

Worlding Tamil Cinema

Amrutha Kunapulli

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Introduction

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Introduction

Worlding Tamil Cinema

Growing up in Tamil Nadu, cinema was an unavoidable fact of everyday life; one could not be agnostic. The thousands of posters and cut-outs of film stars and/or politicians that dotted the vertical landscape of Chennai city ensured that the very first word I learned to read in Tamil was “Amma” (mother), from posters of film-star-turned-politician J. Jayalalithaa. She was symptomatic of the complexities of stardom, fandom, and cinema’s relationship to formal political systems in Tamil Nadu, which have been considered unique anthropological formations by academics. Yet, until this century, Tamil cinema was not legible or popular outside South India, let alone outside India. Despite being the biggest domestic rival to the more globally popular Hindi film industry, Tamil cinema is still further from academic recognition. The relative obscurity of the Tamil film industry in popular and academic discussions of cinema stems from the complex relationship between cinema, state, nationhood, and language that affects cinema in India, and the westernisation of film studies scholarship.

Tamil cinema is the label for Tamil-language film industry that is located in Tamil Nadu, India,¹ and is centred in the capital city, Chennai. In Tamil Nadu, cinema is the central medium of representation of the modern Tamil identity. This identity, as conceived and constructed during the colonial struggle and later in independent India, is rooted in two interrelated ideas: linguistic difference and Dravidian ideology. Not of the Indo-European family of languages, Tamil literary and spoken traditions have always been differentiated, by scholars and practitioners, from Sanskrit, with claims to an equally long classical history.² It is this linguistic pride that has ceaselessly fuelled an anti-Hindi position in Tamil Nadu’s modern history and continues to be part of its public discourses, including cinema, well into the twenty-first century.

At the same time, the idea of an Indian nation-state as forged by struggles against a colonial power was rejected by Tamil leaders of the mid-twentieth century. They perceived a national imaginary of “India” to be an Aryan conception and built on principles of caste and religious division, placing Sanskrit and Sanskrit-origin languages such as Hindi at the centre. Tamil, on the other hand, was part of a Dravidian identity—different from the Indo-European

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Aryan racial identities. Dravidian is a not-yet-completely-understood racial/genetic identity that is claimed to have origins in West and South Asia. In the aftermath of Indian independence, Tamil political leaders demanded secession from the Indian nation-state and the right to form a Dravidian nation-state or *Dravidistan*. This articulation of a non-Indian space in not-Hindi is foundational to the Dravidian movement and Tamil identity in general. It is this set of identity politics that was propagated by and reinforced through cinema, and continually positioned cinema as the site of identity politics, as the vehicle of propaganda of Tamil/Dravidian culture, and as the most prolific medium of representation in and of modern Tamil Nadu.³ Arguably, these very identity politics may have kept their reach smaller, more “regional” than the more “national,” globally circulated Hindi film industry.

Twenty-first-century Tamil cinema represents a significant break in this history, in its ability to circulate both within *and* outside Tamil audiences, both popular and academic. It is this phenomenon that becomes the central preoccupation of this book. The efforts of the film industry, in concert with global socio-economic forces, have resulted in Tamil cinema starting to be coded as “world cinema” rather than “Indian cinema.” By consciously altering narrative structures, participating in festival circuits, taking advantage of OTT platforms, and several other machinations, I have collectively termed worlding. Tamil filmmakers are finding non-native audiences. Essentially, Tamil cinema is shedding its status as a ‘regional cinema’ by bypassing the national—and the resultant national-regional binary—and existing as part of a network of world cinema. As such, to lay the groundwork for this study, one needs to understand the basics of Tamil cinema and its relationship to India and its cinemas, as well as Tamil cinema’s relationship to the changing definitions of world cinema as a category and as a field of study.

National, Regional, Global Art Cinema

Film Studies, film festivals, and Euro-American paradigms of prestige have canonically privileged national cinemas and global art cinemas, which in the case of India have usually been presented as either commercial Hindi cinema or independent art cinema. Take the case of the two internationally visible movies from India in the ’50s, soon after independence: *Mother India* and *Pather Panchali*. Mehboob’s seminal movie starring Nargis as the titular allegorical figure was a didactic, melodramatic narrative that brought together ideals of Nehruvian socialism and its projections of an Indian modernity and tied them to feminist ideals through the figure of *bhaarath maatha* / Mother India. Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali*, on the other hand, had the advantage of meeting the conventions of global art cinema. Mentored by Jean Renoir, and inspired by Vittorio de Sica, Ray’s work was in the language of realism: long and lingering takes, child protagonists, humanist narratives, and open endings. Although faring poorly at the domestic box office, *Pather Panchali* premiered

at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, and even without the benefit of subtitles, was an instant art cinema success. The differing but equal successes of *Mother India* and the *Apu* trilogy (of which *Pather Panchali* was the first) demonstrate that cinema from India had to either be national/commercial or global/art to find visibility outside national borders. Twentieth-century Tamil cinema rarely met either criterion.

In the realm of the national/commercial, non-Hindi commercial cinemas such as those of South India are often subsumed and suppressed under the label “regional” and are thus obscured in the study of “Indian” cinema. This is largely because commercial Hindi cinema, in the ’40s and the ’50s, had the dominant agenda of resisting British Rule, supporting Indian independence, and defining the values of independent India, whereas industries like Tamil cinema had an added prerogative of resisting the North Indian/Hindi/Hindu/Brahminical hegemony.⁴ In a collection of essays on Tamil cinema, appropriately subtitled “The Cultural Politics of India’s *Other* Film Industry” (my emphasis), one finds the argument that “Tamil cinema has been simultaneously collaborative, complicit and antagonistic to the project of nation building and yet remains at the margins of Indian cinema” (Devdas & Velayutham 168). This is mostly true of other “regional” film industries of India as well, with Tamil, Bengali, and, recently, Telugu cinema being the dominant alternatives to Hindi cinema. Thus, Tamil cinema was not legible as a national cinema. As such, it did not receive academic consideration, institutional support on the national level, or a broader audience.

In terms of global art cinema, unlike Bengali cinema, which often found its way outside the national-regional binary by participating in art cinema circuits, Tamil cinema did not have a cut-and-dry art cinema drive. The closest the industry came to an art cinema movement was the post-classical turn of the ’70s and ’80s. As the first chapter details, despite adopting techniques of neo-realism, this movement too featured vernacular and melodramatic narrative practices, and its films were the most commercially successful at the Tamil box office at the time, making it difficult to classify them as purely art cinema. In effect, Tamil cinema’s history had made it impossible for it to be read as either national/commercial or global/art cinema.

