

# Why This ‘KaadhalVeri’?

Making meaning of ‘love failure’ through the Tamil film song

Sriram Mohan

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School of Media and Cultural Studies  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
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## DECLARATION

I, Sriram Mohan, hereby declare that this dissertation titled ‘Why This “KaadhalVeri?”: Making meaning of “love failure” through the Tamil film song’ is the outcome of my own study undertaken under the guidance of K.V. Nagesh Babu, Assistant Professor, Centre for Critical Media Praxis, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this Institute or of any other institute or university. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me in the preparation of this dissertation.

6 March, 2014

Sriram Mohan

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation titled ‘Why This “KaadhalVeri?”: Making meaning of “love failure” through the Tamil film song’ is the record of the original work done by Sriram Mohan under my guidance and supervision. The results of the research presented in this dissertation/thesis have not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this Institute or any other institute or university.

6 March, 2014

K.V. Nagesh Babu

Assistant Professor

Centre for Critical Media Praxis

School of Media and Cultural Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Mumbai

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-clung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling.

- Walter Benjamin: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, there has been an upsurge in the number of Tamil film songs featuring the idea of 'love failure' as experienced by young male protagonists. Enjoying massive popularity, these songs have served to showcase the angst and the anguish of the protagonists 'failing' in love. This study seeks to understand how these ideas of 'love failure' have been articulated by Tamil film songs over the years, and attempts to capture a moment of their reception through present-day audiences in Tamilnadu.

It argues that the Tamil film song serves as a site for the 'production' of romantic love and traces the genealogy of the 'failed' male lover in Tamil cinema through these songs. In doing so, it locates the ideas of 'love failure' in the dialectics of cinema, culture and society. The study then posits that audiences beyond the screen make meaning of these texts in a variety of ways and proceeds to explore how audiences engage with notions of romantic love and its 'failure.'

## CHAPTER 1: ON SCREEN, OF(F) SCREEN

On November 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, a music video for a Tamil film song was uploaded on to the online video streaming site YouTube.com at fifty three minutes past midnight by an employee of the record label Sony Music. This music video was released to counter the spread of a rough version of the same song, which had reportedly been leaked on the internet by an unauthorised, unnamed source earlier that week. The music video uploaded by the Sony Music employee to counter the leaked version, featured some of the cast and the crew members of a Tamil film that was still under production. The video was all of four minutes long. But four days after its appearance on YouTube.com, it had been viewed four million times. And at the end of three weeks from the time it was uploaded, it had been viewed nineteen million times (N. Madhavan 2012) and had spawned numerous cover versions and parodies by people across the globe. The song in question was a track from the Tamil film *3* (Aishwarya Dhanush 2012) and was titled *Why This Kolaveri Di* (Why This Murderous Rage).

Featuring a young man expressing his anguish at being rejected in love, the music video for the song, which was sung staccato style in Tamil-accented English, was widely touted to have taken a slice of present-day ‘Tamilness’ to the world at large (Pillai 2012). The sudden global popularity of song prodded me to look at it more closely and I realised that the song was, in its essence, a classic case of a cinematic text pertaining to what is now often referred to by Tamil films as ‘love failure,’ as experienced by an archetypal protagonist in Tamil cinema. Always male and roughly within the age group of 18 – 30 years, such protagonists are invariably positioned as misfits who have ‘failed’ in romantic love and have persistently featured in the range of male protagonists favoured by Tamil cinema. In the last few years, however, there has been a peculiar upswing in the number of films featuring young male protagonists cast in this mould.

In many ways, *Why This Kolaveri Di* was the break out example of a Tamil film song featuring a male protagonist singing a song that involves him ruing the act of falling in love and castigating the woman he fell in love with or, as the case usually is, women in general. His angst invariably forms the kernel of such songs, which have then been articulated in various ways over the years. Part lament and part outburst, these songs of ‘failed’ love condemn the notion of romantic love itself and frequently celebrate male bonding and friendship as the antidote to the ill-effects of falling in love with a woman. The male protagonists in these songs see romantic love as an affliction and subsequently, look at themselves as inevitable sufferers of this affliction. They are, therefore, by their own admission, ‘lovesick.’ Also, this sort of rejection in love seems to uniformly render them as misfits or ‘losers,’ allowing them to contemplate not just about their ‘failure,’ but about the inescapable ‘failure’ of the notion of love itself.

It is imperative to remember that romantic love, being a staple theme for Tamil cinema, is approached and narrated in numerous ways by various films, with the songs working to reflect or further the propositions put forth by the films within which they are embedded. In fact, the form that I am concerned with, i.e., songs featuring male protagonists pining for love or having faced rejection in love, is in itself not new to Tamil cinema or for that matter, other language cinemas in India. Tamil film actors such as Gemini Ganesan in the 1950s, Sivaji Ganesan in the 1960s and 1970s, T Rajendar in the 1980s and Murali in the 1990s have played such roles and in some of these cases, have even been typecast in the mould of a ‘failed lover.’ Additionally, songs from the films featuring the aforementioned actors in such roles continue to receive airplay on radio shows and televisions programmes even today. Soaked in pathos pertaining to ‘failed’ love, these songs can often be heard on late night radio shows in Tamilnadu and are made available as compilations with titles like ‘hit love failure songs’ for downloads from internet forums. Also, some of these songs are often touted to have come to stand in for the ‘unvoiced’ emotions of numerous Tamil men who have been rejected in love, as evidenced by several instances of intertextual referencing over the years, in Tamil cinema.

