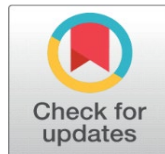
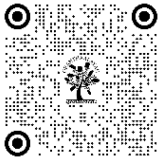


TAMIL FILM AND SUSTAINABILITY: A NEW TURN FROM ILLUSION TO REALITY - AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based discrimination, climate change catastrophes, and expanding populations are the most concerning factors of the twenty-first century. The entire world requires rapid action to control the current challenge. To meet the world's population's needs and to improve the lives of every living being, there must be a disciplined livelihood to deal with the problems that man creates. The benefits of the seventeen sustainable goals structured by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 bring an admirable global notice to society. Each is distinct in its way and extremely valuable and beneficial to humans and other living beings. Artists of various kinds contribute a lot to achieving these sustainability goals through their artistic creations. Congenially, a participatory outlook on these goals is more prominently seen in many regional film industries in Indian cinema. Among them, the Tamil film industry has recorded these 17 targeted concepts at different times and in variant ways of life. Eliminating poverty, providing quality education, reducing inequality, establishing good health and well-being, and other SDG themes can be appropriately traced in Tamil cinema from its early days. This paper analyses the SDG as depicted in two female-centric Tamil films, 36 Vayadhinile (2015) and Raatchasi (2019). Both films portray refreshing characters battling towards a strong hope for sustainable societal growth and uncover the major SDG goals on the screen for the audience's cognizance. The core possibilities of pursuing Sustainable Development Goals likely with tangible results are identified in the paper with a thorough study of the several SDG plans portrayed in the films.

Keywords: Tamil Film, SDG, Female Protagonists, Sustainable Livelihood, Society

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian films stand out for tackling various topics, and captivating audiences globally with powerful performances. Throughout its development, Indian cinema has shaped its history and experienced pivotal moments. Millions of people across all ages, social classes, sexes, and communities have been captivated by the variety of genres on the silver screen, from cliched love stories to action, drama, realism, and fantasy. The influence of cinema on people's awareness makes it a potent tool for social change. Films have the power to highlight social injustices and India's diverse culture can significantly benefit from cinema's unifying force. People from various socioeconomic levels and origins, regardless of their language, are equally intrigued and drawn to movies. Himanshu Rai's 1936 film Achhut Kanya

(Untouchable Girl) deftly covers the sensitive social subject of caste discrimination. The narrative centers on the challenges faced by Devika Rani, who plays a Harijan girl, and Ashok Kumar, portraying a typical Brahmin. In the tale, two people who have been friends since childhood grow to love each other, unable to get married because of social conventions. The film is among the first in Indian movie history to raise concerns about religious intolerance, class disparities, and caste bias, all of which prevented the couple from being married. According to the UN's 10th Sustainable Development Goal, "Inequality threatens long-term social and economic development, harms poverty reduction, and destroys people's sense of fulfillment and self-worth. This, in turn, can breed crime, disease, and environmental degradation" (UN 2015). It is admirable that Indian cinema began to depict the principles of sustainable development goals when the concept was not so well defined.

Many regional movies paved the way to address social issues concerning society's development and the personal growth of individuals. Numerous relevant concepts were taken into consideration to dissect the issues that are prevailing in the current society. The Tamil film industry has concentrated on issues that closely equate to the elements of current sustainable development goals such as eradicating poverty, sustaining zero hunger, good health and well-being, giving quality education and importance to gender equality, and much more. The research explores how the SDGs are portrayed in two female-centric Tamil film narratives: 36 Vayadhinile (2015) and Raatchasi (2019). Both films depict strong female characters striving to promote the SDGs. The films are made to entertain and educate the current society, directing the betterment of the nation and its audience.

2. SUSTAINABILITY IN FILMS

Investigating cinema as a medium for sustainability communication is essential because how films communicate about environmental issues shapes our understanding of them and our willingness to act on them (Cox, 2009; Hansen, 2010). Recently, global threats have increasingly prompted deep visual adaptations on-screen to envision a more sustainable future. Remarkably, the film medium has played an unavoidable part in bringing forth strong environmental messages during the last few decades. (Brulle, 2010). The Tamil film industry is profoundly interested in promoting the SDGs in recent films. The films with commercial aspects also carry didactic elements, which happen to be associated with sustainability. For the past two to three decades, films set in different social milieus have concentrated on the need for education, eradicating poverty, environmental preservation, and many other social issues that mirror the SDGs framed by the United Nations General Assembly.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Themes in Indian cinema are evolving to cater to the diverse tastes of a growing audience. Didactic ideas are increasingly appearing in commercial films. Film directors and scriptwriters face challenges in crafting compelling plots to convey these messages. India's sustainable development initiatives safeguard the nation's stability, the environment, and natural resources. Films with social messages are a popular trend in contemporary cinema, and the modern Tamil cinema audience has started to enjoy them. Tamil films like Ka Pe Ranasingam (2020), Koozhangal (2021), and Kadaisi Vivasayi (2021), along with numerous documentaries, effectively depict a range of environmental issues. The characters in these films

