



Quest, Rebirth and Learning a difficult task: Analysing the Plots and Types of the selected Tamil films and a Tamil short film suitable for Videotherapy Sessions for Elderly People in Madurai

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Abstract: Everyone likes watching films and short films and they also enjoy and watching films. Sometimes the films would also be inspiring and some films would also offer life lessons and tips on how to overcome the challenges in professional and private lives to the audience. Thus the audience can also watch the films and can apply the lessons and tips which they have learnt from the films to overcome challenges in their lives and the principle of cinematherapy or videotherapy functions is also based on the aspect of watching films. However, interestingly, videotherapy involves using the films and short films for treatment purposes and it is practiced frequently overseas as a part of regular therapy and by organizations. It is still a nascent field in India and videotherapy or related activities is carried out by some organizations such as Doctor Drama, a creative arts organizations in Mumbai which organizes videotherapy workshops for the general public often. This study aims to analyze and study about the nature and type of plots of the suitable Tamil films and Tamil short film for videotherapy sessions for elderly people in Madurai so as to organize videotherapy sessions using these films and a short film to help the elderly people to successfully overcome their mental health issues and/or to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing. The methodology adopted by this study is qualitative analysis based on watching the films, also based on pages of the films and short film on the IMDb website and also through the concept of The Seven Basic Plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker in his book THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS : Why we tell stories?.

Keywords: Tamil films, Tamil short film, Videotherapy, Elderly People, The Seven Basic Plots and Plots

Everyone likes watching films and short films and they also enjoy and watching films. Sometimes the films would also be inspiring and some films would also offer life lessons and tips on how to overcome the challenges in professional and private lives to the audience. Thus the audience can also watch the films and can apply the lessons and tips which they have learnt from the films to overcome challenges in their lives and the principle of cinematherapy or videotherapy functions is also based on the aspect of watching films. However, interestingly, it involves using the films and short films for treatment purposes.

Videotherapy involves screening selected clippings, full films or short films based on the mental health issues faced by or key mental health themes vital to the clients or targeted audience and having discussions and conducting activities with them after the viewing of the films and short films to make them to learn from the films or short films and characters who have successfully solved similar mental health issues and/or successfully enhanced their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Videotherapy sessions can be conducted for various groups of people such as men, women, children and also elderly people etc.

Videotherapy is practiced frequently overseas in countries such as the USA as a part of regular therapy and by organizations successfully. It is still a nascent field in India and videotherapy or related activities is carried out by some organizations such as Doctor Drama, a creative arts organizations in Mumbai which organizes videotherapy workshops for the general public often. This study aims to analyze and study about the nature and type of plots of



the suitable Tamil films and suitable short film for videotherapy sessions for elderly people in Madurai so as to organize videotherapy sessions using these films and a short film to help the elderly people to successfully overcome their mental health issues and/or to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing and expand the practice of videotherapy sessions in the country.

The Tamil feature films and short film were selected for the purpose of this study and also to be used in videotherapy sessions with the elderly people in Madurai as Tamil films and short film can be successfully related to and watched and enjoyed by the elderly people as they speak and understand Tamil fluently as they are in Madurai, a city in Tamil Nadu. The methodology adopted by this study is qualitative analysis based on watching the films, also based on pages of the films and short film on the IMDb website and also through the concept of The Seven Basic Plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker in his book THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS : Why we tell stories?.

Research Questions

1. What type of films are the selected Tamil films and a Tamil short film?
2. What type of the Seven Basic Plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker do the films and short film fall under?

Theoretical Framework

The study uses the concept of the seven basic plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker in his book THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS : Why we tell stories? to analyse the type of plot of the suitable Tamil films and Tamil short film fall under according to the seven basic plots and they are:

