

Festivities and faith: An analysis of environmental degradation in *Azhagarsamiyin Kuthirai* and *Kadaisi Vivasayi*

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Abstract

This paper puts forward the ecocritical analysis of the Tamil films *Azhagarsamiyin Kuthirai* (2011) and *Kadaisi Vivasayi* (2021) exploring the communal union of the cultural festival and its relation to the distress caused by drought. The cultural festival acts as a hope for people as it is believed to bring rain to the village after the festival. From the villagers' point of view, this study analyses depictions of Solastalgia and Soliphilia. These are the concepts proposed by environmental philosopher, Glenn Albrecht, to describe human distress and sense of belonging caused due to environmental change. These films are set in drought-stricken rural villages. Consequently, in the film *Azhagarsamiyin Kuthirai* (AK) (2011), the desperation of the villagers for rain disturbs the peace of the horse, Appu and the protagonist, Azhagarsamy as they both act as agents of nature. In the same way, in *Kadaisi Vivasayi* (KV) (2021), Mayandi becomes a victim of the materialist society. The movies are to be analysed by close visual analysis, which primarily focuses on the arc of the characters and the evolving nature of the events that are unveiled occasionally. By analysing the films through the ecocritical lens, the conflicts of solastalgia, desperation for rain, discrimination and how cultural festivals demonstrate soliphilia and their connection to human emotions are revealed. This study fills a critical gap by examining Solastalgia and Soliphilia in Tamil Nadu's cultural and ecological contexts, contributing to global ecocritical discourse.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Solastalgia, Soliphilia, Drought, Cultural fest, Discrimination

Introduction

Environmental changes instigate mental distress in humans. The lack of solace from the environment that has undergone drastic change is termed "Solastalgia", a concept introduced by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht. The term was coined in 2003 at the Ecohealth Conference in Montreal (Cooper, 2022)." Solastalgia is the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory" (Albrecht, 2005). It belongs to the broader category of Psychoterratic diseases namely, Ecoanxiety, Nature deficit disorder, Eco-paralysis, Eco-nostalgia and Global dread. According to the speech delivered by Glenn Albrecht at TEDx Sydney in 2010, these terms represent a new typology for our emotions

that are related to our environment, which includes both positive and negative emotions. This study analyses how the cultural festival demonstrates Soliphilia, another term coined by Glenn Albrecht. "Soliphilia" is the love of the totality of our place relationships and a willingness to accept the political responsibility for protecting and conserving them at all scales" (2019).

This study aims to point out the relevance of solastalgia in the context of Tamil culture using select films by revealing the importance of the relationship between Tamil culture and the environment. By focusing on the affected characters, this study also aims to analyse the condition of the marginalised. The film *Azhagarsamiyin Kuthirai* (2011), directed by Suseenthiran in 2011, is an adaptation of a short story

by Baskar Shakthi and the film *Kadaisi Vivasayi* (2021) which won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil are taken for the study. The film *AK* (2011) came during the period when the new wave of directors like Bala, Ameer, Mysskin, Sasikumar and Vertrimaran brought Tamil films away from the commercial ground, introducing fresh narratives and new actors. Suseenthiran became a part of this movement with his earlier film *Vennila Kabadi Kuzhu* (2009). The film *AK* (2011), coming from this lineage represents various dimensions of stress, desolation and hope through the characters. *KV* (2021), which is called as a Poignant Ode by the Hindu (2022) is directed by M. Manikandan. He is the director of *Kaakaa Muttai* (2014), *Kuttrame Thandanai* (2016) and *Aandavan Kattalai* (2016), which already sets him apart from his peers. These films address larger issues of ecological responsibility and the elimination of ancestral agrarian knowledge including the effects of capitalism on local communities. These concerns are some of the major issues in the global critical debates on sustainability and environmental justice in the Anthropocene (Galway et al., 2019). The films play a part in current discussion in the environmental humanities by putting forth alternative modes of community-oriented values and how regional cinematic stories can feed into global perceptions of both ecological and cultural stability. This study aims to address the following questions. How solastalgia is relevant and is very much applicable to the Tamil context? In what ways Tamil people react to Environmental change? How Tamil people reflect Soliphilia? And finally, how are marginalised being held in parallel with the degradation of the environment? This study analyses the select films through an ecocritical lens exploring the ecological deterioration and human suffering and investigates how a cultural festival acts as a ray of hope for the villagers. This paper is structured as follows: first, the review of literature on the relevance of solastalgia in Tamil environment and second is the section about drought and solastalgia highlighting the relationship between them. The following chapters helps to point out how solastalgia is depicted and how cultural festivals act as Soliphilia for Tamil people. Finally, the conclusion is drawn.

Review of literature

Indian environmentalism is held in parallel with the ‘utilitarian conservationism’ since it is concerned with the conservation of nature for people’s sake rather than conservation of nature for nature’s sake. There are three major environmental movements in India, they are: ‘Crusading Gandhi,’ ‘Ecological Marxists’ and ‘Appropriate. It proves that Indian community is intertwined with the environment.