It must be noted that Tamil cinema is not unique in its ability to break the national cinema illusions of a homogenous nation of India; Bengali cinema and other cinemas of South India also prompt a revision of a homogenous “Indian cinema.” In fact, much like the way the history of Hindi cinema has obscured the varying histories of other cinemas of India, Tamil cinema holds a hegemonic position in common perceptions of the cinemas of South India. This is often because the cinemas of South India—especially the Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada film industries⁵—centred their production in Madras in their formative years. This allowed for greater fluidity of labour, technology, talent, and capital across these industries, and films and film stars received comparable reception across state lines in the first few decades of cinema in

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South India. However, this is not to say they share a similar history or ideological trajectory.

If Telugu cinema gets associated with its fan-phenomena [...], Kannada film is known for its linguistic chauvinism, and though fading, the idea of “good” Kannada film as the “art film” of the 1970s and 1980s still stands strong. Tamil cinema, of course, gets inseparable from its connection to politics, Dravidian or otherwise, and Malayalam cinema to its realist element and to its communist undercurrents.

(Sowmya Dechamma and Sathya Prakash xvii)

Tamil cinema is often projected to stand-in for South Indian cinema more broadly because these cinemas are all labelled “regional” cinema, and Tamil cinema is the most explicit in voicing resistance against said “regionality.”⁶

Writ large, the landscape of cinema in India is such that the study of how cinema is produced, distributed, and consumed directly maps onto the sociological complexity of the Indian nation-state, its colonial histories, its intranational oppositions, and the workings of the diversity matrix of region, religion, caste, and gender. If cinema, therefore, is the single most useful cultural object by which to gauge the progress of the project of Indian nationhood, that study of non-national, and at times anti-national, industry like Tamil cinema presents the fissures and fractures of the project, as well. In the twenty-first century, Tamil filmmakers are reappropriating this complicated relationship with the national and leveraging it to participate in world cinema networks by making visible transnational connections and histories.

Revising World Cinema through Tamil Cinema

To understand Tamil cinema in and as world cinema, the limits of the world cinema discourse need to be understood. There are two ways to approach and define world cinema: the ontological and the epistemological. In other words, there is world cinema as a category of cinema: a collection of films that share certain traits and features, which could bring them under the label of world cinema; and there is World Cinema as a field of cinema studies whose central preoccupation might be the study of the aforementioned movies, traits, and features. In addition, however, the field of cinema studies that we might call World Cinema also concerns itself with the structures and politics of scholarship, methodology, discourse, and what has broadly been conceived as the “de-westernisation” of film studies. I contend that Tamil cinema, in its novelty on the world cinema stage, might provide productive complexities to the theorisation of both understandings of the term.

In tracing the genealogy of world cinema, the scholarly field and the movies it studies are often interchangeable in their usage. Films and film cultures that used to occupy the erstwhile categories of global art cinema, Third Cinema, or transnational cinema are now labelled and studied as, or included in syllabuses

of, “world cinema.” It was earlier a somewhat catch-all term for all those films that are not Hollywood, a perspective that was sought to be revised by Nagib, Perrian, and Dudrah in their collection *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (2012). Using Dennison and Lim’s *Remapping World Cinema* (2006) as a point of departure, they begin by stating that “the greatest danger of defining world cinema negatively, as ‘non-Hollywood cinema’ is to perpetuate the patronising attitude which sees all other cinemas as victims” (xxii). Working with Shohat and Stam’s notion of polycentric multiculturalism, Nagib, Perrian, and Dudrah’s clarion call is to liberate “world cinema” from the Manichean binary shackles the Hollywood / not Hollywood. The category of world cinema is then no longer necessarily film cultures that are not Hollywood. Neither are they film cultures that are simply not Western. The ontological category of world cinema is arguably an all-encompassing, almost tautological ontology, or attempting to be one that seeks to embrace all cinematic traditions, without necessarily privileging any one.

In tandem with this project of defining world cinema as a levelling category, fundamental revisions in Film Studies scholarship are required, a call to which Bâ and Higbee respond with their collection, *Dewesternizing Film Studies*, which

[S]eeks to problematizes a binary mode of thinking that continues to promote an idea of “the West and the rest” in relation to the questions of production, distribution, reception, and representation within an artistic medium (cinema) that, as part of contemporary moving image culture, is more globalized and diversified than at any time in its history.

(1)

Appropriately, the essays in their collection include critical, academic essays, but also interviews with filmmakers, and anthropological observational essays. Other scholars who study world cinemas similarly diversify their methodology to move beyond close reading and grand theory, towards sociological, anthropological, and digital humanities methods, which include fieldwork, interviews, and data mining to scaffold their arguments. In such ways, World Cinema can be understood as a field that attempts to recognise all cinemas as equal by privileging the study and scholarship of all cinemas for what they are, without defining them primarily by what they are not. Of pertinence here is the tendency of World Cinema, taking its cue from the de-westernising impulses of Third Cinema, to allow for a study of cinema that does not privilege Western methodologies of scholarship.

Primarily, World Cinema as a field offers a space for non-national and non-art cinema to be viewed as world cinema, which is necessary for the study of an industry like Tamil cinema that is inherently non-national and, at times, anti-national. The Indian nation-state, in particular, was born fragile, an imagined community not necessarily co-opted into by all the regions it encompassed. Secessionist movements from the South, East, and Northern edges of the country, and constant threats from Pakistan, continue to haunt the everyday

existence of the state.⁷ When translated to cinema, it becomes difficult then to speak of an “Indian” cinema; a national cinema of a nation “which is often—uniquely, for a postcolonial state—embarrassed, rather than gratified, at having inherited the world’s largest, and most diverse, film production base” (Rajadhyaksha 45). And yet, national histories of Indian cinema have been compiled (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen), and broad-stroke analyses of “Indian” film industries have been published. However, most scholarship of cinemas from India have sought to theorise Hindi cinema and name it “Indian cinema” (Vasudevan; Hogan; Chakravarty), leaving the other film industries of India to find their own way into being recognised, given that they are excluded from the recognised classification of the “national.” And so, the term “regional” cinema was theorised to discuss non-Hindi-cinema. Implicit in this categorisation was of course the pro-Hindi bias evident in early nation-building projects. The non-Hindi, “regional” film industries were as excluded from nation-building as they were from studies of national cinemas. In contrast, to study Tamil cinema as World Cinema implies the ability to study a film industry, which is located in India and affected by grand historical narratives of Indian independence, but not beholden to the same cultural and historical trajectories of a homogenous “Indian” cinema.