Also, it must be mentioned here that songs featuring female protagonists singing about rejection in love and/or about the difficulties of romantic love have also been produced by the Tamil film industry. But such songs occur rarely, with the male protagonists’ laments often being privileged, both in terms of their centrality to the plots of the films and their role as the drivers of the narratives. This privileging only appears to have become even more pronounced, with the increasing occurrence and circulation of Tamil film songs featuring young male protagonists who lament the ‘failure’ of their love to a male friend or a bunch of male friends and rue the ‘profane’ form that love has been reduced to, in modern times. Consequently, songs featuring the male protagonist singing about ‘love failure’ are grounds for the articulation of ideas pertaining to love, loss, friendship, intimacy, the place of men and women in the society, and particularly, Tamil society. The growing popularity of these songs, along with the potential offered by what these ideas could mean within the larger socio-political context of Tamilnadu, encouraged me to view them as basis for research.

Given this context, my dissertation is as an exploratory study that concerns itself with the construction of meaning with respect to the notion of ‘love failure,’ through the Tamil film song. I posit that through a study of these songs, the location of male protagonists singing about ‘love failure,’ their outlook towards women and their class positions, can be read and analysed to nuance the understanding of how such filmic representations are (or are not) reflective of the socio-cultural milieu of Tamilnadu. Subsequently, I put forth the idea that by investigating how audiences interact with and make meaning of such cinematic texts, it is possible to unpack existing notions pertaining to the influence of cinema on society and the dialectics of the complex relationship between the *reel* and the *real*. I draw upon Hughes (2003), who argues:

The study of exhibition renders films as performative social events with multiple histories. This means that seen from the perspective of exhibition, films cannot be studied as finished and timeless objects. Instead, one must be attentive to how films are constantly rearticulated through the specific historical situations of public exhibition and reciprocally constructed through a complex social interchange with audiences.

### **Tamil film songs, Tamil films and romantic love**

In order to establish the relevance of such a study, the role played by cinema in the cultural history of Tamilnadu, and the vice-like grip that Tamil film songs have held on social and political life in the state, has to be foregrounded. As suggested by Hughes (2010), ‘after almost 80 years of existence and over 6000 films, Tamil cinema has long reached its own critical mass’ and ‘has turned into a naturalized object.’ Along this arc of time, songs have served as an integral element in the Tamil film machinery. It is worth mentioning here that the first talkie to be made in Tamil, titled *Kalidas* (H.M. Reddy 1931), contained fifty songs (Baskaran 1991). Ravindran (2011), citing Hughes (2007), goes on to argue that ‘the emergence of the gramophone records as a medium of musical entertainment along with the rise of musical stars such as S.G. Kittappa reconfigured the audience expectations of the composite popular culture that was being shaped by Tamil theatre, Tamil cinema and gramophone records.’ The popularity of Tamil film songs, however, surged in 1949 with the introduction of Radio Ceylon, a Sri Lanka-based commercial broadcaster whose programming mix included six hours of film songs every day. Buoyed by its success, All India Radio also ‘opened a commercial wing and began to air film songs’ by the 1950s (Baskaran 1991: 756). Over the years, songs have been called upon to mark certain milestones in the narrative of the film such as the hero’s entry, the hero and the heroine’s first meeting, etc, with romantic love invariably being the chief concern.

Also, these songs can be excised from their location in film and continue to be shared as cultural artefacts. And shared they have been, in an array of ways and to swathes of listeners and spectators. From the days of gramophone records, Radio Ceylon, and subsequently, cassette tapes, the distribution mix for Tamil film songs today includes All India Radio’s local programming outlets, more than half a dozen private radio channels, an equal number of 24-hour exclusive Tamil film music channels on television, hundreds of internet radio channels dedicated to Tamil film songs and numerous websites (legal and otherwise) offering downloads of these songs. And when viewed alongside the availability of inexpensive mobile phones with radio and music player facilities, the idea of socio-cultural life in Tamilnadu being lived to a soundtrack comprised predominantly of songs from Tamil cinema, becomes a standpoint that may be subject to further academic investigation. However, in the opinion of Baskaran (1991), mass popularity has not translated into scholarly attention in the case of Tamil film songs, and film music continues to be ignored in, say, seminars on music or culture. Nonetheless, as suggested by Kalinak (2010), film music continues to be ‘one of the most powerful emotional

prompts in film, encouraging us to empathize with onscreen characters.’ In its early days, Tamil cinema and its music were viewed as crucial equalisers in a deeply fractured, caste-driven Tamil society, as suggested by Pandian (1996). ‘The cinema hall was the first performance centre in which all the Tamils sat under the same roof. The basis of the seating is not on the hierarchic position of the patron but essentially on his purchasing power’ (Sivathamby 1981: 18). Understood to have been patronized mostly by the lower classes, Tamil cinema, its theatres and the class denomination of its audiences has been reconstituted significantly over time. As posited by Srinivas (2001), an understanding of cinema theatres and the audiences they serve is vital, as this provides ‘an occasion for the articulate middle class public to arrive at definitive normative formulations on the nature of the filmgoing experience on the one hand and the nature and function of the public space opened up by the cinema on the other.’