Especially, Tamil culture is in close approximation with the natural environment. From the ancient times, Tamil people categorised their livelihood based on their landscapes. During the Sangam Era, the concept of Tinai addressed various landscapes and the identity of people. There are five types of lands according to Tinai: Kuringi, Mullai, Marutham, Neythal and Palai. These landscapes were in accordance with the people living in it. For example, people living in Neythal did fishing as it was the Sea scape and these people had certain characteristics apart from their professions. This is closely associated with the concept of ‘Biome’ in English. Tinai proves that everything is in intimate connection with nature for Tamil people. Even though Tinai is an old concept, it shows that ecology has been an important concern since Sangam age as culture, livelihood and the emotions of people are entangled. Tinai is an Anthropocentric concept as it focuses on the benefits of lands to the people living in it. The landscapes of Tamil Nadu from Sangam era to the contemporary agrarian practices is not just a physical dwelling but a storage of memory and culture. This is further reinforced by the agricultural rituals and the village festivals that is related to environment. Consequently, cultural and emotional dislocation is experienced in case of environmental degradation. There are so many Indian movies especially Tamil movies discuss the importance of environment in people’s lives. In a research article by Pankaj and Ray (2023), they argue that Indian eco-sensitive films are anthropocentric perceptions of Nature. They mention Indian environmental films not as Ecocinema but eco-sensitive films for the non-ecofriendly production process. Ecocinema refers to films addressing environmental issues, ecological issues and the human-nature relationship and they also adapt ecofriendly film making.

Over the period, the popular mode of communication had shifted. Cinema is one of the mediums of Environmental communication which, with strong environmental themes or subjects may help to raise awareness of conservation issues (Fernandez-Bellon & Kane, 2019; Hofman & Hughes, 2017), Trigger empathy and concern for threatened species (O'Bryhim & Parsons, 2015; Pearson et al., 2011) and motivate behaviour change (Shreedhar & Mourato, 2019; McCormack, 2021). Pezzullo (2021) says that "environmental communication is pragmatic and constitutive, it educates, alerts, persuades and helps us to solve environmental problems and on the other hand constructs the representation of nature and environmental problems as subjects for our understanding".

Rural Tamil cinema documents Agrarian life, which has been overshadowed by mainstream films. Though not produced using ecofriendly practices, there are eco-sensitive films in Tamil cinema which discusses the environmental degradation, anthropocentrism and psychological issues caused by degradation of the environment, such films include *AK* (2011), *Kadamban* (2017), *Merku Thodarchi Malai* (2018), *KV* (2021) and others. The documentary about a Tribal couple and their Elephant titled, *The Elephant Whisperers* (2023) won an Oscar award for the Best Documentary Short Film. And these films have been critically analysed by the scholars.

Jeeva has studied the film *KV* (2021) for its depiction of environmental changes and Sustainable Development Goals. There is a doctoral thesis titled *An Ecocritical Analysis of Ecological Discourses in Tamil Cinema* (2014) by Sunitha D, which discusses the ecological beliefs, practices and traditions of the Tamil agrarian community through Tamil cinema. Arunadevi analysed *Kadamban* (2017) for its portrayal of corporate greed and the struggle of native people against it. Ecosophy and Ecospirituality in the film *KV* (2021) is studied Riya Susan Scariah. Even though ecological coexistence was prioritised in Tamil cinema, the studies on it are limited. The focus on the impact of environmental change on people is given minimum attention. Therefore, this study addresses how people react to environmental change by providing new lens on the area.

The mental landscape of environmental loss: A study of solastalgia and drought induced themes

Ecocriticism has broadened its focus from the representation of nature in literature to more general issues of environmental degradation, climate change, ecological justice and human environment relationship. Foundational scholars like Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) and Lawrence Buell (1995) highlight the co-constitution of cultural production and ecological realities, suggesting that literary and cultural texts have a significant role in cultivating environmental consciousness. Within the ecocritical context, Edward Soja suggests that the concept of spatiality is not simply physical locations but are socially constructed spaces influenced by memory, culture, lived experience, and power relations. Thus, environmental change not only affect the material landscape but also the identities attached to it. this is an argument that builds on Glenn Albrecht's concept of Solastalgia, the distress caused by changes in familiar environments (Meenakshi, 2014). In the review study by Galway, the universality and the importance of solastalgia has been discussed mentioning that the indigenous worldview and experience is inadequately engaged with (2019).

"Solastalgia exists where there is the lived experience of the physical desolation of home" (Albrecht et al., 2007).