Aside from constricting frameworks of the national, Elavarthi Sathya Prakash notes, the theories of Film Studies often have to be “dramatically stretched” to fit the study of non-Hindi cinemas of India (177). The use of what is termed “Grand Theory”—using lenses of postcolonial, Marxist, psychoanalytical theories—have usually proven to be safe methods for the study of cinemas of India to find acceptance in Western academic cultures. It is a further impediment that classical Film Studies scholarship often favours the study of “art” cinema or high culture cinema, which automatically excludes cinemas of South India that are predominantly popular and populist cinemas. As Sathya Prakash asks, it often comes down to the question of whether Western scholarship possesses the experience and awareness to study cinemas that require different reading strategies (“Beyond ‘Bollywood’” 177). For instance, the concepts of film theory, film history, and film interpretation are often used interchangeably in the study of Tamil or Telugu cinema (Hughes “Madras Cinema Audiences,” Sathya Prakash “Telungu Identity, Tamil Cinema, and Cultural Politics”). Similarly, in the study of cinemas of India, the “story” or plot becomes a crucial site of study, unlike classical film theory or western film history that places pre-eminence on the interpretation of the visual, sonic, and technical aspects of filmmaking, and often disregards audience response as worthy of study. And it is because of such discursive restrictions that the majority of Tamil cinema scholarship in English is found in the fields of anthropology (Sara Dickey, Stephen Hughes, Rajan Krishnan, Constantine Nakassis, Anand Pandian, etc.), sociology (Vijay Damodaran, MSS Pandian, Selvaraj Velayutham), literature (Sathiyavathi Chinniah, Vasugi Kailasam, C.S. Lakshmi, Perundevi Srinivasan), and area/culture studies and ethnography (Robert L. Hardgrave, Sundar Kaali, Preeti Mudaliar). Within

media studies more broadly, there is recent work done in communication studies (Vijay Devdas, Sriram Mohan, Joyojeet Pal, Ashwin Punathambekar). The study of Tamil cinema has rarely found space in Film Studies proper, with the most substantial work being one monograph on the studio system of the '70s and '80s (Pillai's *Madras Studios*). Thus, the epistemological freedoms provided by World Cinema by encouraging non-traditional modes of film studies scholarship might better support the study of a not-national (but not regional) film industry like Tamil cinema.

It must be noted that, however, both world cinema and World Cinema have certain limitations (as of now) that prohibit a holistic study of Tamil cinema. If world cinema is defined as a category where “notions of a single centre, primacies and diachronicities are discarded, [and] everything can be put on the world cinema map on an equal footing” (Nagib et al., 2012: xxiii), this presumes that all cinema can be and is accessible across a wide cross-section of audiences, which poses challenges to a study of Tamil cinema as world cinema. Such a definition of world cinema arguably relies, to a great extent, on the translatability of language, aesthetics, genres, and technology, as well as the film industry's ability to co-opt into globally recognised modes of filmmaking. Historically, the majority of Tamil productions have not been brought to the attention of the non-Tamil-speaking public, have not been subtitled, and have rarely been viewed or studied by anybody but native Tamil speakers. If the world outside does not/cannot access Tamil cinema, is it still world cinema?

A Revised World Cinema

At the inaugural Global Cinema Symposium held at the University of Texas, Dallas, in 2024, several self-identified world cinema scholars set ourselves the task of revising the limits and definitions of world cinema. The conference began with the idea that world cinema might be simply all cinema in the world. But over the days, my ideas were sharpened, and I began to understand that maybe the consensus was that cinema that was aware of the world is world cinema. It fell in line with the impetus of my project and scholarship, where I proposed a category of world cinema that rests upon the principles of democracy and globalisation, but still created a functional heuristic: a category that allows for differences between industries, while not privileging any one industry.

The working definition of world cinema in this project then: world cinema is any cinematic endeavour that demonstrates an awareness of the world; in the context of Tamil cinema this includes cinema that intentionally attempts to and/or succeeds in cultivating a non-native audience, and those cinematic practices that borrow from or influence non-native texts and cultural influences. (The disciplinary field of World Cinema might then be that which studies this category.)

I think about non-native audience as those audiences outside the original culture of the film industry in question. It would include Marvel Studios attempting to cultivate a Chinese audience, Senegalese filmmakers finding their

niche in European film festivals, Nollywood being watched as fantastic/cult cinema in the US, Tamil cinema being watched by North Indians, or Sri Lankan Tamil cinema finding Indian Tamil audiences. This becomes relevant in the light of there being films from specific film industries that are made for a specific linguistic and cultural audience. In Tamil cinema, the typical mass/*masala* movie rarely finds an audience outside South India (and its first-generation diaspora) and rarely tries. They are movies made for pre-existing fans and audiences who are familiar with the language and conventions of the Tamil film industry, such as *Tamil Padam*, which is a parody of the mass Tamil movie. Similarly, thousands of video films in Nigeria and Senegal probably never see an outside audience. One might even consider the melodrama of “Lifetime” movies in the US that are rarely accessible or viewed outside the US. Presumably, there are films from many industries that neither attempt nor succeed at cultivating an audience outside the original linguistic community or national configuration. I acknowledge that my configuration of world cinema as a category will exclude these films and film cultures. However, *because* of such exclusion, it reconfigures world cinema as functional heuristic, and not a summation of all films produced across the world.

This definition is partly supported by the ideas of Shekar Deshpande and Meta Mazaj who conceive World Cinema as a polyvalent, polycentric, and polymorphous study of cinema in which they

(...) maintain the basic tenet of world cinema [is] that films are to be seen in cultural context outside of their own, then the spheres of visibility are fluid for different films. Each form of cinema, from European art cinema to minor cinema or peripheral cinema, is caught in this politics of visibility where its capacity to reach wider audiences is a result of intervening forces of economics and institutional and state power. Each of these cinemas needs to be granted a perspective of world cinema from its own vantage point while mapping its relations of power to the larger spheres of influence.