By the 1990s, Tamil cinema had oriented itself towards a new kind of film audience, a trend that could, in part, be attributed to the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the emergence of a ‘new’ middle class. Since then, spectatorship for Tamil cinema has only trotted further and further away from earlier conceptions of the publics that frequented the cinema halls, and consequently, the character of Tamil cinema’s key concerns has also been altered. Velayutham (2008), speaking about the ‘new’ Tamil cinema, states that ‘the representation of modernity, progress, affluence and global consumerism is its major preoccupation’ and notes that ‘the urban space and “the city” now serves as the primary backdrop for most films.’ Also, the emergence of newer locations of film exhibition such as multi-screen theatre complexes, the entrenchment of cable television and the development of other modes of distribution like direct-to-home (DTH) broadcasts, have all contributed to a further reconfiguration of audience profiles in terms of the spectating public for Tamil cinema, with the young, lower middle class male becoming the face of this spectatorship as it appears to be construed by Tamil film producers. The implications of having a range of such protagonists serve as ‘voice’ for the audience in terms of identification, truly deserves to be studied in depth in order to comprehend the changing face of Tamil cinema. Songs featuring young male heterosexual protagonists ruing the ‘failure’ of their love, then function as starting points in such attempts and offer a vantage view of what Nakassis and Dean (2007) refer to as ‘realist spectatorship,’ a mode that Tamil cinema currently seems to address when it comes to romantic love and associated concerns. That this character is staged in the urban complicates matters in interesting ways, with small towns offering the scope for being viewed as fresh, new sites for such characters to emerge. I posit that in understanding the gender, class and caste frameworks within which such portrayals are placed and the ways in which they are consumed, the ground can be set for the emergence of newer, more substantive ideas that could detail the various ways in which cinema serves as a site of construction of the socio-political context.

The concept of 'love failure' in Tamil cinema is one that has neither been specifically identified nor discussed by scholars so far. However, considerable amounts of literature is available on Tamil cinema, Tamil film songs, depictions of youth and realism in Tamil cinema, ideas of masculinity and womanhood associated with movie-watching in theatres, narratives of love and romance in films, the experience of cinema and social relations, and affective encounters in Tamil cinema. For instance, Baskaran (1991) reflects on the 'historical, cultural and sociological factors' responsible for the popularity of Tamil film songs and declares that 'the film song has acquired independent value and has emerged as a complete, self-sufficient product.' He goes on to mention that 'it is written and composed irrespective of the filmic context in which it is to appear, so that each song can be an entertainment by itself and can be enjoyed as such.' Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan (2008) delve into the role played by film songs in the expressive nature of cinema and also, articulate the modes of production involved in the creation of such songs in Tamil films. Pandian (1996) discusses the various binaries (realism v/s fantasy, classical v/s non-classical, high culture v/s low culture) straddled by Tamil cinema in its early days and some of his arguments, especially those concerning the elitist negotiation of the challenges posed by such cinema to what was referred to as 'high' culture, continue to retain their validity. Badiou and Truong (2009) speak of romantic love as a 'tenacious adventure' and remark that 'real-ness' of love is contingent on its ability to comprehensively trounce worldly hurdles. This idea, then, offers a frame against which the 'failure' of love, as positioned by Tamil cinema and its audiences, can be read. Dickey (1993) suggests that Tamil films' emphasis on romance contributes to a reduction of anxiety in young people, about love and relationships. She argues:

How does the movies' emphasis on romance contribute to a reduction of anxiety? I suggest two ways. One is that, as viewers' desires for romantic involvement grow without any increased fulfillment of these desires in actual relationships, stories about lovers who overcome great social barriers to achieve their love suggest that surely love can be found among people of the same backgrounds who have no such barriers to cross. On the other hand, love relationships may also represent youth's rebellion against parental restraints, even rebellion against constraining social strictures or 'society' itself. (p.99)

She also notes that the urban poor in Tamilnadu look at 'perceiving messages in films' as 'natural,' furthering the position that this sort of naturalisation requires unpacking. Krishnan (2008) talks of the theme of love in Tamil cinema, which he states is a 'narrative feature nearly omnipresent and mandatory in all Tamil films even when it only makes a marginal contribution to the story or plot.' Illouz (1997), in her book about romantic love and consumption, talks of love being positioned as 'a means to attain spiritual perfection' in the Victorian era and points to the linkages between the romantic discourse and the 'values and metaphors of religion.' This is in sync with Tamil cinema's focus on the theme of *kaadhala* (romantic love) and its positioning through oft-repeated descriptors such as *punidham* (purity) and *deiveegham* (godliness). Also, the aforementioned attributes are seen to disproportionately apply to Tamil women under the broad aegis of nebulously-defined 'Tamil culture.'

with scholars such as Pandian (1992) Dickey (1993), Lakshmi (1995), Anandhi (2005) and Dhara (2006) all attempting to delineate the contours of this ‘Tamil culture’ and its preoccupation with the chastity of the woman.

Zizek (1989) analyses the ‘libidinal economy of love’ and how the ‘fascination of the Lady in love is usually attributed to her inaccessibility.’ But I suggest that the ‘failed’ male lover’s articulations in the songs of Tamil cinema need to be set against the flux in the ‘social,’ which are the same conditions that may render his love ‘impossible.’ Derne (2000) concerns himself with masculinity and modernity in the course of the Indian male’s engagement with cinema, speaking about how men enjoy rebellion vicariously when it comes to romantic love, but often fold into the strictures of conformity in the own lives. Srinivas (2010a), in her ethnography of women’s cinema-going experiences in the city of Bangalore, delineates the importance of the ‘ladies audience’ and attendant considerations about the ‘quality’ of films and the locations in which filmic texts are consumed. Srinivas (1998) also offers interesting insights into spectatorship and social relations as envisaged by the Hindi movie-goer. Lukose (2005) looks at youth, the amorphous constituency favoured by film producers, as ‘a gendered category of consumption’ in the case of Kerala and charts the ways in which such consumption is geared towards the production of certain kinds of ‘youthful femininities and masculinities.’ Nakassis and Dean (2007), referring to Tamil cinema, argue that the ‘emergence of the mode of realist spectatorship, the films associated with it, and their connection to male youth are due to changes in the film market and to differential socialization by generation.’ They frame the ‘realist spectatorship’ as being pivoted on the key assumption that the reflection of the ‘real’ is a preferred condition for Tamil films and that this reflection is a function of how easily instances of particular representations can be found in the worlds inhabited by the audiences. Athique (2011), citing Hall (1980), argues:

The constructed (or encoded) film text thus provides a dual contribution to public culture which can be usefully related to Stuart Hall’s model of a ‘circuit of communication’ (128–30). At one pole of the circuit, the Indian cinema reacts to, and is therefore reflective of, the public mores of Indian society. At the other pole, the cinema intervenes in public mores, providing both the symbolic referents and the ‘issues of the day’ for everyday conversations on romance, social justice, nationalism, community relations and modernity. (p.156)

Therefore, in order to capture a meaningful snapshot of the ‘circuit,’ a semiotic analysis of the constructed film text must necessarily be counterbalanced by an understanding of audience reception, thereby avoiding the tendency to offer textual analyses as being sufficient to extricate all meanings produced from the text. For such an endeavour, the cultural studies framework as envisaged by Hall (1980) offers tremendous scope. In positing ‘culture’ as a more expansive frame than ‘communication’ (typically privileged by earlier models), he provides useful ways to understand the latter through a detailed exposition of crucial ‘moments’ such as production, circulation, consumption and reproduction. He also speaks about the gaps available to readers/viewers/audiences to negotiate

with these ‘moments’ and even resist or oppose them. Hall’s ideas are in sync with the changes in perception of audiences as furthered by newer audience and reception theories. Williams (2010), in his book titled ‘Understanding Media Theory,’ states that ‘the attention paid in reception studies to the differences between people in their understanding of media messages, on the basis not only of class but also gender, race, ethnic identity, age, sexual identity, nationality and disability, presents a more complex differentiated picture of the audience.’ While ensuring that audiences’ agency is not overdetermined so as to see the media as becoming ‘powerless,’ the movement away from only an ideological analysis of the texts and towards a framework where the audiences’ interpretation of filmic texts, their negotiations with them and their perceived attempts to gain pleasure from them and/or allay anxieties through them, is a direction that has largely influenced this nature of this study. The perspectives and theories mentioned so far, formulated by a variety of scholars, have served as vital building blocks in the attempt to make meaning of ‘love failure,’ working to both explain and question the production and consumption of such concerns.

## **Objectives**

The major objectives of this study are:

- To build a case for Tamil film songs serving as a site for the construction of romantic love between young heterosexual men and women, and to locate ‘failed’ love as experienced by young male protagonists within this oeuvre
- To identify how the idea of ‘love failure’ as experienced by young male protagonists in Tamil cinema has transformed over the years and the ideological assumptions within which such portrayals have been embedded
- To comprehend the meaning-making processes activated by a ‘realist spectatorship,’ comprising male and female Tamil youth who grapple with these ideas of ‘love failure’
- To test the possibilities of the ‘failed’ male lover serving as a narrator of the larger socio-political context within which he is situated

## **Process**

Five popular songs from mainstream Tamil cinema, released within the period of one year (June 2011 – June 2012), were selected purposively for their depictions of ‘love failure’ and analysed. These songs were some of the biggest successes of the year in which they were released, receiving extensive attention from both audiences and the media. These songs were the central artefacts around which the promotional campaigns, for the theatrical release of the films, were built. The music, the lyrics, the picturisation of the song, the placement of the song in the film, its relevance to the plot of the film and the circulation of the film and the song, served to constitute the data, whose analysis resulted in an understanding of the key thematic concerns of the songs. It allowed for a mapping of the ways in

which 'love failure' had been approached by Tamil film songs in the recent past.

These songs then were used to trigger conversations with Tamil audiences about 'love failure' and attendant concerns. 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted in May 2013 with male and female participants within the age group of 18-30 years. All of the interviews were conducted in Chennai, the capital of Tamilnadu and also, the base of the Tamil film industry. However, care was taken to ensure that young men and women hailing from other parts of the state and from different class positions (lower middle class, middle class and upper middle class) were also included. Persons in the age group of 18 - 30 years, belonging to the aforementioned classes, were selected to ensure that population for the study consists of the perceived audience for the films in question, one that is likely to be involved in pre-marital, heterosexual romantic relationships or at least, involved in pursuing the same. Out of the 30 respondents, 10 were female and the rest were male. I do not believe that this is a representative sample. For instance, all of respondents were heterosexual. While the sexuality of the respondents was neither explicitly asked about nor answered, their heterosexuality was seen to have been subtly articulated over the course of the interviews. But given Tamil cinema's heteronormative character and that the study was pivoted on the nature of reflection perceived by audiences with respect to onscreen portrayals of romantic love, the sample of respondents had to be tailored to mirror those conditions. Most of the interviews were conducted in Tamil, with a few of them being predominantly in English. The choice of language was determined by the participants' preference. All of the interviews cited were translated by me. In-depth interviews were preferred over other data collection methods such as focus group discussions, given the sensitive nature of some of the queries pertaining to the participants' own pursuits of romantic love, and also, to ensure that the respondents spoke as freely as possible without having to worry about adhering to the dynamics of a group. The mode of semi-structured interviews was chosen to ensure that there was flexibility for participants to guide the interview towards concerns that they felt were crucial, as opposed to simply adhering to a pre-defined agenda set by the respondent. Also, in terms of identifying participants, some were found through peer networks and some were introduced to me by the participants that I had interviewed earlier. Care was taken to ensure that the participants selected were interested in Tamil cinema and Tamil film songs. All of the interviews were conducted either in 'public' places such as coffee shops or restaurants, or in the homes or outside the workplaces of the participants. They were conducted in relative privacy, with no third person present. The respondents were first asked whether they had seen all of the five songs and if they claimed that they had not, the song clips were shown to them before the commencement of the interview. These texts and questions pertaining to their engagement with these texts, served as the starting point in the attempt to draw out the participants and enable a free-flowing discussion about romance, love, its 'failure,' films, morality, modernity, marriage and many other subthemes. While some of the interviews did start with the participants seeming slightly uncomfortable and formal, most of them turned into casual yet introspective discussions about the