The definition of solastalgia suggested is:

Solastalgia is not about looking back to some golden past, nor is it about seeking another place as "home". It is the "lived experience" of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the present. In short, solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at "home." (Albrecht, 2005)

It was first applied to the Australian Upper Hunter region where mining transformed the landscape. "In the context of open-cut coal mining and power station fallout and severe drought, both researchers in the state of NSW, we see evidence of the large burden of chronic environmental stressors leading to solastalgia" (Albrecht et al., 2007). In a study by Holly Vins and Jesse Bell, the affected mental well-being of the people experiencing environmental degradation due to drought (2015). This study highlights the condition of western countries with raising temperature the frequency of

drought has increased in much of the southeast and large parts of the West, and confidence is height that longer-term with intensified droughts in Southwest, southern Great Plains, and Southeast. The concept has been applied in various regions and contexts. Similarly in the study of solastalgia by Charles Rangeley Wilson's Slit Road, where the emotion over the lost river is analysed by Jens Kirk (2022). In the Indian context, solastalgia has been studied among the farmers of Uttar Pradesh, where Pandey (2022) "attempts to study the psychological turmoil experienced by the farmers, which is termed as solastalgia." Using the Malayalam films *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019) and *Malik* (2021), S. Meenakshi and Krupa Shah (2024) have discussed solastalgia. This study on Malayalam cinema brought the relevance of Solastalgia and Soliphilia to the Indian cinematic context.

Unlike a flood or a cyclone, drought has a long-lasting effect, leaving behind psychological wounds. In 2017, a massive strike was organized by farmers in front of Jantar Mantar in Delhi. These farmers were from Tamil Nadu, where one of the worst droughts had struck during 2016-2017 (Gibbens, 2017). Climate change may have led to the deaths of 59,000 farmers' suicides in the past three decades (Carleton, 2017). For a farming community whose only solace lies in the environment they live in, such a drought results in severe emotional distress and depression. "It's the stress of not being able to harvest a crop. It's the feeling so many farmers have that there is no other path for them to follow. They suffer between denial and dependence and see that there is no escape route. Both paths are bad. That is the tragedy," quoted by Keith Schneider from the words of the farmer Bharathiselvan (News Security Beat, 2017). Galway, Berry, Jones-Casey, and Tasala (2019)'s review study lists nine feelings of solastalgia caused by environmental change, which are,

- mental distress over deteriorated landscapes,
- threat to farming caused by degradation in the water and land quality,
- concern for the loss of clean air, water and scenery,
- loss of the unique attributes of the place,
- the loss of peace that was enjoyed earlier,

- grief over the disappearance of the familiar plants and animals,
- ashamed of the present state of the environment,
- depression over the very thought of the family being forced to leave,
- a change in environment challenging the sense of belonging (Galway et al., 2019).

Glenn Albrecht also proposes a solution for this desolation, which is soliphilia. "Soliphilia is manifested in the interdependent solidarity and the wholeness or unity needed between people, to overcome the alienation and disempowerment present in contemporary political decision-making about the environment" (Albrecht, 2019). This study highlights how hope functions as a driving force making people come together and believe that the successful conduct of the cultural fest can bring rain and prosperity to the village, where the cultural fest demonstrates soliphilia. The study adds to the international discussion in ecocriticism by using the concept of solastalgia to show how environmental change produces emotional and cultural distress in local communities. By foregrounding Tamil cinematic representations of ecological loss, the article expands the geographical and cultural scope of environmental humanities study and expands its scope to the global south (Galway et al. 2019). Using the review study done by Galway (2019) this study analyses Solastalgia in the Tamil ecological context.

There has been a drastic decline in the agricultural production contributed by the climatic changes in recent years in India, which resulted in psychological turmoil (Pandey, 2022). Due to the lack of Tamil discourse in the area, this study aims to discuss solastalgia in Tamil context using cinema. There have been no significant studies conducted on solastalgia caused by drought in Tamil Nadu. With minimal critical exploration, particularly on *AK* (2011) and *KV* (2021), there is an opening to discuss the films' approach to solastalgia and ecological distress.

Rain as a narrative device

Ancient Tamil writers invoked natural elements for their works. Even *Cilappatikaram* or *Silapatikaram* begins with the praise of natural elements such as sun, mountains and rain. In various scenarios rain has been

worshipped by Tamil people. The God of rain, Indira is worshipped for good monsoon during Indira festival. In multiple cultures, Rain acts as a symbol of fertility and spiritual influence on Earth. Even in, the Bible, rain can be interpreted as a divine intervention upon moral sin (Matarneh, 2020). This is Ecospirituality. The philosophy that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living beings and the natural world. It fosters responsibility in humans towards nature (Berry, 2009; Scariah, 2025).

Rain is depicted as a narrative force into the stories of the select films. Rain transcends mere weather, symbolizing the ecological and spiritual harmony. The villagers believe that the procession of Azhagarsamy in the wooden horse will bring rain to the village. Their longing for rain reflects their emotional desperation driven by a sense of loss and despair. In *KV* (2021), people believe that drought was caused by the misfortune of not praying to their ancestral deity. The villagers see rain as God's blessing, which reinforces their faith in the rituals in both the films. By the end of both the films, in response to this faith, rain arrives. This provides closure to their longing and conflict, re-establishes the farming cycle and signifies the renewal of both the villagers' psychological state and their landscape. It symbolizes a new beginning for the villagers, helping to sustain the environmental cycle.