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The politics of visibility being a function of institutional and state forces is central to this understanding of world cinema; it is also central to the circulation of cinema as commodity. Further, it allows this study of cinema and global networks to be polycentric, i.e., located at multiple centres rather than simply Hollywood and European cinema. Instead, they propose Hollywood, “Indian cinema and Bollywood, Asian cinemas (Japan, Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, and South Korean cinema), European cinema, and Nigerian cinema or Nollywood” as the centres of study for world cinema (25). This was decided based on the fact that these films have high cinematic activity, critical mass of indigenous scholarship, and (as relevant to my project) spheres of influence outside their borders. However, this form of polycentrism, in its attempt to map “world cinema through these five centres” without “eclips[ing] their internal

diversity and complexity” (26), seems almost impossible. As described, the system has the potential to continue to ignore certain power structures within those centres. Centring Nigerian cinema as the sole “hotspot” of cinemas of Africa, for instance, might obscure the transnational histories of Ghanaian cinema that operate outside Nollywood and the festival successes of Ousmane Sembène.

Specific to my project is the phrase “Indian cinema and Bollywood.” While better than claiming to be “Indian cinema *or* Bollywood,” the project continues to centre Bollywood as the “popular national cinema of India,” (141) by claiming Hindi to be the national language of India, which it is not.⁸ The other cinemas of India are labelled “multiple language cinemas” instead of regional cinemas, which—while definitely resisting the “national-regional” binary—would not really make visible the politics of access and visibility within the country. While acknowledging that Bollywood has taken over the popular image of Hindi cinema and therefore, by extension, obscures other film industries in India (including non-Bollywood Hindi cinema), Deshpande and Mazaj continue to hold to an idea of “Indian cinema” that presumes a homogenous history and present of cinemas of India. However, as the first chapter will show, Tamil cinema (as with Bengali cinema or South Indian cinemas) has had a distinct trajectory, separate from that of Bollywood. The spheres of influence of Tamil cinema are different, as are the diasporas with which it engages. Unlike Bollywood, whose “old diasporas” were the Caribbean, the Tamil diaspora was located in Singapore, Malaysia, and erstwhile Burma and received considerable visibility and circulation in South East and East Asia.

In sum, Deshpande and Mazaj argue that the field of World Cinema might concern itself with the politics of visibility and access of cinema and with the project of levelling the field of study by making Hollywood one among five centres of study. Their conception then expands both the category and the field of study. This study of Tamil cinema argues for the revision of both concepts: it asks that the definition of world cinema as a category be expanded to include any movie that can act as a vehicle for understanding cross-cultural distribution and pollination, not necessarily defined by region or nation. In a sense, my understanding of world cinema centres film-as-commodity more than it does film-as-text or film-as-cultural-object. Cinema that evidences global/transnational/trans-regional distribution networks, whether formal or informal, becomes included in the category of world cinema.

While the focus here is Tamil cinema, it is simply a case study in the shifting paradigms of world cinema, a way to revise our understanding of world cinema (to add to that of Deshpande and Mazaj) that world cinema might comprise of all cinema produced in the world that attempts to or succeeds at cultivating a non-native audience. The study of those cinemas presents an interesting set of principles regarding recognisability and access; they question categories of the national and transnational, and at times render them obsolete. Film industries that work towards a non-native audience are significant because of how consciously they navigate the local and the global, the vernacular and the contemporary “foreign.” In essence, it assumes that in order for

films to be able to participate in a world-ness, they would have to adapt to a certain “world cinema” mode of filmmaking. It begs an exploration into the sociological foreignness of the diaspora and the theoretical modernism of global capitalism. World cinema, as a function of non-native audiences, necessitates that film studies be a transdisciplinary discourse that moves beyond simply the text at hand and engages with the broader socio-cultural systems of which the film industry is a part. I take the presence of non-native audiences and the presence of non-native influences as my parameters, as both evidence access and visibility. The field of World Cinema, in my conception, studies the politics and structures of distribution, reception, and exhibition; the nuances of access and recognisability of cinema from across the world, taking its focus to be cinema (or more broadly, moving images) that is facilitated by these networks of access.

What Is Worlding for World Cinema?

Contemporary Tamil cinema is an appropriate case study through which to showcase and practice this understanding of World Cinema because of the rapidity with which it is worlding i.e., the conscious move on the part of Tamil filmmakers to engage with the world and place themselves and their work within the discourse of world cinema. Worlding, simply put, is the ability and process of becoming engaged with the world, where “world” is defined as different from “local,” “regional,” and “national”. In literary studies, the term worlding has had a long lineage from Hegel to Derrida to Spivak to Cheah, each of whom constructs a different aspect of the philosophical concept of world and worlding. Most germane to my conception is its usage in postcolonial theory introduced by Gayatri Spivak. Spivak defines worlding as “a texting, textualizing, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood” (“Criticism, Feminism and The Institution.”). She acknowledges “worlding” to be an imperialist project whereby the colonised were ontologically and epistemologically otherised through colonial discourses of representation. Thus, her conception of worlding implies the awareness of something that is open to interpretation as art and its ability to be “understood” and interpreted. Spivak theorised worlding at the beginnings of the postcolonial mo(ve)ment, where she read colonising forces as having “worlded” cultures and peoples through the discourses of colonialism (art, literature, cartography, naming, etc.). In other words, the colonised were worlded in order to be understood and interpreted by the Western colonial forces. Therefore, to consider worlding is to consider the ways in which things and persons are recognised as objects for study (to be studied by the West).

In her own formulation of the term, she acknowledges that her “notion of the ‘worlding of a world’ upon what must be assumed to be un-inscribed earth is a vulgarization of Martin Heidegger’s idea” (“Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”). Heidegger’s “worlding” refers to the gerundive process of making one familiar with the world—to give meaning and significance

to an extant world through interaction. It is not, however, an active process, in the sense that worlding is always happening, with little or no agency in the hands of the subject whose world is in the process of worlding. Spivak took this minimal agency and reframed it in the postcolonial lens, whereby the Third World was being constructed, with little or no agency of its own, by the imperialist mission of the Empire. Postcolonial worlding was evidence of an imperialist discursive project that showcased the world on a map as drawn by colonial powers.