1. **Overcoming the monster**-A evil villain and a huge and powerful threat is threatening the world and society and the protagonist must defeat the villain or successfully overcome the threat by extraordinary efforts and save his or her world and earn a reward.
2. **Rags to riches**-The protagonist is a very normal person and is often not considered as important by the other people in society and due to an inciting event, they are now known to be special people.
3. **The quest**-The protagonist embark on a journey to achieve his or her goal and he or she achieve their goals by overcoming the obstacles in their journeys.
4. **Voyage and return**-The protagonist suddenly stumble into an unknown adventures or worlds and they embark these adventures or journeys in these unknown worlds. Sometimes the protagonist is transformed with his or her adventures or journeys in these unknown worlds and sometimes not
5. **Comedy**-This type of basic plot involves a sequence of inciting events involving people mistaken for other people or a basic misunderstanding which leads to funny confusion and mayhem.
6. **Tragedy**-This type of basic plot is about a story without a happy ending and it leads to death or losses.
7. **Rebirth**-This type of basic plot is about the protagonist coming under sudden illness or curse due to evil force before coming out free from them and being rescued.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes the concept of the Seven Basic Plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker in his book THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS : Why we tell stories? to analyse the plots of the Tamil films and the Tamil short film suitable for videotherapy sessions for the elderly people in Madurai through the methodology of qualitative analysis. The concept has been chosen for the purpose of this study as the seven basic plots explained by Booker covers and is applicable to various films and short films in various languages. The types of these selected Tamil films and short film has been analyzed through an analysis of their respective pages on the IMDb website and also by watching them.



Determination of the Tamil films and the Tamil short film for videotherapy sessions for the elderly people in Madurai

Tamil films and short films released from the 1960s till present fulfilling some predetermined criteria were analysed and were found to be suitable for video therapy sessions for the elderly people. The Tamil films and the Tamil films selected were based on the criteria given below for choosing films for videotherapy according to the technique of the non-probability technique of purposive sampling. They are:

1. "A film offers hope.
2. A film leads a person to feel motivated to improve oneself.
3. A film leads a viewer to reflect upon their own psychological health, issues and/or concerns." (Shelton, 2024)

In addition to this, a very important condition was also included in the list of selecting films for videotherapy sessions with elders as these sessions are about the elders:

4. The film should feature elderly protagonists and the stories of the films should revolve around the elderly people; solving their emotional or mental health issues and/or improving their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

After the films had meet these conditions, the films were also further analysed through certain categories for content analysis for selecting suitable films for videotherapy sessions for elderly people to analyse if they were suitable to be used in videotherapy sessions with elderly people.

The categories of content analysis for selecting films suitable for videotherapy sessions with elderly people are:

- **Plot**-What is the plot/narrative of the film? What is the story that the film tells to the audience?
- **Issues or themes about elderly people and their mental health issues and/or emotional and psychological wellbeing**-What mental health issues does the film address? What aspects or themes related to the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the elderly people does these films address? Why?
- **Does it depict these issues or themes well?**-Do the films depict the mental health issues such as anxiety or depression and/or discuss about the themes or aspects related to the emotional and psychological wellbeing in the elderly people realistically and also without stereotyping or trivializing them? Do the films discuss about these themes and mental health issues elderly people in the realistic way and can these themes or aspects be related by the elderly people?
- **If it depicts about an mental health issue or issues in the elderly people, does the film offer a happy and successful solution?**-Does the film offer a solution to the mental health issues or mental health issues faced by its elderly people protagonist? Do the elderly people protagonists overcome their mental health issues successfully and live happily and enhance their emotional and psychological wellbeing?
- **Does it contain any unnecessary elements or aspects such as sadness, melodrama and violence etc?**-Do the films contain too much of unnecessary elements such as sorrow, violence, comedy, romance and melodrama which shifts the focus away from how the elderly people protagonists address and overcome their emotional and psychological issues of the elderly people or maintain/improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing?

Thus, according to the process of the purposive sampling carried out and the content analysis of the films which had met the criteria discussed above, the following Tamil films (feature and short film) and English films were selected as being suitable for videotherapy sessions for elderly people along with a short summary of their plots:

1. Pannaiyarum Padminiyum-2014-Comedy drama film-Directed by SU Arunkumar-**Plot:** Pannaiyar and his wife Chellamma are a kind hearted and rich couple in their village who introduce some latest technologies to their villagers. Once when he goes to his friend Shanmugam's house, Pannaiyar immediately develops a liking to the



Ambassador car of his friend. Pannaiyar is also overjoyed when his friend tells him that he plans to leave his car with him while he goes to visit his pregnant daughter. Pannaiyar's and his wife's attachment to the car grows as the car is with them. What issues can this car bring in their lives? How will Pannaiyar and Chellamma manage and solve these issues successfully?