The Azhagar festival is celebrated annually during the Tamil month of Chithirai, which typically falls in April. This festival is also known as the Chithirai Thiruvizha and marks the divine wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareshwarar. Azhagar, also known as Kallazhagar, is the brother of the goddess Meenakshi. The festival is steeped in divine stories and traditions. During the reign of this divine couple, the land and the people of Madurai were blessed with abundant rainfall. Thus, there is a constant belief that the successful conduct of the Azhagar Thiruvizha will bring rain. In the film *AK* (2011), these unwavering traits of the festival and its association with rainfall are depicted. In *KV* (2021), the villagers pray to their ancestral or tutelary deity, which is community worship. In this film there is a belief that such prayer would bless the villagers with rainfall by cleansing them off their bad omen, which is the drought. The story narrated is that the first ancestor who settled in that land is the deity they pray, who decided to settle in that area for its

ecological advantages for farming. For the villagers, the land was spiritual as it was chosen by their ancestors. When the drought struck the area, it was like spirituality was tainted for the villagers. Thus, Rain becomes a voice in these stories and conveys the emotions of people who dependent on it.

Solastalgia as a catalyst for narrative transformation

The emotions of solastalgia are observed both in *AK* (2011) and *KV* (2021), where severe drought is experienced by the villagers. Both films depict several similar incidents in which drought is followed by negative indicators that made people to count on the cultural festivals. There is an intimation of drought conveyed in the beginning of these stories and both the stories end with the arrival of rain. Dry and parched landscape is used to showcase the intensity of the drought and the emotions of solastalgia in both the films. Albrecht says that detrimental changes to the natural and built environment can undermine a person's sense of place and belonging. The anxiety caused by

broken links with the home environment is a prominent feature of twenty-first century as pressures from rapid development, environmental degradation and climate change continue to intensify (2005).

In the film, *AK* (2011), the people of Mallayapuram are experiencing a severe drought, due to which their landscape became dry and parched. People are desolate and desperate over the degradation in their landscape which made them believe that monsoon has failed them because of their failure in conducting the annual festival. The film begins with the scene where the violence caused by the antagonist, Varadharajan disrupting the festival. Again, as they prepare for the festival, the wooden horse gets stolen. The horse acts as a central element of the village festival and stands for the continuity of the collective memory and identity of the villagers. The absence of it exposes the fragility of the cultural practices that rely on the relationships between community and the tradition. This disruption implies that social and environmental change threatens both the livelihoods and the symbolic communal identity. To find the missing horse, the Kerala clairvoyant is summoned and he guides the villagers into believing that they could locate the horse in three days. The villagers find a real

horse, which belongs to a man called Azhagarsamy who lives in a nearby hamlet. The anxiety over the situation of the stolen horse made the villagers believe in an external figure from their community; this fear was primarily invoked by loss of trust on the native people. This loss of trust in their own community is ecological grief induced problem.

The cinematic representation of a low angle shot of the dry, dusty and windy terrain showcases the conditions of the terrain. The ecological depletion of the village is evident in the visuals of the dry ground and the shrine of the horse amidst the barren lands and mountains. The shepherd and the shepherdess who go to graze their goats get depressed by the sight of their condition of the landscape and say, “these sinners stopped the festival, now we have no way but to die with no rain at all” (Suseenthiran, 2011). The statement speaks a deep sense of helplessness and loss as they see a familiar landscape transform into an unrecognisable and inhospitable space. In this case, solastalgia is well captured where people are shown living in the same environment feeling sad over the place that used to represent their identity has now transformed completely. The chronic fear of environmental doom is the definition provided by the American Psychological Association for the term Eco-anxiety as proposed by Glenn Albrecht. As stated, they are uttering hopeless words that resonates with their infertile and degraded habitat. “Sad when looking at degraded landscapes” (Galway et al., 2019), which is one of the feelings of solastalgia, is observed in this case. There are possibilities of people feeling alone or being overwhelmed by others when society becomes unreliable, affecting people’s mental health. Suicidal thoughts, mental disorders and drug addiction are expected as the result of the social imbalance (Albrecht, 2005).

There are consecutive scenes of hungry school children where the camera focuses on their plates to convey their hunger which is followed by the scene where young children from the village are going to work in Tirupur. This highlights the parents' inability to provide for their children. This notion indicates that the degradation of the environment forces communities into leaving their traditional means of living behind for survival. As far solastalgia is concerned, the image not only suggests migration of people but also the

breakdown in the emotional bond of people with their native surrounding. Children leaving their homeland behind indicates that the environment could no longer provide safety and continuity for them. This reflects feelings of solastalgia listed by Galway, Berry, Jones-Casey, and Tasala (2019), “Thought of my family being forced to leave this place upsets me”.

Later, in the film *AK* (2011), the scene shifts to the perspective of the president, Perumal with his hands raised toward the sun, symbolizing their spiritual connection to nature and their sense of helplessness. The camera captures the president's point of view that displays his dependency on nature where the deep emotional connection between nature and the villagers is expressed. By framing him in such a way that his point of view is the same as that of the camera, the personal experience is reflected, and the helplessness of the villagers is observed as the land that has provided for them getting destructed gradually. This emotion continues in the discussion among the village elders at President Perumal’s house about the ongoing drought and the suspension of the festival. This reflection expresses disappointment over the landscape’s drastic change, where the once-thriving village has now been altered and they “miss peace and quiet once enjoyed in this place” (Galway et al., 2019). “An inability to prevent the degradation or loss of land can also negatively affect notions of personal identity and generate experiences of ecological grief” (Cunsolo, 2018).