themes mentioned above. In a few cases, the interviews started with the participants referring to the interviewer as *neenga* (a respectful form of the word ‘you’) and moving on to the use of the word *nee* (a casual form of the word ‘you’). Often, respondents (both male and female) used the words *namma ellam* (we all/us) while speaking about concerns that could be generalised to young people in Tamilnadu. Also, while discussing basic biographic details with the participants before the commencement of the interview, I offered details about my educational and social background. The participants seemed at ease at being told that I was a Tamilian and that I had done all my schooling in Tamilnadu. Some of them even declared that they were initially worried about speaking to someone who had come from Mumbai, as they were not sure whether the person would understand what they were really trying to say and whether they could be ‘open’ with them. Some of the male respondents noted that their responses to questions pertaining to ‘love failure’ would have been vastly different, had the interviewer been a female. A few of the female participants also invoked phrases like *pasanga neenga ellam* (all you boys) while generalising about young men in Tamilnadu, thereby positioning me as a part of ‘the collective’ whose characteristics were being discussed. During the closing stages of the interviews, numerous participants remarked about how they had never been asked some of these questions ever before and how the interview had helped them understand what they thought about certain aspects of romantic love and its role in their own lives. This helped me to reflect on the lacunae that exists both in terms of theorising romantic love and audiences’ engagement with texts such as film songs.

### **Constraints and limitations**

The attempt to make meaning of ‘love failure’ through the Tamil film song was likely to have been bolstered by interactions with the producers of the texts i.e., the music composers and the lyricists of the songs selected. However, the same was not possible, as I did not have access to the aforementioned professionals and could not manage to establish connections during the course of my fieldwork in Chennai. Also, along with in-depth interviews, I would have liked to carry out participant observation in colleges, bus stands and other such student-dominated spaces inhabited by the ‘target audiences.’ But given that my data collection work was undertaken in Chennai in May 2013 when most colleges are shut for summer, participant observation was not a viable option. In addition, I anticipated and encountered issues with respect to access to female respondents, considering the intimate nature of the topics (love, marriage, etc) that I wanted to discuss with them. I would have, for instance, liked to interview more females from other social backgrounds and at least a few disabled people. This would have endowed more rigour to the reading of audiences’ meaning-making processes and would have possibly brought forth more location-specific concerns.

## CHAPTER 2: SEASONS OF ‘LOVE FAILURE’

In the Tamil cinematic universe, there have been numerous examples of men and women protagonists singing songs on screen that can be viewed as articulations of suffering as a result of difficulties in love. Men, however, appear to dominate the landscape when it comes to singing about ‘failed’ or spurned love. Going under the collective term of ‘love failure,’ this can refer to a multitude of scenarios ranging from the woman refusing to entertain even the possibility of courtship despite the man’s insistence, to the woman deciding or being compelled to decide in favour of leaving the man for someone else. These kinds of ‘failures’ in love seem to be a long-standing preoccupation in Tamil cinematic texts, with the form metamorphosing as times change. Reading the male protagonists’ laments about ‘failed’ love in the Tamil film song helps map its textuality over the years to situate a commentary on Tamil cinema and Tamil society. Vasudevan (2010), while talking about the documentary titled ‘When Four Friends Meet’ made by Rahul Roy, notes how men have become ‘objects of enquiry’ from simply being ‘figures to identify with.’ He then goes to state that this ‘enables us to reflect on the sources and problems posed to masculinity in the contemporary epoch’ and allows for ‘a bridge to open out the status of fiction and performance in the rendering of experience.’ Songs of ‘failed’ love sung by male protagonists, in their various forms, can then be read to serve as a handle for such enquiries, with filmic texts squarely positioned to imply the male lover’s anxieties and the stock methods deployed to assuage them. However, in order to meaningfully construct the idea of ‘love failure’ that one sees in *Why This Kolaveri* and the other songs selected for this analysis, it is important that the various expressions of rejected or spurned love in Tamil film songs over the years be identified and analysed.

One of the earliest songs to directly address this idea of ‘failure’ in love is *Kaadhalile Tholvi* (Defeat in love) from the film *Kalyana Parisu* (C.V. Sridhar 1959). *Kalyana Parisu* (Wedding gift) starred Gemini Ganesan, Saroja Devi and Vijaykumari, and was the directorial debut of C V Sridhar, who went on direct over 60 films in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. Gemini Ganesan, the male protagonist, was one of the rising stars in the Tamil film industry at that point of time and had begun to carve a niche for himself as the quintessential soft, romantic hero. Even today, fans refer to him as ‘*Kaadhal Mannan*’ or the ‘King of Romance.’ While referring to the songs of *Kalyana Parisu*, Baskaran (1996) states that they were ‘stupendous hits,’ and claims that the film owed its ‘phenomenal’ success to ‘music composed by A M Raja, who was at his peak as a playback singer’ then. The lyrics were penned by Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram, who later went on to write some of most popular songs of the actor-turned-politician M G Ramachandran.

In the song *Kaadhalile Tholvi* (Defeat in love), which appears at the end of the film, Baskar, the character played by Gemini Ganesan, is seen walking away after handing over his child to his ex-

lover Vasanthi, played by Saroja Devi. Vasanthi is in wedding finery, as she has married another man under pressing circumstances. Baskar, while walking away into the horizon marked by a setting sun, sings the lines ‘*Kaadhalilae tholviyutraan kaalaiyoruvan, Kadadtha pinnae amaidhi engu peruvaan*’ (A man has been defeated in love, Where will he find his peace now?). Here, it must be stated that the film also has a female version of the same song, sung by Vasanthi earlier in the film, when she puts aside her love for Baskar so that her elder sister can marry him. In the case of this film, the situations that allow for the use of a song about defeat in love, speak volumes about the social circumstances seen as legitimate occasions to evoke such songs of lament. Love *had* to be eternal and it was only circumstances that could drive a wedge between lovers. But as the lines of the song suggests, defeat in love is also considered eternal and can apparently not be undone by time.