2. Pa Paandi-2017-Drama film-Directed by Dhanush- **Plot:** Power Paandi, a former stunt master tries to get rid of drug peddlers in his neighbourhood and thus he gets into trouble with the police and with the drug peddlers sometimes. This leads to rifts and arguments between him and his son Raghavan. When one such argument due to this escalates into a very heated and intense fight between both of them, Pa Paandi becomes sad and does not like this life in which he cannot remain in his son's house forever. Thus, he leaves from his home in a soul-searching journey.

3. KD Engira Karuppururai-2019-Comedy drama film-Directed by Madhumita-**Plot:** Karuppururai, an 80 year old man who was in a coma, suddenly wakes up and overhears his children planning to kill him through the practice of thalaikoothal. Thus, he runs away from home and in the process, befriends a young boy named Kutty. This boy helps him to live his life to the maximum content and in this process, Karuppururai also becomes independent and rediscovers himself.

4. Avarum Naanum Avalum Naanum (part of the Tamil anthology Puthum Pudhu Kaalai which is available on the OTT platform Amazon Prime)-2020-Drama film-Directed by Gautam Vasudev Menon-**Plot:** A reluctant and unwilling granddaughter (Kanna) goes to her maternal grandfather who has not spoken to her mother or approved of their parents' love marriage, to take care of him during the lockdown because her parents tell us to do. However, as Kanna starts talking and mingling with her grandfather, she gradually warms up to him and develops a bonding and affection towards him. Their bond grows. Why did her grandfather did not approve of her parents' love marriage? Did he reconcile with Kanna's mother?

5. Thaa Kizhavi-2026- Comedy drama film-Directed by Prashanth Murugesan-**Plot:** Pavunuthaayi, is an elderly woman but also is very independent and tough, who lives with her daughter and her son. She is a moneylender in her village. All of the villagers are very afraid of her due to her straight-forward and also ruthless approach while collecting the money which they have to pay her. However, suddenly one day Pavunuthaayi falls very ill and her estranged sons and son-in-law come to her house to claim their share of the wealth. What will happen next? Will Pavunuthaayi recover and come back successfully? Will her sons and daughters-in-law realize and understand about her?

Analysis and Discussions

The analysis of the selected Tamil films and the Tamil short film based on their genre and type of films according to the concept of the seven basic plots explained by Christopher Booker.

Types of the suitable Tamil films and short film for videotherapy sessions with elderly people in Madurai

Interestingly, an analysis of the selected Tamil films and the Tamil short film reveals that most of the films (KD Engira Karuppururai, Thaa Kizhavi and Pannaiyarum Padminiyum) are comedy dramas. In addition to this, although the film Pa Paandi and short film Avarum Naanum Avalum Naanum are drama films, they also have some moments of comedy which can make the elderly people to laugh and enjoy during their videotherapy sessions and also learn from them to overcome their mental health issues and/or to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

In addition to this, most of these films and short films are slice of life and feel good films like Pa Paandi, Avarum Naanum Avalum Naanum and Pannaiyarum Padminiyum. In films such as KD Engira Karuppururai and Thaa Kizhavi which do not focus or detail about too much about the mental health issues and narrate how the elderly protagonists of the films overcome their mental health issues successfully over the course of the films in a very engaging way with the mixture of drama and comedy.



Interestingly, all of the films feature the elderly people successfully addressing and overcoming their mental health issues or/and to enhance their emotional and psychological wellbeing by themselves or/with the help of their families and friends.

Type of basic plots of the selected Tamil films and the short film

1. Pa Paandi falls under the basic plot of **quest** as it is about how an old man, a retired stunt master, Power Pandi after an heated argument with his son Raghavan leaves from home, goes on a soul searching journey on his motorbike, with the help of some old people at a road stall, rediscovers his desire to meet his former lover Poonthendral and with the help of the old men, creates a Facebook profile, locates her and expresses her desire to meet her.

Then, he, with her consent, goes to meet her in Hyderabad where he becomes very happy and enjoys spending time when he rediscovers himself and also of his love towards her. However, when he goes to her home to meet Poonthendral and talk to her about his desire, his now repentant son with his wife and children turn up, apologize to him for his scoldings and now requests him to return home with them. A reluctant Pandi edged by Poonthendral, agrees and returns home with them in his motorbike, while his son and his family travel in a car. Thus, Paandi has embarked on quest successfully, meet his former lover and would continue to stay in touch with her as Poonthendral has said to him while he was leaving, although his wish of reuniting with her was not fulfilled.

