

Environmental Narratives and Sustainable Development in Kaṭaici Vivacāyi

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of environmental and global transformations in the Tamil film Kaṭaici Vivacāyi (The Last Farmer), directed by Manikandan and awarded a National Film Award, India. It delves into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting their interconnected economic, social, and environmental dimensions. As sustainable development has become a pivotal framework for social progress globally, this study analyses how the film integrates these goals into its narrative. Kaṭaici Vivacāyi offers a unique perspective on pressing global issues and environmental degradation, serving as a vital medium for raising awareness and fostering dialogue on these interconnected challenges. The analysis reveals the film's alignment with contemporary SDGs, vividly portraying various social and environmental issues such as industrial animal farming, hybrid seed usage, urbanisation, and the practices of farmers within an industrialised context. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, this research examines the environmental, social and economic elements through the lens of the three pillars of the SDGs.

Keywords

Sustainable Development Goals, Environmental, Social, Economic

Introduction

In recent years, Tamil cinema has emerged as a significant force within the Kollywood industry, garnering attention for its exploration of pressing environmental, social and economic issues. A notable trend in this cinematic landscape is the production of films that reflect real-life events, offering nuanced perspectives on both the positive and negative aspects of societal challenges (Rajadhyaksha & Willems, 2014). This research focuses on a specific film inspired by true societal occurrences, delving into its central themes and subthemes that address critical social issues, raise awareness, and highlight the realities and difficulties faced by communities. Key topics include agricultural challenges, environmental sustainability, and the broader implications of global transformations. The concept of sustainable development, as articulated by the United Nations Environmental and Development Council (1987), emphasises the integration of social, environmental, and economic dimensions, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This framework advocates for collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders to foster

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long-term outcomes that are socially and environmentally viable. Furthermore, the intersection of Indigenous experiences, environmental justice, and settler colonialism profoundly affects marginalised groups, including people of colour, Indigenous communities, women, and individuals with disabilities, often resulting in adverse impacts on health and social cohesion (Whyte, 2016). Environmental challenges such as pollution, systemic racism, and poverty exacerbate these issues, underscoring the importance of understanding the interplay between human and nonhuman elements in the pursuit of environmental justice (Bathran & Goswami, 2022). Future research will continue to explore these dynamics, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding sustainable development and social equity.

Methodology

The research paper employs a qualitative approach through narrative thematic analysis to explore the film in relation to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This method facilitates the identification and exploration of significant themes, symbols, and patterns within the narrative. The analytical framework involves the creation of codes that serve to investigate, assess, and articulate the identified themes, ultimately culminating in a comprehensive report that reflects these findings. The evaluation process included a thorough examination of online resources to gain a secondary perspective on the film, alongside multiple viewings that allowed for meticulous scrutiny. This involved discerning codes through an analysis of various elements such as visuals, symbols, imagery, dialogue, mise-en-scène, and narrative components that are relevant to the SDGs. The framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals provides a foundation for understanding the processes of sequencing, initial coding, and both direct and indirect open coding. Furthermore, the themes identified are rooted in the three pillars of sustainable development—social, economic, and environmental—which are intricately woven into the narrative style of films addressing these issues. The study also delves into the themes derived from the data, highlighting the interconnectedness of the film's narrative with the broader objectives of sustainable development.

Results and Discussion

Environmental Aspects of Sustainability:

Environmental sustainability is a central theme in *Kāṭaici Vivacāyi*, where the protagonist's farming methods are deeply rooted in harmony with nature. The film critically examines the adverse impacts of contemporary agricultural practices, highlighting issues such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and the decline of biodiversity. By employing organic and low-input farming techniques, the farmer not only promotes environmental sustainability but also conserves vital natural resources and maintains ecological balance. His deliberate choice to forgo hybrid seeds and synthetic fertilisers serves as a powerful statement against environmentally damaging practices. The farmer's profound spiritual connection to the soil embodies a commitment to climate action and the intrinsic value of life sustained by healthy soil. *Kāṭaici Vivacāyi* effectively addresses the three pillars of sustainability—economic viability, social cohesion, and environmental integrity—by advocating for the preservation of traditional agricultural methods. The film underscores the multifaceted nature of sustainable development, which encourages

positive interactions with the environment and emphasises the importance of protecting against environmental degradation. It highlights the necessity of responsible stewardship of natural resources, focusing on waste reduction and pollution control. Furthermore, the environmental dimension of sustainable development goals encompasses the interplay between natural ecosystems and social issues, including waste management and greenhouse gas emissions. The term “environmental” relates to the various elements of an organisation’s products, operations, and services, as well as their interactions with the surrounding environment. This interconnectedness reveals three levels of ecological and biophysical vulnerability that are at risk of harm and degradation. Ultimately, the concept of environmental wellness, integral to sustainable development goals, fosters overall health and well-being, emphasising the profound impact of environmental conditions on human health and quality of life.