In the moment in which I write, I propose to take the term further away from its postcolonial intention by claiming a conscious and agentive role (at least, partly) in the hands of the artist or collective of artists in their own worlding. Texts are being created to present a subject rather than an object, to represent subjecthood, and they are created to be “understood” and interpreted by non-native audiences. In both cases, texts are worlded at the moment they are accessed or made real to another. But in the contemporary moment, texts from postcolonial countries construct themselves—to make themselves familiar to the world by their own representations of themselves, rather than an othering (similar to the agenda presented in Solanas’ and Getino’s manifesto). Where Spivak’s worlding of a world was a necessary formulation in the postcolonial era, in the contemporary post-national era of globalisation, the erstwhile postcolonial countries are finding themselves with increasing access to and by the rest of the world.

To be precise, “worlding” is a broad process of providing oneself with a global public discourse through a cognisant crafting of a self-image. It is to be aware of and take advantage of the networks of access and make oneself accessible and recognisable to the world. It links to contemporary theorisation of the “worldliness” of African cinema, which, as defined by Nuttall and Mbembe,

has to do not only with the capacity to generate one’s own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes in the service of one’s own making.

(Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, 1)⁹

Working off this definition and borrowing from Ferguson and Achille, Carmela Garritano studies popular African (specifically Ghanaian) cinema:

As modern African cultural articulations, they participate in the “worlding” of Africa (Simone 2001) and the “indigenizing” (McCall 2002) of global technologies, styles, desires, and discourses. As global vernacular forms, they trouble generalizations about an African or national identity because they emerge from, are shaped by, and reshape “a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (Appadurai 1996, 6).

(Garritano 15)

Tamil cinema is caught in a similar process of “worlding” and “indigenizing,” in an attempt to transcend a specific national framework. However, the worlding of Ghanaian cinema (or popular cinema of Africa) is targeted at their growing diasporic communities. Garritano’s study illuminates the cultural ecology of globalisation through the circulation of these videos “within the space of the *African everyday*” (15) (my emphasis). In contrast, Tamil cinema’s worlding, and the worlding that this project concerns itself with, has to do with a broader target audience, that is roughly defined as a balance of native and non-native audiences.¹⁰ This will, to an extent, involve an otherising—to locate Tamil cinema as singular and unique in a certain fashion. Simultaneously, however, contemporary worlding will include processes of relatability—situating Tamil cinema as accessible and recognisable. The teleological end of the worlding of Tamil cinema is in its being read, interpreted, and understood as world cinema, rather than as a cinema of India.

In a sense, the postmillennial turn of Tamil cinema, i.e., the worlding of Tamil cinema, undertakes the principles laid forth by Miriam Hansen in her theorising of vernacular modernism but marries it with what Garritano describes African popular video movies to be, a global vernacular. Hansen argues that cinema is always modern; it is created and sustained by technologies of modernity and constantly engages them, thus becoming a self-reflexive function of modernity. Central to her argument is that the dominance or even hegemony of modernist aesthetics—championed by Hollywood as the harbinger of modernity—allowed for a change in the medium of cinema as a whole. Hollywood’s ability to be classical, low-brow, mass produced and therefore replicable and accessible, allowed for it to be reproduced across cultures; it became the vernacular of modernism. In contrast, Tamil cinema’s worlding is in the postglobal moment; it is effected by the technologies of globalisation (or the scapes of globalisation, to borrow from Appadurai). As such, it is not Hollywood that is providing Tamil cinema its language to articulate or effect its globalised status. The processes of twenty-first-century Tamil cinema diffuse the centre and find their inspirations and affectations from a myriad of film movements and industries, notably East Asian cinemas, other cinemas from India, Third Cinema, and global art cinema. The ready availability of media from non-Hollywood industries creates an environment of cross-cultural pollination that is wider and more diverse than at the moment of modernity.¹¹ The lack of an unequivocal centre of influence for contemporary Tamil cinema posits that the *cinema franca* to which Tamil cinema is aspiring is not a Hollywood-dominated American cinema but the more amorphous idea of world cinema. The worlding of Tamil cinema demonstrates, then, a vernacular globalisation.

When understood as such a global process, studying the worlding of Tamil cinema can be understood as a multifaceted exploration: studying the changing definitions of the “Tamil” in Tamil cinema; studying the historical and contemporary global influences on the film industry; studying the mechanics of international distribution, circulation, and exhibition; and studying the

shifting limits of World Cinema as an area of scholarship. In the case of Tamil cinema, the mass movie presents itself as a reliable throughline for this multifaceted exploration and becomes an organisational principle for the book.

The Mass Movie: The Tamil of Tamil Cinema

Stephen Putnam Hughes, a scholar of early Tamil cinema, in an essay titled “What is Tamil about Tamil cinema?” argued that

(T)he “Tamil-ness” of Tamil cinema was not based on any fixed linguistic identity, but was constructed as a matter of production practice and critical discourse after the introduction of sound film during the 1930s. (...) The Tamil-ness of Tamil film must also be read in relation to an increasing differentiation within the ongoing linguistic division of Indian cinema, the critical discourses of Tamil revival and the cultural politics of caste and class during the 1930s and 1940s.

It is his contention that while it might be easy to understand the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema as, very simply, the language spoken within the film, Tamil-ness is not necessarily a “stable, self-contained, linguistically bounded tradition,” especially in its formative decades. Instead, the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema depended on where the film was produced, who was making the film, and what kind of music and theatrical traditions were presented on screen. It is important to note that Hughes identifies this location of production as a point of regional pride in India. Since Madras was the sole presidency of the South, it became a matter of reputation when Tamil films were produced elsewhere by non-Tamils. With the setting up of production studios in Madras, South India gained a collective foothold, and films in several South Indian languages began to be produced in Madras. This fostered a broader regional identity of South Indian cinema that still holds intact to an extent in the twenty-first century. For instance, while Hindi cinema long rid itself of the comedian figure and the comedy track, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada film industries continued to hold that figure in reverence into the early decades of the twenty-first century. The Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema was understood as entrenched in a South Indian/not-North Indian politics as it was being formulated.

Furthermore, with the introduction of sound, the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema was also situated in the songs and musical tradition of the early talkies. The Tamil-nationalist and Tamil-purist politics of the Dravidian movement dominated the debates about what should and should not represent Tamil music on screen. Hughes points specifically to the Dravidian poet, Bharathidasan’s critique of Tamil cinema as not being Tamil enough, because it borrowed from too many foreign elements, specifically, “an odd assortment of the costumes and tunes from north India, Telugu songs mixed with Tamil, slokas in Sanskrit, and speeches in English.” In essence, the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema was situated at the nexus of language, linguistic/regional identity

politics, and a call to present an authentic and pure Tamil-ness on screen that was devoid of influences from other cultures.