express a strong desire to preserve nature and agriculture. The Elephant Whisperers (2023), a documentary about a tribal couple and their beloved foster elephant, won the prestigious Oscar. The film's concept of preserving wildlife through compassionate human intervention earned the prestigious award. The visually themed environmental elements are commendable, as they inspire interest in nature preservation. When it comes to sustainability, aside from showcasing the challenging, hazardous interactions that harm the environment, alternative solutions that support sustainability are expected to be shown as well. The visually themed environmental elements are commendable, as they inspire interest in nature preservation.

3.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To determine the elements of SDGs dealt with in the film narratives of 36 Vayathinile and Raatchasi.
- To explore the feasibility of promoting SDGs with the female protagonist in the films, 36 Vayathinile and Raatchasi.

Research Gap

The majority of Tamil films focus on the nobility and equity brought to society only by male protagonists. The most popular and concentrated subjects in Tamil cinema are social changes, social justice, and traditional love relationships. However, these themes often fall short of providing actual remedies. A significant number of films to date have included environmental and ecological issues as sub-themes but drifted away from addressing these subjects meaningfully. It is rare to observe the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 21st-century movies. The commercial side of filmmaking often overshadows subjects related to ecology and the environment, as directors are pressured to make films financially successful. Additionally, directors must tailor important themes, such as environmental issues, to the tastes of the audience to make them more palatable. Selected films are carefully examined to trace the principles of the SDGs behind the events of the female lead character's life.

Research Questions

36 Vayathinile by Roshan Andrews and Raatchasi by Sy Gowthamraj are movies with subtle depictions of SDGs with Jyothika as the lead character. The greater part of films featuring female leads strives to empower women and promote gender equality. The chosen films likewise strive for empowerment, not only for women but also for overall human empowerment. In such a context,

The research study aims to answer the following questions:

- Do the films analyzed (36 Vayathinile and Raatchasi) show human empowerment that fosters sustainability?
- How many of the 17 SDGs are observed and related to the film contexts?
- Do the films have a compelling storyline that elevates the SDGs in relevance to the sustainability discourse?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The films' utilization of the SDGs is identified through the application of thematic analysis. Raatchasi and 36 Vayathinile are acknowledged as films strongly relying on sustainability. The practice of discovering patterns or themes in qualitative data is known as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a six-stage study

(Braun & Clarke, 2006) that begins with data familiarisation, then moves on to looking for concepts, analysing the subjects, defining and labelling themes, and finally generating the final result. To get accustomed to them, the films were watched several times to familiarize me with the contents. The resources were carefully studied, potential themes of the SDGs were identified, and it was ensured that the identified themes in the films truly represented the sustainable development goals. The next phase of the research delved into mapping the film scenes and labelling the concepts to derive the important elements of sustainability. The scenes were labelled according to the relationships among the characters, conversations, mise-en-scène components, and narrative motifs.

Out of the 17 SDGs, the topics and concepts were inclined towards sustainability, dissected, and analysed based on the core values of SDGs. A careful thematic analysis was carried out focusing on the film sequence/scene details, timing, concept-based analysis, and the SDG themes. Thematic analysis is usually performed with qualitative data; in this study, the film scenes and the conversations among the characters provide sufficient relativity to SDG tenets.

Ecofeminism: Bridging Feminism and Sustainability in Tamil Cinema

“Feminism is a perspective, not a method.... Feminist research aims to create social change, represent human diversity, includes researcher as a person, and attempts to develop special relations with the people studied” (einharz, 1992).

In the 20th century, ecofeminism emerged as a social and political movement addressing women's oppression and environmental degradation. Ecofeminism connects feminist and ecological concerns, advocating for respect towards nature and gender equality (d'Eaubonne, 1974). The Tamil film industry, traditionally a platform for social issues like caste discrimination, hypocrisy, and prejudice, has recently emphasized sustainability through woman-centric films. Tamil Nadu's cultural context often associates nature with femininity, resonating with audiences who value both cultural heritage and gender equality. By featuring powerful female leads, these films not only promote sustainability but also mirror the values of ecofeminism and the Sustainable Development Goals, advocating for a more equitable and respectful relationship with the environment.