Social Aspect of Sustainability:

The film *Kāṭaici Vivacāyi* explores the social aspect of sustainable development, highlighting the decline of rural communities and the erosion of traditional knowledge. As urbanisation and industrialisation progress, younger generations increasingly turn away from agricultural practices, leading to significant depopulation of rural areas. This shift threatens the social fabric of these communities, resulting in a loss of cultural identity and weakening of communal ties. The protagonist’s solitary life serves as a poignant representation of the isolation faced by traditional farmers as they grapple with the potential extinction of their way of life. The narrative advocates for the preservation of rural communities, the safeguarding of local customs, and the promotion of indigenous agricultural practices, while also envisioning sustainable urban environments and the goal of eradicating hunger. The social dimension encompasses various elements, including higher education, community development, and technological advancements, all of which play a crucial role in addressing the needs of both privileged and marginalised groups. This dimension also addresses economic support, counselling services, and governance solutions, reflecting a comprehensive approach to community development. Furthermore, the spatial aspect of this social component can be likened to an ecosystem, aiming to extend its influence beyond geographical confines. Within the framework of sustainable development goals, the social dimension is integral to achieving a balance between social, economic, and environmental sustainability, emphasising the importance of nurturing interpersonal relationships and fostering cooperation within society. Human behaviour, shaped by social norms, communication practices, and conflict resolution strategies, is essential for cultivating a thriving community.

Economic Aspect of Sustainability:

The economic dimension of sustainability is intricately tied to the management of pest-related diseases, which often leads to an increased dependence on pesticides. This reliance not only incurs significant costs for farmers but also poses environmental risks. The film *Kāṭaici Vivacāyi* poignantly illustrates the financial challenges faced by farmers who grapple with escalating input expenses while striving to sustain their agricultural practices. It effectively portrays the unsustainable nature of current agricultural methods and underscores the urgent need for more equitable and sustainable development approaches. The narrative reveals how the high costs associated with premium seeds place a considerable burden on farmers’ budgets, exacerbating their economic stress. Many farmers, as depicted in the film, feel compelled to boost their production levels to meet market demands, even if this requires incurring additional expenses linked to sustainable development goals. Furthermore, the film raises critical concerns regarding the long-

term viability of relying on high-yield seeds, which can contribute to soil degradation and a cycle of dependency on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, *Kaṭaici Vivacāyi* sheds light on the economic pressures stemming from rising pesticide costs, emphasising that the management of pests and diseases often necessitates the use of chemical pesticides. These pesticides, while intended to protect crops, can significantly strain farmers' finances, potentially leading to indebtedness and economic hardship. The film also highlights the detrimental environmental impacts of excessive pesticide use, which can contaminate soil, reduce fertility, and create lasting challenges for agricultural sustainability.

Conclusion

The analysis of the research film provides a comprehensive insight into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address critical environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The *Kaṭaici Vivacāyi* Tamil film poignantly illustrates the challenges encountered by marginalised rural communities striving to escape poverty and enhance their living conditions. It places particular emphasis on the significance of gender dynamics within agricultural and rural contexts, spotlighting the empowerment of women in both agricultural practices and decision-making processes. The social aspect of sustainable development is fundamentally aimed at poverty alleviation, fostering social investment, and cultivating secure, supportive communities. The 17 SDGs are strategically formulated to confront social challenges stemming from individual obstacles and shifts in the global environment. Within this context, the film accentuates the importance of the SDGs that pertain to social, economic, and environmental issues, particularly regarding agricultural land use in the face of global and climatic changes. By meticulously investigating judicial processes, societal realities, and organizational frameworks, the film instils a sense of hope for the realisation of justice-oriented Sustainable Development Goals. Ultimately, it aspires to shed light on the social realities faced by individuals within a civilised society, with the goal of empowering rural communities to devise sustainable communication strategies (Martinez, 2025). The *Kaṭaici Vivacāyi* film serves a crucial function in enabling the community to secure a dignified livelihood, gain access to education, safeguard natural resources, and engage in responsible consumption, all while honouring their environmental and legal rights. It underscores the fundamental right of sustainable development communicators, regardless of gender, to live with dignity, free from the limitations imposed by the three pillars of sustainable development—environmental, social, and economic—as delineated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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