The theme of lovers being separated due to circumstances, and not choice, continues in the film *Kalathur Kannamma* (A. Bhimsingh 1960), starring Gemini Ganesan, Savitri and Kamal Haasan in his debut role as an orphaned child. *Kalathur Kannamma* (Kannamma from Kalathur) is usually remembered for the song *Ammavum Neeeye, Appavum Neeeye* (You are the mother, you are the father), a prayer song sung by the young orphan Selvam, played by actor Kamal Haasan. But the film also features one of the early instances of a now-typical situation while discussing songs of spurned or failed love, i.e., the male lover singing in a drunken stupor about the pain caused due to the act of falling in love. In the song *Arugil Vandaal* (Near me, she came), Raja, the character played by Gemini Ganesan, can be seen swilling wine and lamenting about what love has done to him. He sings the lines ‘*Idhayam yenbadhu oru veedu, Andrum indrum aval veedu, Adhu maalgai aanadhum avalaale, verum man medaanathum avalaale*’ (The heart is a house/Earlier and even now, it is her house/It became a palace, thanks to her/Then it became rubble, thanks to her), as he staggers around in a balcony, all alone and teary-eyed. In the film, the song appears at a juncture when Raja cannot find his lady love Kannamma, played by Savitri, after coming back from a stint abroad. He sees it as abandonment, rather than a rejection of his affection. Nonetheless, he holds her responsible for the rise and fall of their love, a position that then begins to get repeated over the years, in such songs in Tamil cinema. The song *Arugil Vandaal* was written by Kannadasan, a Sahitya Akademi award winner and one of the most prolific lyricists of that era.

Given that circumstantial separation was the invariable cause of agony within the films’ plots to enable the male protagonist to sing songs of ‘failed’ love, the songs began to mutate and assume other forms. In *Kulamagal Radhai* (Chaste woman Radha; 1963) directed by A P Nagarajan, the character played by actor Sivaji Ganesan, considered to be ‘the Marlon Brando of south India’s film industry’ (Los Angeles Times 2001), sings the popular song *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai* (You are not to be blamed). It starts off with a soliloquy where he accuses Radha, the female protagonist played by Saroja Devi, of leading him on by telling him that she loved him and then, cheating him by marrying someone else. In the chunk of dialogue that precedes the song, he even calls her ‘*kalnenjukaari*’

(stone-hearted woman) as he walks up what appears to be a small path to the peak of a hillock. As he stands on the summit, he looks at the sky and screams Radha's name, only to have his wails countered by thunder and lightning. He then breaks into song and sings the lines '*Unnai solli kutramillai, Ennai solli kutramillai, Kaalam seidha kolamadi, Kadavul seidha kutramadi*' (It isn't your fault/It isn't my fault/It is the design of time/It is god's fault). This idea of absolving the woman of blame in causing 'failure' in love and squaring it instead on fate/god, however, is not one that finds traction over time in Tamil cinema. Interestingly, this song blaming 'god' for 'failed' love was written by Kannadasan, who started off as a staunch atheist and eventually, embraced Hinduism. This is notable, given that the rise of the atheism-promoting Tamil nationalist political outfit Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was already underway and the hold of the party over cinema in Tamilnadu was only getting stronger. Kannadasan, however, continued to pen the lyrics for a number of films featuring or made by DMK sympathisers due to the sheer 'popularity of his songs' (Hardgrave 1973).

For instance, the song *Kadavul Manidhanaaga Pirakkavendum* (God should take birth as a man) from the film *Vanambadi* (Skylark; G.R. Nathan 1963), written by Kannadasan again, almost seems to take off from where *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai* ends. The song features the actor S S Rajendran standing near an idol in what appears to be the ruins of a temple, singing the lines '*Kadavul manithanaga pirakkavendum, Avan kaadhalithu vedhanayil vaadavendum, Pirivennum kadalilile moozhgavendum, Avan pennenal ennavenru unaravendum.*' (God should take birth as a man/He should fall in love and rot in anguish/He should drown in the sea that separation is/He should understand what a woman is). From blaming god/fate/time (and not the woman) for causing the separation between lovers, the articulation becomes bitterer in form and calls for god to go through the same pain. It is noteworthy that such railing against god is done through the character played by S S Rajendran, who was at that time a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Tamilnadu as a DMK candidate (Election Commission of India 1962). Further, the anger which truly characterises the song *Kadavul Manidhanaaga Pirakkavendum* begins to resurface periodically in other songs of spurned or unrequited love, which marks a significant shift from the form of lament that earlier songs typically exemplified.