Bharathidasan's accusations of early Tamil cinema *forfeiting* its Tamil-ness by borrowing from too many foreign elements presents an interesting problem in the study of contemporary Tamil cinema that is consciously borrowing from foreign elements in order to *preserve* its Tamil-ness. Filmmaking practices, genre configurations, star processes, and circulation and exhibition practices have been evolving over the past three decades as a way of being more globally recognisable. It seeks to carve out a place within the category of world cinema; Tamil cinema is, indeed, worlding.

To that end, Tamil cinema has been re-orienting itself to world cinema and digital cinema approaches to filmmaking, production, and circulation. Contemporary Tamil filmmakers consciously acknowledge the influence of East Asian cinema, Latin American cinema, and Hollywood on their work. There are now Tamil films that are released on the internet and use hashtags as a way of publicising and being heard, and there are others that travel the festival circuit to be noticed, thus targeting both diasporic and unfamiliar audiences. Yet, this process of becoming globally visible, accessible, and recognisable has paradoxically cemented the need to stand out as Tamil. To paraphrase Vetrimarana, a contemporary Tamil filmmaker who is conspicuously intent on being included in broad definitions of world cinema, the more ethnic a film is, the more universal its appeal.¹²

Therefore, I look at the mass movie or the masala film—the staple mode of Tamil cinema—and the changes to it (including its marked but gradual disappearance) as a marker of changes to the Tamil of Tamil cinema. I look to this as a marker of the ethnic for, as Hudson and Zimmerman state, “[b]y North Atlantic standards, even the most traditional A-grade *masala* or C-grade “quickie” might appear avant-garde.” They further argue that “these richly textured films” in their peculiarities “make the ways that multiple modernities differ from (a singular) “the modern” apparent” (6).¹³ By their argument, the masala film has been a site of an alternative modernity; Tamil masala films are then a site of a Tamil modernity/postmodernity. They make apparent the “rejection of a strict distinction between modern and postmodern” as they operate within the conditions of postcoloniality. However, this project, in its navigation between nation, region, and world in a globalised era, looks at how the quirks of and changes to the mass mode can be representative of a post-global era of Tamil cinema, or indicative of the explicit worlding of Tamil cinema.

The term “masala” movie comes from these films having no specific genre structure (as understood in the west) but containing romance, comedy, action, and a socially relevant message all mixed in. I refer to them as the “mass” movie, for these films are made explicitly for a mass, mainstream audience. Furthermore, the English word “mass” holds specific connotations in Tamil cinema (similar to the word, “style”) that associate a movie with particular actors, narrative formulae, and commercial success. In Tamil cinema, the mass movie is, or rather was, built around its male lead actor and his politics, the comedian figure, and the songs.

The standard structure: the movie begins by introducing the hero with a fight sequence and song sequence that establishes the moral outlook of the male star and his character. We are then introduced to the main villain of the movie, and the politics for which he stands. In parallel, we are also introduced to the heroine of the movie, who, in her portrayal of trying to become “the good Tamil woman,” is presented as a woman in need of reform or rescue by the hero. The plot then becomes a series of challenges that the hero must overcome—with the final challenge being the main villain himself—in order to save his lover, his family, his community, and thereby the state/country. The issue plaguing the society against which he fights can be any number of things, from the evils of Western modernism in the ’60s to political corruption in the ’90s. More recently, the mass movie has dealt with gender equality in sports and society, political agency of the individual, or the importance of rural agricultural practices.

The mass film’s most attractive feature, however, is that the main plot is flanked by song sequences and a comedy track. The comedy track is a separate section of the plot starring the comedian of the movie that occasionally intersects with the main plot of the film by way of the comedian’s character being part of the hero’s primary support system. The song sequences are interstitial spaces that narrate the needs and wants of the hero and heroine and their community outside the moral confines of the diegesis. These two features are central to the promotion and success of the movie itself and circulate as paratexts (in promotion of the movie) and as extra-texts (on their own, outside of their relationship to the film), and they are a recurring feature of Tamil films (or other films from South India). The fact that the song sequence, comedy, and star politics exist in most films of Tamil cinema, irrespective of genre characteristics, is why I think of mass movie more as a mode than a genre of film.¹⁴ It is the way filmmakers have structured narratives.

The songs, fights, and comedy scenes of Tamil cinema and South Indian cinemas more broadly have been studied as “interruptions” as theorised by Lalita Gopalan, who argued that Hindi action cinema, and maybe popular Hindi cinema overall, is characterised by interruptions: specifically, the fight sequence, the interval, and the song-and-dance sequence. In Tamil and other South Indian cinemas, the same interruptions occur, albeit with a few more in tow: the comedy track and the specificities of star processes. However, as Ravindran Gopalan has argued, conceiving of them as “interruptions” betrays a normative bias from a Western perspective from which the song sequence is seen as breaking the narrative continuity and thus moving the movie away from Western ideas of “realistic” cinema. Instead, he argues,

Any commercial Indian film has to be seen in the same manner as the average Indian film viewer sees it—an organic whole, where the stars, their songs, stunts, moments of laughter and tragedies are interwoven more like a tightly knit fabric and less like a curtain of venetian blinds.

I attempt to look at them as somewhere caught between those two interpretations. They are not “interruptions,” for they are certainly a part of the narrative, without which many nuances and plot points are lost for the average native audience member. However, they are not just a part of the film. The comedian and his track, the song sequences, and the moments of star politics of any given film can and do exist as individual texts and circulate outside a movie as video clips that are screened on TV channels dedicated to film comedy or songs. More recently, these narrative moments circulate as YouTube videos, memes, GIFs, and TikTok texts (till it was banned in late 2020). They are characteristic of the vernacular film form, and they take on a characteristic of Tamil-ness in order to and as they circulate through social media circuits. The gradual change in how they function in Tamil movies in the twenty-first century is why they can be studied as a crucial site of Tamil cinema’s attempts at being world cinema.

