexual assault, and her trauma is amplified by the patriarchal norms that shame women for being victims. Her emotional and social struggles reflect the broader issue of gender-based violence and the lack of support for women.

Empowerment through Expression: The film also highlights Aruvi's ability to challenge societal norms, slowly reclaiming her identity and empowerment through her courage and ability to speak her truth.

Karnan (2021)

Karnan (2021) film centers on Karnan, a man from a backward village who fights for justice and dignity against a corrupt and oppressive system. It is a potent narrative that delves into the systemic injustice faced by marginalized people, making it an important cinematic exploration. It explores deep social issues, particularly related to caste discrimination, inequality, and the oppression of marginalized communities.

Caste-based Oppression: The film portrays the systemic exploitation of the lower caste people by the dominant caste. The villagers are constantly oppressed, denied basic rights, and subjected to violence. Karnan, as the protagonist, becomes a symbol of resistance against this injustice, fighting for the dignity and rights of his community (Reduced Inequalities - SDG 10).

Community Justice: Karnan's personal journey is not just about resisting physical oppression but also about challenging the failure of institutional justice. The film showcases the absence of legal or state-backed support for the downtrodden, and Karnan's rebellion becomes an act of seeking justice when official channels fail (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions - SDG 16).

Economic Independence and Empowerment: Karnan's struggle can be seen as a fight for social and economic justice. The oppressive social systems prevent the community from achieving economic independence, which in turn keeps them trapped in cycles of poverty (Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 8).

Community Solidarity and Sustainability: Despite being oppressed, the village community shows solidarity and resilience, working together to resist injustice. The communal spirit in the face of adversity symbolizes the strength of close-knit, sustainable communities, even in harsh circumstances (Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG 11).

Kaala (2018)

The film explores the fight of the oppressed against systemic injustice, primarily focusing on Dalits and the underprivileged in urban slums. Through its narrative and portrayal of Kaala (played by Rajinikanth), the film reflects various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty, inequality, justice, and urban development.

Land Rights and Economic Justice: The film revolves around the slum dwellers in a Mumbai locality, where they are being forcefully displaced by land developers who want to gentrify the area. The residents, led by Kaala, fight for their land and livelihoods. This represents a direct challenge to SDG 1 (No Poverty), as the film highlights how poverty is often perpetuated through the loss of land, displacement, and lack of economic opportunities.

Caste and Class Struggles: The slum dwellers, largely composed of Dalits, face significant oppression from both the state and powerful landowners. Kaala's resistance is not just a fight for land but for dignity, equality, and the abolition of caste-based discrimination. The film directly aligns with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), advocating for the reduction of inequalities, particularly those based on caste and social status.

Exploitation of Labor: Many characters in the film, particularly those from the slums, are depicted as working in menial, exploitative jobs without any social security or decent wages. Kaala's role as a leader

within the slum highlights the economic exploitation faced by the working class, which resonates with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The film emphasizes the need for fair wages, job security, and equal economic opportunities for all citizens, particularly the marginalized.

Urban Slums and Gentrification: The slum, where the film is set, represents the precarious living conditions of the marginalized in urban India. The attempts by corporate forces to gentrify the area, displacing its residents, mirror the real-world problems faced by urban slum dwellers globally. This ties into SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Corruption and Institutional Failure: "Kaala" portrays how powerful, corrupt figures manipulate the state machinery to exploit the poor. The film exposes the institutional corruption that allows the elite to trample upon the rights of the marginalized without fear of retribution. This aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which advocates for the establishment of transparent and accountable institutions.

Maamannan (2023)

Maamannan (2023) is a powerful Tamil film that delves into themes of caste, power dynamics, and social justice. The narrative focuses on the protagonist's battle against systemic oppression and the complex relationship between political power and social inequality. The film's central themes, including caste-based discrimination, the fight for justice, and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

Empowerment and Resistance: The protagonist's fight against the oppressive forces that seek to maintain caste-based dominance represents a powerful call for SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The film promotes the idea of dismantling systemic inequalities and uplifting marginalized communities by challenging the status.

Resistance Against Oppression: At its core, "Maamannan" is a narrative about the battle for justice against corrupt and oppressive political and social institutions. The protagonist's fight reflects SDG 16, which calls for peaceful, inclusive societies and the need for strong institutions that ensure justice, equality, and accountability.

Economic Exploitation of Marginalized Communities: The film touches on how caste oppression leads to economic marginalization, with lower-caste individuals often relegated to menial and exploitative jobs with little opportunity for economic mobility. This aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which advocates for inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

By focusing on caste-based oppression, political corruption, social justice, and the empowerment of marginalized communities, the film champions the need for Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). The film also calls for Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), as well as indirectly addressing issues of land rights and responsible consumption.

Conclusion

Films have long been a powerful medium for conveying social, political, and economic issues, and in recent years, many filmmakers have used cinema as a tool to raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Wide range of global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, climate change, peace, and justice. In this context, films play a significant role in educating audiences, sparking discussions, and inspiring action.