2. Pannaiyarum Padminiyum- This film although it does not feature superheroes and large impending threats such as monsters and great villains who pose a threat to the society and the world etc, it is still a much softened and feel good version of the basic plot of **Overcoming the monster** as it is about a rich elderly man Pannaiyar (hero) immediately developing a liking to a car after he sees it in his friend's house and later wants to learn to drive it to take his wife Chellamma to their temple on their wedding anniversary as per his wife's wish. However, he has to face obstacles (a much lesser softened versions of Monsters) such as a insecure driver who feels that he might lose his job when the Pannaiyar learns to drive, the fact that Pannaiyar himself is an elderly man which can affect his ability to learn and drive a car and his greedy daughter Suja who always has an eye on their car and eventually takes the car away; plunging him and Chellamma in deep sorrow.

However, Pannaiyar overcomes all of these obstacles and in a major climatic twist, in the occasion of their wedding anniversary, Pannaiyar comes of their house majestically driving the car by himself successfully and a happy Chellamma now gets inside the car besides him and he even successfully races with a bus. Thus, Pannaiyar has overcome the obstacles (monsters) and won his prize (taking his wife to the temple on their wedding anniversary).

3. Thai Kizhaavi- The film falls under the basic plot type of **Rebirth** as it is about how a fiercely independent moneylender Pavunuthaayi suddenly becomes paralyzed and ill and how she successfully recovers with the efforts of her once greedy turned affectionate and estranged sons after they realize the value of their mother and a fellow villager when they arrange a doctor to take care of her in her village and also eventually to a hospital in the nearby city when her condition deteriorates.

In the end, Pavunuthaayi also realizes of the huge debts of her sons due to them taking care of her and also the efforts of her daughters-in-law taking care of her when she was ill, reconciles with them and splits her huge amount of gold equally with her three daughters-in-law and daughter, whose husband had left her in Pavunuthaayi's home due to dowry conflict. In the end, Pavunuthaayi eventually severs her daughter's relationship with her greedy son-in-law and marries her to the villager who had helped her sons while she was ill. So, Pavunuthaayi had suddenly become paralyzed and recovered successfully from it. She has also changed by reconciling and reuniting with her estranged sons and daughters-in-law.

4. Avarum Naanum Avalum Naanum- This short film falls under the basic plot type of **Rebirth**. Although it does not feature the protagonist, an elderly man who is a nuclear physicist suffering from serious mental or physical illness, it still features him living in sorrow that his daughter who is a very good singer stopped singing after her love marriage and thus he is living alone by himself by many years after her marriage.



However, he overcomes his sorrow and loneliness by bonding with his granddaughter(his daughter's daughter) who had come to take care of him during the pandemic sharing his feelings and sorrow with her through gradual bonding and also through a heartfelt conversation with her.

The granddaughter also realizes the truth and also that both she and her sister had misunderstood him as not accepting their parents's love marriage, reconciles with him fully. Then she also plays the role of the person who removes his sorrow and loneliness by making him to reconcile with her mother successfully by making him to listen to her mother's song and the elderly man also comes out of the house after the lockdown, finally stepping into the outside world after many years of living in loneliness.

5. KD engira Karupppudurai-The plot of the film falls under the basic plot type of **Voyage and return** as it is about an elderly old man, Karupppudurai waking up suddenly after three months in coma and he runs away from home when he discovers his sons and his elder daughter have conspired to kill him through the ritual of Thalaikoothal. Thus, the plot of this film falls under the basic plot type of Voyage and Return as Karupppudurai unexpectedly comes face to face with an impending danger and in order to escape from it, runs from home.

Initially clueless and directionless about where to go, he stumbles upon and boards a bus to a town. Then he goes to a temple in the town and meets a small boy Kutty with whom he strikes a friendship and that friendship radically transforms him completely. With the help of the smart Kutty, Karupppudurai learns to read and write and also fulfills his long time wishes such as riding a motorbike with his friend and eating different types of briyani etc.