Worlding Tamil Cinema

The sites that this book looks at—stardom, comedy, and musical interruptions—have been used by filmmakers and producers, stars and comedians, and musicians and lyricists as a way of articulating and presenting Tamil identity politics; they were, figuratively speaking, the “Tamil” of Tamil cinema. Changes to these elements (and to an extent, their disappearance) form the core interrogation of this book. It must be noted that the three sites are not discrete units but inform each other, and changes to each element are part of broader structural changes in the industry. For instance, a major change in the twenty-first century that has been observed is, as Vasugi Kailasam first noted, the emergence of the neo-noir black comedy film, made by a new generation of filmmakers like Karthik Subburaj, Nalan Kumarasamy, or Vignesh Shivan. Their films rarely feature established heroes, comedy tracks, or expensive song sequences, thus making this a genre or mode outside the mass movie. This may have partly been due to the fact the new generation of filmmakers did not work with expensive budgets of the ’90s.¹⁵ Without a big star at the helm, the need for star processes like the introductory song sequence becomes unnecessary. Furthermore, the genre characteristics of the neo-noir black comedy de-necessitate constructing the hero as a moral centre, therefore does not require a comedian sidekick to play foil to him. Instead, the genre encourages ensemble casts of characters who are all partially comical. In such ways, the emergence of certain genres ripple across various aspects of filmmaking. These shifts change the make-up of labour and talent in the industry, as well as causing differences in the way the film industry feeds the political conditions in the state. After all, morally infallible heroes being constructed through cinema has been the backbone of the political leadership in post-independence Tamil Nadu. (Notably, the emergence of the neo-noir anti-hero coincided with the first Chief Minister of the Tamil Nadu state who was not from the film industry.)

The genres themselves are a product of, or maybe representative of, changes in the socio-economic make-up of Tamil Nadu.¹⁶ Hariharan argues that dark comedy and the filmmakers that make them inherited a legacy “through the critical concerns surrounding the betrayal of a Tamil Dravidian Utopia by corrupt political leaders.” Further, he adds that:

These films in turn resonated with the dysfunctional portrayals of society in the works of Kim Ki Duk (*Coast Guard*), Almodovar (*All About My Mother*), Rodriguez (*Sin City*), Katia Lund (*City of God*), etcetera. The new anarchic Tamil cinema had gone far too global for the rest of the nation even to imagine.

Postmillennial Tamil cinema, in its form and content, betrays a “world cinema aesthetic” (Kailasam 24) and is a product of the informal film school facilitated by the media piracy centred in Burma Bazaar in North Chennai. Appropriately, contemporary Tamil cinema caters to “the eclectic visual consumption tastes of the modern, Tamil spectator” (24). This coming together of various processes of the industry in the service of catering to a globalised (both Tamil and non-Tamil) audience is an all-encompassing process that, over the next few chapters, I untwine, with dedicated chapters to changing politics of stardom in Chapter 2; the replacement of the comedian figure by the black comedy genre in Chapter 3; and the shifting functions of the song sequence in Chapter 4.

The core chapters on stardom, comedy, and songs are bookended by chapters dealing with broader dynamics of the industry. The first chapter excavates a history of global and transnational influences in the industry and provides a consolidated historiography of the industry’s transnational processes, while the last chapter highlights the role of digital and social media networks in sustaining the global-ness of the industry in the twenty-first century. The last chapter aside, it must be noted that the digital is especially significant to the process of worlding because it situates Tamil cinema amongst other film cultures that are experiencing a similar shift in their workings, and thus forms an underlying heuristic of the entire book.

Digital media, whether as modes of production, exhibition, or circulation, have engendered digital presences and afterlives for several parts of the Tamil film industry and its agents and commodities. Whether it is the politics of stardom that gain a new platform through social media, or the availability of new releases worldwide through OTT platforms, pirated or otherwise, or digital remasterings of older Tamil films for re-releases, the digital avatars and afterlives of Tamil cinema have come to form a predominant mode of engagement with the industry for audiences both native and non-native. Tamil nationalism and Tamil globalism recur and are reincarnated across these various platforms; my focus is very specifically on how these manifest in and as cinema.

Worlding Tamil Cinema Scholarship

The primary project of this book is the study of the worlding of Tamil cinema, in its gerundive form. The ability to integrate itself into world cinema cultures is increasingly seen as a sign of the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema. In fact, the contemporary moment of Tamil cinema is unique in its history, because it is the first time the Tamil-ness of Tamil cinema is being played out on a world cinema stage, outside the ideological confines of “regional” and “national,” with an explicit aim to find global visibility.

The secondary function is the worlding of Tamil cinema scholarship as well—to expand film history and film theory through Tamil cinema’s participation in world cinema. In other words, as a producer of Tamil cinema scholarship, I’m making it more familiar to the world through my participation in global knowledge networks. Tamil cinema, for instance, is constantly being theorised in local Tamil-language magazines like *Vikatan* or *Vinavu*, and these articles and reviews are often attributed labels like Marxist or Foucauldian or Deleuzian by their readers. However, such critique is excluded from formal western scholarship. Even if a *Vikatan* or *Vinavu* article contained an insight into the inner workings of politics and cinema, it could never be considered critical scholarship unless it’s laundered through (translated into the languages and then translated again into the language of) the system of Western academia. Much like the cinema at its core, Tamil cinema scholarship needs to be adapted and translated if it is to gain critical capital. This endeavour, however, requires a nuanced approach to critical scholarship practices, because of the ways in which the methods of scholarly writing are ill-suited to the cultural politics and logistics of the film industry.

One such example is that the culture of mononyms and the patronymic naming system of Tamil cultures are not suited to a system of formal writing that habituates referring to individuals by their last name. In my writing then, I have refused to use given names (like “Joseph Vijay”) and instead use the name that they are more familiarly recognised by (“Vijay”). Similarly, the patronymic naming systems of the Tamil language make it difficult to use only last names while writing, especially for women. For instance, Aishwarya Rajinikanth was, for a time, Aishwarya Dhanush and has directed both Rajinikanth and Dhanush in films. Avoiding last names thus also allows the new crop of women filmmakers and stars to be recognised by their mononyms rather than by their father/husband’s names, rhetorically liberating them from the patronymic systems of Tamil culture.