However, the tone and manner of the song also varied with the personality of the characters in the film and more importantly, with the perceived 'image' of the male star of the film. For instance, a year after the release of *Vanambadi* (1963), yet another pathos-filled song *Pallaku Vaanga Ponan* (I went to buy a palanquin), written by Kannadasan, began to gain popularity. The song appeared in the film *Pannakara Kudumbam* (T.R. Ramanna 1964), which starred actor Saroja Devi and the actor-turned politician M G Ramachandran (usually referred to as MGR). Saroja Devi and MGR acted in 27 films as the lead pair, second only to the Jayalalitha – MGR combination (Ashokan 2009). In the film *Pannakara Kudumbam* (Rich family), Nalla Thambi, the character played by MGR, is asked to stay away from Rani, played by Saroja Devi, by her father, as he does not want their love to result in

marriage. Dejected, Nalla Thambi wanders the streets alone singing the song *Pallaku Vaanga Ponon* (I went to buy a palanquin). With tears in his eyes, he rests against a lamp post on the street and sings his sorrows, as a wedding procession passes by. At one point in the song, he sings the lines ‘*Kaadhalukkae vaazhndhirundhaen karpanai illai, Kalyaanam kolvadhu mattum en vasamillai*’ (I lived for love, it wasn’t imaginary/But I am not fortunate enough to get married). To see MGR defeated in love was not something that Tamil audiences were accustomed to. As Sara Dickey (2008) argues, ‘MGR came to specialise in broadly two kinds of film roles: the under-dog, a rickshaw driver, farmer, or cowherd who overcomes oppression; and the ruler, warrior, or public servant who fights righteously for the downtrodden.’ The casting against type, therefore, can be read as adding to the song’s allure and enabling even more powerful deployment of the pathos associated with ‘failed’ love, using MGR’s iconic status as a powerful frame of reference to showcase what ‘failure’ in love can do even to a ‘great’ man. It is also important to note that, after *Pallaku Vaanga Ponon*, there were no prominent songs of spurned or ‘failed’ love featuring MGR. As his political ambitions solidified and his place in the Tamil politics became entrenched, the ‘virile fighter’ had turned into a ‘nurturing caretaker’ (Dickey 2008), leaving no space or scope for ‘failure’ in love.

Lovesickness had, meanwhile, become the domain of choice for Sivaji Ganesan, who was MGR’s contemporary and was considered to be more of an ‘actor’ compared to the ‘star’ that MGR was. In fact, one of the most popular songs of spurned or ‘failed’ love in the history of Tamil cinema was picturised on Sivaji Ganesan. The song was *Yaarukaaga* (For whom?) from the film *Vasantha Maligai* (K.S. Prakash Rao 1972). Originally made in Telugu in 1971 as *Prem Nagar, Vasantha Maligai* (Spring Palace) was a blockbuster success at the time of its theatrical release and a digitally-restored version of the film was even re-released in March 2013 (Naig 2013). The song *Yaarukaaga* (For whom?) was considered to be one of the highlights of the film and featured a drunk Anand, played by Sivaji Ganesan, ruing the ‘failure’ of his love, while staring at a giant portrait of his lady love in the dream house that he builds for the both of them. It is a stormy night and the song is intercut with visuals of the weeping bride Latha, played by Vanisri, travelling in a car. Anand, meanwhile, sings the lines ‘*Kanngal theettum kaadhal enbadhu, Adhu kannil neerai varavalaippadhu, Penngal kaattum anbu enbadhu, Nammai pithanaakki alaiya vaippadhu*’ (Love that brims up to one’s eyes/Is love that induces tears/The love that women show/Makes us roam around like madmen). In *Yaarukaaga*, as it is with the songs mentioned earlier, love is often painted as ‘torturous’ or as something that eventually descends to become a form of illness that causes tremendous misery and is incredibly painful. Couched in lament and anger, these songs also seem to function as warnings for those who are not in love yet. When seen against the suggestion made by Dickey (1993) that Tamil movies’ emphasis on romance contributes to a reduction of anxiety in young people about love and relationships, the reading of these songs as flags of imminent misery seems to acquire further validity.

Later in the same decade, another song featuring an angry male lover became a youth anthem of sorts. The song was titled *Ennadi Meenatchi* (What is this, Meenakshi?) and appeared in the film *Ilamai Oonjal Aadikirathu* (C.V. Sridhar 1978). *Ilamai Oonjal Aadikirathu* (Swinging youth) featured the two of the most popular stars of the next generation of actors, Kamal Haasan and Rajnikanth. The female leads were Sripriya and Jayachitra, both upcoming actresses at that point of time. The song *Ennadi Meenatchi* was picturised as a stage performance where Prabhu, the character played by Kamal Haasan, sings as his lover Padma, played by Sripriya, sits in the audience with Murali, played by Rajnikanth. Prabhu is angry at the sight of his lover Padma sitting with another man and breaks into a song where he seems to question her commitment, dancing wildly as he does so. Prabhu's anger is palpable and so is Padma's discomfort. In a song punctuated by trumpet sections, Prabhu's resentment comes out powerfully, especially in the lines '*Intha pirivai thaangumo enmam, Oru noolil adugindra unjal ponrathadi naalum maarugindra un manam, Enaku indru purithathu, Eval endru therinthathu, hey!*' (Will my heart survive this separation/You change your mind like it's a swing on a thin thread/I've understood today/I know what you're made of now). The song *Ennadi Meenatchi* functions differently as compared to the songs discussed so far, in the sense that it is a song of a jilted lover which plays out in front of an audience that includes the woman in question. The camera seems to look down upon Padma's discomfort and positions the audience squarely on the side of Prabhu. The rage is unbridled, with the envelope being pushed further than ever before on that front as the song progresses. Incidentally, the film featuring *Ennadi Meenatchi* was directed by the same C V Sridhar who directed the film *Kalyana Parisu*, discussed earlier in this chapter. Also, the song *Ennadi Meenatchi* ushers in new faces into the oeuvre of songs sung by spurned or 'failed' male lovers in the form of the lyricist Vaali and music director Ilaiyaraaja, who then go on to dominate the Tamil film music scene through most of the next decade.