This discussion scene is where the economic and psychological condition of the villagers are perceived. Their lament over the failed seasons in agriculture is observed when an elder says, “When sown in the Aadi (Tamil calendar month) month, we were getting an abundant yield. Now there has been no rain for the past three years” (Suseenthiran, 2011). The failure of monsoon shows the ecological system failure on which the farming depends, which can be provided as evidence for one of the feelings of solastalgia listed by Galway, Berry, Jones-Casey, and Tasala (2019) that is, “Farming lifestyle depending on good land and water is threatened by change”. Eco-anxiety is observed in this case with people expressing their fear over environmental degradation. Water bodies are affected by drought as mentioned by Carpenter Kannan, who is one of the participants in the discussion. He says, “There is no

water in most of the wells,” he further goes on, “if the situation proceeds, we have no other way but to leave this village” (Suseenthiran, 2011). These utterance expresses their grief over the loss of aspects of the place they live in which contributes to displacement and hopelessness. Their worry that “valued aspects of place—clean air, water, scenery are being lost” (Galway et al., 2019) is expressed. The discussion concludes with elders deciding to ask Kodangi (Claivoyant) for a solution, who demands a lavish festival. This arise in Solastalgia indicates that it is an interrelated system that connects environment, culture and social systems. Any collapse is those elements disturbs the balance and invokes emotions of solastalgia like anxiety and desperation. This case is applicable in both the selected films.

After that, the scene where the elders go out to collect the festival fund money provides visuals of households and their financial status. They go to an elderly woman, who pretends not to understand the words of the group to avoid giving the money. She then utters a Tamil saying, which means that the whole village is poor with dry lands and no food (Perungudi ammanama Potukodi Sammanama) (Suseenthiran, 2011). There is a sense of eco-angst among the villagers, that is, the despair as “our emotions are being “moved”, causing waves of ecoanxiety and solastalgia” over the fragile status of the environment (Albrecht, 2020). These are all the important moments where solastalgia is observed in *AK* (2011).

Next film is *KV* (2021), it is the story of a last practicing farmer of the village, Ayyanarpatti, a remote village is Usulampatti. It is a severe drought-stricken village where, people consider the death of an old tree for ill omen and decides to pray their ancestral deity. This incident indicates that the villagers consider nature as a living entity and a source of meaning than as a scenic background. The emotional and ecological implications of environmental degradation through Mayandi the last practicing farmer of the village. When Mayandi buries three peacocks, he gets arrested under false allegations. Due to the delay in the formalities Mayandi could not visit his land and the crops dies because of improper maintenance. But in the end, he again sows his land with the help of the villagers and gets the yield for the festival. Rain blesses the people after the successful conduct of the festival. The

perspective of the villagers underscores the strong emotional bond that people share with their environment where changes and destructions are perceived as a threat to their culture and wellbeing.

This film deals with the ecological issues like the climate change, deforestation, destructions of farming lands and the use of chemical pesticides (Scariah, 2025). In the beginning of the film itself there are hints of it. Except Mayandi, there is no other farmer or cultivating land is shown. Dhanapadi, a farmer with fifteen acres of land, says that he sold it all due to drought when the elders approached him for paddy for the festival. Mayandi’s embrace of the farming is as act of ecological resistance to forces of modernisation and the agrarian decline. The emotion of threat to farming caused by degradation in the water and land quality (Galway et al., 2019) is observed here. Dhanapandi mentions that due to improper rain he could not get proper yield, which made them sell all the land and buy an Elephant for their livelihood. According to Goleman (2009), eco-angst is “the moment a new bit of unpleasant ecological information about some product or other plunges us into a moment (or more) of despair at the planet’s condition and the fragility of our place on it”.

There is a sense of yearning for the past through the song of an old man, proves that there is a mental distress over the deteriorated landscapes (Galway et al., 2019). The frequent long shots and aerial shots instigates the condition of the landscape to the viewers.

Another important emotion of Solastalgia observed in the film is grief over the disappearance of the familiar plants and animals (Galway et al., 2019). The old tree which burns due to thunder became a bad omen. The tree was already dried down due to drought. As the tree was considered a sacred being, the villagers consider its death for misfortune caused by not praying to their local deity. Like *AK*, there is a village meeting scene where the villagers decide to pray their village deity to bring rain.