Additional difficulties including citational practices: citing song sequences present a unique challenge because of the number of credits involved. It cannot be cited like an audio track because the visual aspect is key. It can also not be simply cited as a video for its link to the movie is vital. How, then, does one cite a song like *Kolaveri*,¹⁷ which exists as an independent video on YouTube, is linked to a movie, is published on YouTube by Sony Music South, but is created and composed by Anirudh Ravichander for a movie produced and directed

by Aishwarya Dhanush? Current citational practices are not equipped to handle the interconnectedness of texts and their circulatory systems as they currently stand in Tamil cinema (or other cinemas of India). The works cited in Chapter 4, then, follow as much the requirements of citation and copyright, as they do the laws of common sense.

The problems raised earlier of cinemas of India often requiring a mode of Film Studies scholarship that privileges the study of plot at the expense of cinema-specific elements, like cinematography, is a recurring practice in this book. Film studies has long favoured the close reading of the visual and sonic elements of cinema as a way to ground its historical and theoretical work. The study of Tamil cinema, however, as this dissertation demonstrates, is categorically impossible without building on the rich work done on Tamil cinema by anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and in communication studies. This is a project that has relied on interviews, field work, digital exploration, and, of course, close reading of theoretical and cinematic texts.

It must also be mentioned that the need to delve into these fields also stems from the fact that this project carries the burden and privilege of historicising Tamil cinema and its stars, comedians, and song sequences. The first chapter is a consolidated history of Tamil cinema to date and could potentially be expanded into its own monograph. Each subsequent chapter consists of its own brief history of that particular narrative component—a task made difficult by the absence of previous scholarship. Through this historical work, each chapter attempts to situate Tamil cinema within discourses of film history and points out ways in which the current discourse of film history is incomplete without the study of a film industry as explicitly political as Tamil cinema. Through the theoretical work and my reading of contemporary cinema, I seek to bring Tamil cinema into the fold of western scholarship on film studies. In sum, the title of the book has multiple potential interpretations; it is a project about the worlding of Tamil cinema as an industry (or of an industry that is worlding), while simultaneously existing as a manifestation of the worlding of Tamil cinema by expanding the presence of Tamil cinema scholarship amongst non-native audiences.

Notes

- 1 The Tamil language cinema industry of Sri Lanka is relatively underdeveloped with less than 100 films produced overall. As such, Tamil cinema most commonly refers to the Tamil language cinema that comes out of Tamil Nadu, India.
- 2 Unlike Hindi, the Dravidian languages are indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, with the earliest Tamil manuscripts, of the Sangam period, dating back to the third century BCE (Maloney). It was also the first language legally recognised as a classical language by the Government of India. Tamil literary history goes back several thousand years and even lays claim to its own version of the Atlantis myth.
- 3 The work of M.S.S. Pandian has dealt with this issue in depth.
- 4 Early Tamil movies like *Parasakthi* (1952) took on the political objective of representing South Indian and Dravidian identities and, maybe unintentionally, dismantling the nation-building efforts of Hindi cinema.

- 5 Other minor film industries situated in the south include Konkani, Tulu, and Kodava film industries.
- 6 This has now changed since the 2010s, where the “pan-Indian” film has come to stand in for non-Hindi popular cinema, rather than “regional”; this will be further discussed in the conclusion. The cinematic practices of Tamil cinema, especially the popular mode of “mass” cinema, complicate discourses of film history and film theory, by having been a unique formulation of “regional,” while providing its own unique complications to the understanding of world cinema by being a commercial, non-national film industry.
- 7 Partha Chatterjee’s theorisation of the anti-national nationalism that characterised the nation-building of India, and other postcolonial countries is very pertinent here. Essentially, India, as a postcolonial nation-state, was bound to be fragile because it could only borrow a model of nationalism from Europe and the Americas, “the true subjects of history,” rather than devise and curate an indigenous model of nation.
- 8 The anti-Hindi riots of the ’30s and the ’60s from South India ensured that Hindi would not be the national language of India. Instead, English and Hindi were instituted as the languages for official administrative use.
- 9 Quoted in Garritano (14).
- 10 For the purposes of Tamil cinema, I define “native” audiences as those members who are based out of South India and have grown up with the Tamil language and its cinema as a primary language and mode of representation. First-generation American citizens whose parents migrated from Tamil Nadu would be considered “non-native” for they usually do not grow up with or participate in the film cultures of Tamil cinema, whereas the parents might be considered quasi-native.
- 11 There is the further argument of Hudson and Zimmerman that was mentioned earlier that for postcolonial nations like India, there may not have been a distinction between modernism and postmodernism (6). India’s nationhood—a sign of modernity—was accorded at the moment of independence—the beginning of the postcolonial era. Arguably, modern nationhood was born at the same time as postmodern postcoloniality.
- 12 Quoted in Nitya Vasudevans’s “*Ooru Area Pettai: The Terms of the Local in Tamil Cinema of the Twenty-First Century*” (145).
- 13 While Hudson and Zimmerman may have been writing of a more generic “masala” film that might better describe the Bollywood masala film, their work consistently acknowledges non-Hindi cinemas of India. Furthermore, this description, as later chapters show, is certainly applicable to the standard mass Tamil movie.
- 14 The closest analogue in western film cultures might be the melodrama as a mode; however, it is difficult for the melodrama to be categorised as a mode across multiple genres. However, in India, when the mass film takes on extra characteristics of any one genre, it is often categorised as a different kind of movie. For instance, if the film has more action than romance, it might be considered a “curry western” or a gangster film. The movie sometimes may focus more on the romantic side, in which case, it might get characterised as a romantic musical. Then there are films that focus on comedy and centralise it by making the hero the comedian figure and thus becomes a “comedy” movie. In all cases, the mass movie continues to have songs, fight sequences, star processes, and comedians.
- 15 As Hariharan notes,

New generation techies have practised their craft making dozens of short films uploaded on YouTube. They come armed with storyboards, ultra-comfortable with small DSLR cameras and limited lights, edit scenes on location on their laptops, complete their VFX works in tiny home studios, and even mix their 5.1 soundtracks in their backyard. And all this happens for less than Rs 1 crore a film, which would

be the cost of making a low-budget documentary in the US. Interestingly, these films have buyers despite the fact that there is none of those songs or endlessly choreographed fights.

- 16 Another example would be the beginnings of the “woman-centric” film that centres a female lead and imbues Tamil-ness in a heroine for the first time. See Kunapulli (“Shero Worship”) for more.
- 17 There is also the additional rhetorical move that moves *Kolaveri* outside quotation marks to recognise its viability as an independent text, and not just as a song-sequence in a bigger text.

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