Most importantly, Karupppudurai now given a short form of KD by Kutty, becomes independent and also gradually learns how to overcome his anxiety of death, caused due to his fear of the ritual. He eventually becomes emotionally mature and decides to send Kutty to Chennai for higher education upon the advice of his former lover as he realized that as he is very old, he would not be living for a long time and Kutty has got a long life ahead of him. He promises Kutty that they would meet often, returns to his house with the detective hired by his sons to find him. Karupppudurai eventually signs and transfers his property to his children and once again runs from his home the next morning when his children have decided to kill him.

Conclusion

This study aims to study and analyze the type of basic plots of the selected Tamil films and short film and also the nature of the films and short film suitable for videotherapy sessions for elderly people in Madurai through the theoretical framework of The Seven Basic Plots proposed by Christopher Booker in his book The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories?.

The results of the study found out that most of the films were comedy drama films and some films contained some moments of comedy and also most of the films were slice of life and feel good films. The films such as Thaa Kizhavi and KD engira Karupppudurai also interestingly did not dwell too much on the sufferings and mental health issues of their elderly protagonists and instead narrated the story of how the protagonists overcame their illness and mental health issue successfully and in a very engaging way by combining drama and comedy. Thus, the films and short films can be watched by the elderly people and enjoyed and also be a great way for the elderly people to learn from to solve their mental health issues and/or to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing as most of them are comedic or slice of life and feel good films.

Interestingly, an analysis of the type of the basic plots of the films and short film according to the concept of The Seven Basic Plots proposed by Christopher Boooker revealed interesting insights. While the plot of the film Pa Paandi had a **quest** type of plot, Pannaiyarum Padminiyum had a much softened **Overcoming the monster** type of plot about an aged Pannaiyar successfully learning and driving a car without big villains and looming threats to the world, although he faced obstacles towards achieving his goal, the short film Avarum Naanum Avalum Naanum and the film Thai Kizhavi could be classified as films based on the basic plot of **Rebirth** although both



of them have different plots and deal with various mental health issues and themes related to the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the elderly people.

The plot of the film KD engira Karuppudurai could be classified under the **Voyage and return** narrative in which an elderly man flees from home after having woken up from coma when he learns that his children are planning to kill him and embarks on a journey which leads to a profound change and transformation in him and he comes back home, although he again runs away after transferring his property to his children, after learning that they are again trying to kill him.

The analysis of the plots of the films and short films reveal that suitable Tamil films and short film for videotherapy sessions with elderly people reveals that there is no fixed basic plot type for these films and short film suitable for videotherapy sessions for elderly people in Madurai and films and short film suitable for videotherapy sessions for elderly people in Madurai have different type of basic plots featuring elderly people solving their mental health issues or/and enhancing their emotional and psychological wellbeing by themselves or/and with the help of their families and friends. These findings of the study could be useful for psychologists and therapists seeking to select suitable films for videotherapy sessions with elderly people.

However, this study also has some limitations. First, this study is only a qualitative study and is also based on the suitable Tamil films and short film suitable for videotherapy sessions with elderly people and thus the findings are limited with the context of Tamil films and short film. Further research should be done about analyzing the plots of suitable films and short films from different languages and in different regions and countries, which can be used in videotherapy sessions with men, women and children etc. The findings of these studies could be compared and analyzed with its study.

Secondly, this study has only analyzed the plots of the films and short film according to the concept of The Seven Basic Plots as listed and explained by Christopher Booker and also the nature of the films and short films. Future research should also analyze the screenplays of these films and short film and also conduct further research on the films based on other suitable approaches to draw more conclusions about the type of films suitable for videotherapy sessions with elderly people.

Future research can also involve using the Tamil films and short films in videotherapy sessions with elderly people through an experimental method and analysing and studying empirically with statistical evidence about the films having which type of basic plot is more effective in videotherapy sessions with elderly people in Madurai. Such studies would be useful for cinema therapists, psychologists and organizations carrying out videotherapy sessions for elderly people.

This study by combining elements of film studies (analysing by watching films) with an element from the stories (the Seven Basic Plots listed and explained by Christopher Booker) has studied and analyzed about the nature and the type of basic plots of suitable Tamil films and short film for videotherapy sessions with elderly people. It hopes to inspire and encourage more of such studies and related studies in the respective fields in the future.

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