In the scene where Ramaiya climbs atop a mountain, he mentions that mountains are missing, so he counts them to check whether they are still there. He expresses his concern over the missing landscape here. In *KV* (2021), there are two men who are considered antagonistic in the film. They cut the burnt tree, which is shown in the areal shot. This film

critiques development paradigms that promote economic transformation that ignores ecological sustainability. The slow-paced shot informs that the landscape is changing for the needs of materialist men. These are the emotions of solastalgia observed in the film *KV* (2021). There is now a psychological and emotional void in place of the sense of security and comfort that came with being at home is present in these films (Gladwin, 2017). The film does not just show Mayandi as a farmer but as a guardian of ecological lore and cultural memory. The rural landscapes in the both the films are considered as cultural archives where their degradation exemplifies the loss of communal identities and native environmental connection that reflexively triggers emotions of solastalgia in people dwelling in that transforming environment.

The symbiosis of celebration and optimism

Tamil tradition weaves festivals with agriculture, featuring events like Pongal, Aadi Perukku and others. These festivals are believed to invoke rainfall and ensure a good harvest. The film *KV* (2021) depicts a similar story, where a drought-stricken village places its hopes in a festival dedicated to the local deity. The belief that God will provide solace is also seen in the film *Vaazhai* (2024), when the villagers pray for their regional deity after the tragedy. From the start, the villagers' faith in the Azhagar festival is evident, especially in the title song of the film *AK* (2011). The village elders, after discussing the living conditions of the villagers conclude by acknowledging their incapability in that situation, which makes them turn towards God. Through the Kodangi (Clairvoyant), the villagers decide to ask God for a solution. In the scene, the whole village assembles in front of the shrine of the wooden horse, where the kodangi, who channels God Azhagar through him, demands a lavish festival. He made the people of Mallayapuram to believe that God is angry with them for postponing the festival for the past three years. This administered the sense of Soliphilia the "life-affirming and cooperative emotions" in them by demanding communal union (Albrecht, 2020). This recurrent link of festivals with rain and agricultural prosperity in Tamil Culture indicates that the ecological wellbeing is intertwined with cultural and spiritual life. In both the films the present village

festival is a collective expression of the relationship between the community and its environment. Their prolonged drought intervenes their faith in God and it is reflected in their attempt to restore their disrupted ecological and cultural medium. Through the lens of Solastalgia, the villagers' dependance on the festival indicates their emotional reaction to the change occurring in their environment. The transformation that drought brought to their land creates a sense of uncertainty and grief.

The stress and anxiety over the disruption in the festival became heightened due to the drought, which is reflected in the meeting that was held. The villagers resolve to ask another soothsayer, a Malayala Kodangi, who the villagers believe is more powerful than the one in the village. People's trust that the successful conduct of the festival will bring rain remains unshaken. This surrender to the deity is a result of the realization of their powerlessness in controlling the environmental conditions and hence the festival becomes a symbolic means through which hope and communal resilience are maintained. The horse that was found is shown in the wide-angle shot, followed by a close-up shot, where the horse provides a spectacle under the gleaming moon. Such a spectacle made the villagers believe that the real horse was sent by God for their procession ritual. The new horse's arrival marked some auspicious incidents, making the people believe it was God sent. This strengthened their hope that the successful conduct of the festival will prosper the village. The villagers were driven by their trepidation of losing the God given horse. Australian author Elyne Mitchell says, "Divorced from his roots, man loses his psychic stability" (Albrecht, 2005). The teacher of the village says to the police, "Sir, as you know, if the festival did not happen, there would be a lot of problems in our village" (Suseenthiran, 2011), referring to the drought. Even if the superstition is portrayed as an absurdity, it contributes largely to communal cohesion in difficult times. There is an arc in the mentality of the characters from despair to hope with the arrival of the horse and the upcoming festival. And their hope becomes reality when rain comes at the end of the film. The festival is an attempt to restore their sense of belonging to their changing environment. The film connects ecological crises with ritual practices presenting environmental degradation as a cultural and emotional crisis. It also

stresses that the loss experienced by the villagers is not only by the environment but also by their loss of identity and memory.

In the similar way, in *KV* (2021), people decide to pray to God after the fall of the old tree. For which, they needed some offerings to God. In a scene Karuppan says, “it is said that there will be a thousand troubles when we decide to pray our God but now the struggles have crossed that number” (Manikandan, 2022). Through all the struggles, there is a strong belief that the successful offerings to the God will yield them. People consider Mayandi’s arrest as one of the obstacles for the offerings to God. Driven by hope on the divine, Karuppan visits Murugan Temple (Pazhani Malai), where he meets Ramaiyah. Ramaiyah is the mysterious spiritual being. His presence is always accompanied by peacock’s scream. Here peacock is symbolised as the God Murugan, which is the important reason why Mayandi hid the fact he saw dead peacocks in his field.

Unfavourable incidents happened after the death of those peacocks. After all the hurdles, the whole village came together to work on the field. The people who refused to work earlier comes together to support the successful conduct of the festival. This scene shows that the collective care for the environment, that is Soliphilia. When individuals connect with nature there is a sense of togetherness and deep emotional bonding. By placing their hope on the festival, the villagers stood together to face the obstacles. Soliphilia can be seen as the attachment to place and a form of resistance to environmentally destructive social transformations in mayandi’s ongoing practice of environmental preservation. The emotional impact of these films in rooter in their invocation of values that remain influential in Tamil cultural constructions of the land and the environment. These films suggests that resilience is not only from divine intervention but from a collective responsibility of the land. The communal labour on Mayandi’s field is a symbolic act of ecological restoration. It shows how attachment to place can be the basis of solidarity and environmental activism. It brings Soliphilia as a mode of resistance and renewal based on shared relationships with community and environment.