Agenda Setting

Establishing an agenda is a key concept in understanding the influence of mass media on social views of what is important to society (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). The Tamil film industry has always focused on social issues as a part of their storytelling, thus creating an agenda. Several Tamil films, such as Sattai (2012) and Appa (2016), demonstrate issues in the education system, Kaththi (2014) deals with the water crisis, Koozhangal (2021) portrays rural poverty and Bhoomi (2021) talks about life on land. Understanding the different kinds of SDGs covered in well-liked, high-grossing films is essential in creating an avenue for promoting more environmentally inclined films. Films centered on socially significant subjects incorporate SDG ideals, intentionally or unconsciously. The discourses in these films can assist in identifying the agenda established within the scope and reach of the SDGs inherent in them. The fundamentals of sustainability are discussed in the paper by mapping and conceptualizing the scenes promoting sustainability.

Synopsis: 36 Vayathinile

36 Vayathinile deserves praise for its efforts to show women that they can overcome societal limitations, for raising awareness about the harmful substances in our food, and for its tactful message that age is irrelevant to success. The story

focuses on Vasanthi, a woman who succeeds in society after she attains 36. Vasanthi is a government office upper division clerk with a monthly wage. Her husband, who works at a radio station, plans a trip to Ireland with Vasanthi and their child. Unfortunately, Irish employers refuse her job applications due to her age. This episode becomes a pivotal moment in her life, leading her to launch and complete a greenhouse project. She gains wide recognition throughout India.

Inspired to set higher goals for herself, Vasanthi gets an idea from a wedding catering order. She encourages other women in her community to build greenhouses to provide nutritious produce for their loved ones and enhance her greenhouse. She also spreads awareness of the detrimental effects of chemically sprayed market crops. Vasanthi radiates an ecofeminist persona and advocates for natural greenhouses. Ultimately, her idea is chosen by the state administration, and she and her husband meet the President of India as an accomplished woman.

Mapping and Concepts

The conceptualizing and theme mapping were accomplished following an assessment of the film's elements and segmentation into scenes. Sequences without SDG content were excluded from the film study. Scenes and sequences concerning any of the 17 SDGs were selected to begin conceptualizing and theme mapping.

The following table represents the analytical section of the study. The scenes are curated under the SDG lens based on the perception of the concepts.

Table 1

Table 1 Scene Details and SDG Themes in 36 Vayathinile				
S. No	Scene Description	Timing	Concept	SDG Theme
1	Vasanthi supports the college dress code and equal rights.	1.05.22 – 1.06.00	Gender equality	Goal 5: Gender Equality
2	Vasanthi gains confidence from positive social media feedback.	1.08.17 – 1.10.52	Overcoming self-doubt	Goal 5: Gender Equality
3	Heart-to-heart with "Idly Amma" on women's challenges.	1.12.56 – 1.15.11	Empowerment of women	Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
4	Discussion on food security and nutrition awareness.	1.15.12 – 1.18.01	Food security and nutrition awareness	Goal 2: Zero Hunger
5	Community response to Vasanthi's terrace gardening initiative.	1.22.26 – 1.23.31	Sustainable agriculture, Community support	Goal 2: Zero Hunger
6	Chat with a neighbor about organic farming benefits.	1.25.35 – 1.26.09	Sustainable agriculture, Education	Goal 2: Zero Hunger
7	Vasanthi educates the public on pesticide harm in farming.	1.30.18 – 1.34.32	Environmental awareness, Knowledge sharing	Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals
8	Exploration of gender bias in careers and aspirations.	1.35.01 – 1.37.45	Gender equality, Career empowerment	Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
9	Discussion about societal limits on women's dreams.	1.39.41 – 1.41.22	Inequality, Cultural norms	Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
10	Highlighting economic empowerment through local organic produce.	1.41.24 – 1.42.01	Economic empowerment, Sustainable agriculture	Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
11	Recognition of Vasanthi's equality efforts in the state assembly.	1.42.02 – 1.44.00	Equality advocacy, Community Recognition	Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 discusses the thematic analysis of the film 36 Vayathinile. All eleven scenes taken for analysis constitute concepts associated with the Sustainable Development Goals in a social context. It highlights gender equality, decent work and economic growth, zero hunger, partnerships for the goals, peace and justice, strong institutions, and reduced inequalities.