Representation of the victimised

Authors have identified that especially indigenous people face more social problems caused by the loss of culture and environmental support. “Historically, Indigenous people are likely to experience both nostalgia and solastalgia as they live through the destruction of their cultural traditions and their lands” (Albrecht, 2005). That becomes the case with Azhagarsamy and his horse. He is being marginalised and abused by the villagers, where one woman named Ponnamma, provides for him. The relationship between the horse and Azhagarsamy is narrated by a song, which expresses the love Azhagarsamy has for his horse Appukutty. Azhagarsamy might be held parallel to the villagers in the case of despair as he must return with his horse to marry the girl he loves. Initially, He appears angry and vengeful towards the villagers, but his attitude changes when he sees the hopeful side of the people. He says, “I thought that these people knew only to beat others, but now I can see their capability of smiling too” (Suseenthiran, 2011), when Ramasamy plans to help Azhagarsamy escape with his horse. He expresses his innocence and admires how the people of the village have gathered with happiness and hope for the upcoming festival in their village which resonates with Soliphilia that extends love from one’s own place to the whole. Azhagarsamy’s character occupies a liminal space in the narrative as he functions both as a vulnerable outsider and as a mirror to the collective anxieties of the villagers. His public humiliation and abuse are indicative of how environmental distress could intensify the social tensions and generate forms of victimization. The group, which is led by Varadharajan attempts to stop the festival using Azhagarsamy as bait. Varadharajan, a believer that the festival's successful conduct will bring rain to the village, seeks to halt it and leverage it as an advantage in the upcoming presidential election. By stirring up the tension during the festival season, he expects the continuous degradation of the landscape moreover, to demean the current president among the people.

Azhagarsamy is ultimately saved by his horse, Appukutty, which symbolises natural harmony, strengthening the idea that ecology and culture are two interdependent entities. As a beacon of hope, the horse restores morale in the village, symbolising the resilience and renewal. In the end, it punishes all the corrupting

forces in that village, including Varadarajan, the minor and the men who attack Azhagarsamy. His attachment to his horse accentuates the emotions over belonging and companionship that are at risk at times of crisis. The camera shows the horse in the low-angle shots to portray its heroic display. Justifying Poetic Justice, everyone receives what they deserve, where the rightful hold the victory. This is the moment where the transition from despair and distress to hope and fulfilment occurs. The villagers' behavior towards Azhagarsamy is not an individual cruelty but a symptom of desperation brought on by ecological uncertainty.

In *KV* (2021), Mayandi, the last farmer in the village makes him a guardian of the agrarian traditions and knowledge and a socially vulnerable figure. He is placed in a difficult position due to the drought, as he had the land with irrigation facility. The two men who try to buy Mayandi's land, were the ones who framed him of murdering the peacocks. This is revealed by Kuzhandhai, son of Dhanapandi. Though there was no ill treatment like *AK* (2011) in this film, there is a discrepancy in the life of Mayandi to the villager's desire. There is also a scene where Karuppan says that he wishes to live like Mayandi, who does not even have electricity in his home. The very institution that is supposed to protect him, wronged him due to inefficiency and ignorance. There is a scene where the older women lament about not being educated over the arrest of Mayandi. Police skipped the actual investigation due to the history of peacock hunt in the village. The isolation of Mayandi symbolizes the declining relevance of traditional agricultural life within the transforming rural society. As the only person who still cultivates the land Mayandi embodies a different relationship with the environment which is opposed to the aspirations and priorities of the other villagers. This distinction isolates him more from his own community and makes him vulnerable to exploitation. It is perceived that Mayandi gets punished for the very values he is celebrated for. This shows that there is a mismatch between the values of Mayandi and the society in whole.

Another character is Ramaiah, who is considered a lunatic has an alternative understanding of the world. Ramaiah is closely associated with the God Murugan through peacocks. Ramaiah, after the death of his lover,

lives at the denial. The denial can be considered as emotional response to displacement and a desire to preserve familiar relationships. But, in the scene where Ramaiah counts the mountains, a random stranger calls him the sane person among the insane people for stating that Murugan is the one who rules all. This scene shows that Ramaiah's unwavering trust in God, which makes him stand-alone from the crowd. At the end of the film Ramaiah disappears in front of Karuppan. Mayandi says that Ramaiah did not disappear, instead he flew away like a peacock. Thus, it becomes apparent that the film does not represent Ramaiah as an insane person but as a custodian of ecological knowledge and spiritual aspects, whose relationship with nature serves as a contrast to the fragmented life of the village community. In both the films, gradual environmental degradation is observed in which marginalised rural communities are subjected to gradual ecological and social losses that are barely acknowledged by the dominant development narratives.