Eleven scenes highlight five SDGs associated with women's empowerment. Global Goal number 5, Gender Equality, fosters inclusivity and encourages women to ask for their rights and choose their needs independently. Vasanthi, being a dutiful wife, starts seeking respect and acknowledgment and learns a new way of life. According to the UN report, "Nourishment is not just about the quantity of food, but its quality" (UN report 2015). Several scenes in the movie demonstrate the poor quality of vegetables sold for profit. The conversation between the cook and Vasanthi about the quality of vegetables creates awareness of SDG number 2, No Hunger, supporting women's role in food security as the foundation of food production and utilization. No Hunger aims to provide training for women farmers and access to information and technology to help women achieve significantly higher agricultural productivity. The scene demonstrates how people are exposed to vegetables that are not chemical-free.

A scene on organic farming addresses the 17th SDG, Partnership for the Goals. Vasanthi invites her friends and colleagues to engage in organic farming, seeking partnerships to achieve her goal. Though the implementation begins on a small scale, it encourages the goal. Decent Work and Economic Growth, the 8th SDG, is highlighted as women's empowerment fuels economic growth, promotes equality, and supports sustainable development through decent work opportunities. Vasanthi's conversation with an idli vendor and her dissatisfaction with her long-forgotten career are innuendos of the 8th SDG. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, the 16th SDG, can be seen during Vasanthi's conversation about her dreams and commitment. Equal opportunities and representation of women's rights from primary households to high-governance sectors are important for the welfare of any organized institution. Goal 10, Reduced Inequality, seeks to reduce gaps in income as well as those based on age, gender, disability, cultural origin, religion, or economic or other status within a country. Scene eleven, which takes place in the State Assembly, portrays Vasanthi being acknowledged for her achievements; she is equally lauded as any man in the country. All these scenes discussed are connected with the core tenets of the SDGs. The film showcases the relationship between society and the environment it has created.

According to 2015 research by the International Council for Science and the International Social Science Council, it is vital to communicate the significance of the 17 SDGs to achieve them. "To be effective in communicating the SDGs, it is necessary to have a compelling narrative to describe how the world could look when the SDGs are fully achieved" (ICSU and ISSC, 2015). The agenda-setting is promptly visualised by the film through various scenes.

Synopsis: Raatchasi

Geetha Rani (Ammu) arrives at R. Puthur with a letter of appointment designating her as the headmistress of a government school. She learns about the unruly kids, the outdated and uninterested routine of the teachers, and the education system that needs to be changed to ensure that society is uplifted with an appropriate education. Despite opposition from many private entities, the

headmistress implements several changes. The story recounts the obstacles she must overcome to resolve all of her problems. The laudable idea of improving education for the poor and raising government school standards makes Raatchasi highly effective. The praiseworthy aspect of the film is that it does not just raise issues but also provides persuasive solutions, such as encouraging parents to donate to the school's improvement by comparing it to a temple festival and asking teachers to be well-equipped to teach the needy. The movie highlights the urgently required reform in the educational system, even though the narrative is somewhat static.

Mapping and Concepts

The conceptualizing and theme mapping were performed after reviewing the film's material and segmenting it into scenes. The analytical portion of the film did not include scenes that lacked SDG content. Scenes and sequences related to any of the 17 SDGs were selected as the basis for the concepts and theme-mapping process. The table below reflects the study's analytical section.

Table 2

Table 2 Scene Details and SDG Themes in Raatchasi				
S. No	Scene Description	Timing	Concept	SDG Theme
1	Ms. Geetha Rani, the headmistress leads morning prayers and ensures school discipline.	19.57 – 22.15	Creating Awareness	Goal 4: Quality Education Goal 16: Strong Institutions
2	The headmistress leads a meeting with parents and teachers to discuss school improvements.	26.07 – 30.53	Social Change	Goal 3: Good Health & Well-Being Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals Goal 15: Life on Land
3	Ms. Geetha Rani and her father educate people on the dangers involved in unnaturally ripened tomatoes.	48.36 – 49.18	Consumerism	Goal 15: Life on Land
4	Amid bribery attempts, Ms. Geetharani remains composed.	50.05 – 51.16	Bribery	Goal 16: Peace and Justice
5	The district collector commends classroom activities and school progress.	53.45 – 54.36	Inspection, Activity-Based Education	Goal 4: Quality Education Goal 15: Life on Land
6	The headmistress inspires female students towards fulfilling lives.	56.17 – 57.48	Advice & Motivation	Goal 4: Quality Education
7	The headmistress resolves a student riot stemming from caste and community biases	1.02.38 – 1.05.08	Community Issues	Goal 16: Peace and Justice
8	Community support secures the headmistress's release, ensuring timely exam results.	1.54.34 – 2.04.22	Community Support	Goal 16: Peace and Justice Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 discusses the thematic analysis of the film, Raatchasi. All eight scenes taken for analysis encompass concepts associated with the Sustainable Development Goals in a social context. It highlights good health and well-being, life on land, quality education, peace and justice, economic growth, and partnerships for goals.

Out of the eight scenes analysed, three scenes highlight Global Goal number 15, Life on Land: "Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss" (UN General Assembly, 2015). The conversation about the quality of tomatoes between the vendor, the headmistress, and her father, as well as the district collector's appreciation of the school atmosphere, demonstrates the theme of life on land. The fourth SDG, Quality Education, is addressed in scenes depicting the morning prayer at the school and the establishment of discipline on the school premises. Here, fostering discipline among students is key to discussing a healthy education system. Empowering people through education enables societal inclusion, breaks down discrimination, and fosters improved living standards. Scenes seven and eight focus on Peace and Justice, where the headmistress resolves disputes among students regarding caste and community and successfully advocates for a student's release to take public exams. The community's support for the headmistress upon her release and a parent-teacher meeting discussing parental involvement in local cleanliness efforts highlight Partnership for the Goals. Cleaning the locality with the participation of parents, including government officials, also emphasizes Good Health and Well-being.

The literature and various art forms, such as films and documentaries, emphasise the importance of partnerships and collaborations among governments, civil society, corporations, and international organizations in achieving the SDGs. Multi-stakeholder participation, knowledge exchange, and resource mobilization are crucial for addressing challenging issues in sustainable development (Singh and Pandey, 2023). Films featuring SDGs are welcomed by audiences as they provide both entertainment and societal insights. Thematic analysis reveals that the films analyzed have dimensions related to the SDGs. However, many socially relevant films often overlook the entrepreneurial roles of women. Women are underrepresented in roles pivotal for social transformation, such as teachers and entrepreneurs. Jyothika delivers a commendable performance in the movie, portraying the hardworking women who play crucial roles in real-life societal transformations.

Visual media are particularly effective for raising awareness due to their ability to convey new information and complex ideas quickly and memorably (Nicholson-Cole, 2005). The film serves as a compelling example of dramatic storytelling, utilizing sound effects, music, pacing, narration, and striking visuals to engage the audience emotionally. Climate change films can also inspire viewers to reevaluate their environmental impact and personal behaviors, especially when modeled by relatable characters (Bandura, 2004).

7. CONCLUSION

The research demonstrates that the films chosen for analysis include important SDG areas, highlighting key characteristics of the SDGs. Many recent movies have garnered attention for portraying environmental challenges. Promoting sustainability on a global scale through visual media is crucial to safeguarding future generations and ensuring current generations live decent lives. It's encouraging to see Tamil movies equally striving to achieve these goals for the betterment of society. Despite varying box office success, these films continue to attract audiences due to their quality and appeal to the actors' fan bases.

Preservation and reverence for elephants are central themes in the movie Kumki. While few films delve into the lives of farmers (Kadaisi Vivasayi, Boomi),

others explore themes related to tribes (Sembi, Kaadan), the sea (Kayal, Mariyaan), and support for tribal rights and autonomy (Viduthalai). These thematic explorations are positive developments for Tamil cinema. However, achieving ideal circumstances remains challenging. The portrayal of the female journey in these films effectively communicates SDGs visually, fostering a national urge to follow suit. As stated by Murdock (1990), "The feminine journey is about going down deep into the soul, healing, and reclaiming, while the masculine journey is up and out to the spirit".

8. FUTURE SCOPE

With their narratives and storylines, many films, film festivals, film forums, and conclaves can actively promote social and environmental change. The audience is not well addressed by films with delicate social subjects on a larger scale, but a small dose of entertainment coupled with sensitivity captivates the audience and encourages the directors to produce more films with messages. Unlike commercial dramas, these films can be described as experimental, testing the director's skill and presenting the audience with a novel perspective on sustainability. Indeed, viewers will experience something new when they leave the theatre. Such positive responses are refreshing for experimental works. These experimental films with modest settings provide researchers with opportunities to investigate previously unspoken issues.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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