The changing face of rural resilience

KV (2021) came after a decade from *AK* (2011). There are two important factors that underwent a great transformation. First, is with the people's view on farming and second, is the caste-based discrimination. These films provide a transformation of how rural Tamil community face environmental degradation and the difficulties around it. In *AK* (2011), there is hope among the villagers. They believe that with abundant rain fall, they can revive agriculture in their lands. In contrast, villagers in *KV* (2021) began selling their lands like, Dhanapandi, who owned fifteen acres of land sold all of it. This proves that the hope of revival is lost among the people. It shows that in *Azhgarsamiyin Kuthirai* (2011) villagers imagine development as improvised farming. In *KV* (2021), Mayandi is the only farmer who refuses to sell his land for which he was framed of killing peacocks. Both the films do not dramatize ecological disaster but rather focus on subtle shifts in farming practices and community structures and the relationships to the land. The gradual shift shows that environmental decline is often normalised in local communities. Instead of reacting to a single environmental event the characters negotiate a series of cumulating changes that reshape their environment. As agricultural livelihoods become more uncertain within

the changing socio-economic conditions, the community's association with environment has progressively weakened. This implies that environmental degradation of ecosystems but also the erosion of cultural and ecological memory, and identity. Emotional impact of these films comes from the sense that the degradation in environment is happening in stages rather than all at once. The loss of traditional farming practices in *KV* (2021) and the collapse of communal structures in *AK* (2011) illustrate the process of environmental change through daily shifts that are usually unnoticed until they have profoundly transformed the character of a place.

In *AK* (2011), Ramakrishnan and Devi's relationship play an important role in the portrayal of caste-based discrimination. Ramakrishnan is the son of the village chief, where Devi is the daughter of the Kodangi (Clairvoyant). At the end of the film, when the news of their marriage is revealed, Ramakrishnan's father curses everyone that there will be no rain due to the curse of this inter-caste marriage. But Rain pours as he speaks. This contradicts his belief that inter-caste marriage is a sin. In *KV* (2021), though there is a clear barrier is observed between the caste groups, there is respect between them. And there are hints of caste-based discrimination is earlier days. When the villager elders invite the drummers (Parai) community for the festival, he assures that there will be no discrimination towards them hereafter. This supports the point that there has been a transformation from the past decade.

Conclusion

The study foregrounds the feelings of solastalgia in the film and explores the emotions of the villagers over their degraded land. By pointing out the emotions of solastalgia expressed by the villagers, the distress caused by the environmental change is observed. The psychological problems, such as anxiety and grief, are the significantly expressed emotions in the films. Both the films highlight both the ecocritical and socio-political discourse on the response of communities to environmental threats by stressing the arcs of the characters and the condition of the landscape. The intricate relationship of cultural festivals with rain is discussed, analysing the significant role contribution of faith among the people who are in distress. This paper demonstrates the emotions of Soliphilia, where the

cultural tradition becomes the receptacle of hope and resilience of a community. People's faith and blind trust in the superstitious practices are observed, which was originally led by desperation for rain. Nature's suffering and resistance are symbolized by Azhagarsamy and his horse in *AK* (2011) and by Mayandi in *KV* (2021). The narration strengthens the interconnectedness of ecology and Indian culture, ultimately revealing the force of collective faith's capability of reshaping the relationship of community with nature, thus proving soliphilia. The limitation of the study is that only two Tamil films were taken, with the possibility of missing out on other discourses on the area. By observing the artistic representations like films on environment, the critical perceptions of nature among the public are revealed. People who are tied to their cultural bonds tend to take the environmental issues more personally. These films show that the environmental degradation is causing harm not only to the ecological system but also to the people by affecting their emotions attached to that place. The film *AK* (2011) can also be discussed for its portrayal of caste dynamics among the villagers. The intercaste love relation between the son of the village president and the daughter of the soothsayer (kodangi), discrimination among the villagers and the revolting attitude of the youngsters against such discrimination can be analysed, providing scope for future study. In *KV* (2021), the ethereal characteristics of Ramaiyah can be studied. A reader-response study with pilot study can also be done on the select films or the films of this genre to analyse the emotions of solastalgia for further research.

This study contributes to the society by pointing out the existing emotions of Solastalgia and our people's way of showing responsibility through the cultural festival. More films can be made to showcase the different narratives of people experiencing Solastalgia. Directors can adapt ecofriendly practices in filmmaking to avoid harming our environment. Overall, the paper opens a new perspective on the environmental distress faced by the rural Tamil people, as shown in the films. By discussing the contemporary environmental crisis and people's emotions around it, this study contributed to the global critical discourse on environmental degradation and its impact on people. Despite being set in rural Tamil Nadu, the environmental anxieties presented in the films are relevant to global

concerns about environmental degradation and climatic vulnerability.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

- Generative AI tools are used to improve clarity and readability of the manuscript.
- Such tools were applied with human oversight and control. Authors take full responsibility for the content.

CRedit author statement

K. Annapurani: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft. **W. Christopher Rajasekaran:** Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review and Editing.

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