But amidst such specialized songwriters and music composers emerged T Rajendar, a young actor-director who wrote his own songs, composed the music and cast himself as the male protagonist in his films. In the 1980s, he positioned himself as the quintessential young Tamil man from a small town, characterized by a deep commitment to family and a perpetual struggle with unrequited or 'impossible' love. This 'failure' in love was then articulated through songs with simple rhythm patterns and accessible Tamil lyrics written invariably in rhyme. One of the most popular songs of 'failed' love in T Rajendar's filmography is the song *Ada Ponnaana Manase* (Oh! Golden heart) from the film *Mythili Ennai Kaadhali* (Love Me, Mythili; T. Rajendar 1986). Sung by the director himself, the song features a dejected Manickam, played by T Rajendar, walking around reminiscing about his childhood sweetheart. This song itself serves as a warning to the heart, asking it not to desire or love a woman. He sings the lines '*Palanaalaa pazagiruppaa, Adhil payanedhum illayappaa, Poovapola pesi chirippaa, Andha pechiledhaan artham illappaa, Adha kaadhalunnu nenakaadhe, Neeyum kaanal neerum aagaadha*' (She would've known you for a long/That doesn't count towards anything/She

would've chatted you up and smiled like a flower/That doesn't mean anything/Don't think that it's love/Don't become the water in a mirage). The song of 'failed' love as warning to other 'easily-fooled' young men begins to reappear as a premise here. The woman, seen as the object of affection, is repeatedly portrayed as fickle-minded and insensitive, while the young Tamil man vying for her affections is positioned as someone who is easily taken in by her 'smooth' charms and therefore, needs to be warned of the impending heartbreak that typically follows. Žižek (1989: 165), while speaking about the British psychological thriller film 'The Crying Game,' says 'what we have here is an "impossible" love which will never be consummated, which can be realized only as a feigned spectacle intended to fascinate the gaze of the spectators present, or as an endlessly postponed expectation ....' This appears to be true of many of the plots of the films discussed insofar. The songs, then, serve as the ultimate articulation of the disappointment that arises from the love being 'impossible' and that articulation is routinely put forth by the young Tamil man who is seemingly caught in this inescapable bind of 'having' to initiate courtship and love, but seldom 'succeeding' at it.

In addition, the songs become even more important as each of them appear to offer theses to explain this 'impossibility' of love, which is a staple thematic concern in Tamil cinema. For instance, one of the most popular songs of spurned love in the year after the release of *Mythili Ennai Kaadhali* (1986) was *Kaadhal Kayangale* (Wounds of love) from the film *Aangalai Nambathey* (K. Alex Pandian 1987). The film *Aangalai Nambathey* (Don't trust men) starred actors Pandian and Rekha, and had music composed by Devendhiran. The song *Kaadhal Kayangale* was considered to be the highlight of the film, and featured Pandian and the director of the film K Alex Pandian in a bar singing about the wounds of love. Alex Pandian sings the song as advice to his friend Pandian, whose 'failed' love story appears as a montage as the song plays. The montage starts off with Pandian's character falling in love with the character played by Rekha, who happens to be an office colleague. It then goes on to quickly apprise the viewer as to how Pandian's gang of male friends help him woo her, how she becomes close to him and how she ultimately rejects him. At this point in the song, Alex Pandian's character mouths the lines '*Penmai pollaadhadhu, Nermai illaadhadhu, Unmai theriyadha manidha un manam yenguthu*' (Womenfolk are notorious/They are not honest/Your heart doesn't know this truth and is suffering). He then follows this up with the lines '*Unmai kaadhal endru inge ondrum illai, Neeyum kaadhal kola vera penn a illai*' (There is no such thing as true love/There are other women you can fall in love with). The suffering lover, played by Pandian, watches motionless as his friend dances around him in a drunken stupor and has this expression of sagely wisdom on his face. Once again, the stock dramatic setup of the 'naive' man who learns about the 'disingenuous' woman's charms too late, repeats itself here, with a couple of differences that then begin to reappear as elements in the songs of spurned or 'failed' love that appear later. Firstly, the presence of the male friend is something that is absent in the songs discussed so far in this chapter. Most of the songs discussed earlier feature the male protagonist alone and have the woman appear in a flashback and/or montage, attempting to

showcase both melancholy and loneliness. However, the song *Kaadhal Kayangale* is picturised in what appears to be a crowded multi-level bar and in its picturisation, transforms the act of agonizing over ‘failed’ love from a private moment to a shared ‘act,’ which involves both the drunk, supportive friend and the anguished male protagonist. Additionally, *Kaadhal Kayangale* departs from the pattern of the male protagonist singing the song as way of articulating his anger and/or sadness. The song, except for a couple of lines in between, is sung entirely by the protagonist’s male friend. Consequently, the song employs a mode of address that is similar to T Rajendar’s song *Ada Ponnaana Manase*. These two songs are important milestones in the arc of time traversed so far in the analysis of songs of spurned or ‘failed’ love as they appear to be directly talking to a Tamil male youth spectatorship, a constituency whose dominance in terms of movie watching in theatres in Tamilnadu assumes greater strength as the 1980s wane away. In Tamil cinema’s conceptualisation, they were the ‘mass,’ the ones for whom such films were made and the ones who *actually* watched these films in the theatres, within the first two weeks of the release of the film. As Nagesh (2013) suggests, they were ‘characterised by their anonymity and the weight of their sheer number’ and were ‘assumed to be a free-riding burden on the state and, in turn, the taxpaying middle class.’ In making no bones about the nature of their imagined audiences, the songs *Kaadhal Kayangale* and *Ada Ponnaana Manase* pave the way for the future, solidifying ideas of the ‘mass’ as they were and allowing for the redeployment of the ‘failed’ male lover as emerging from that ‘mass,’ thereby shutting out the possibilities of the female protagonists’ articulations and/or responses concerning ‘failed’ love within the narrative of the film. Patriarchal modes, therefore, beget repetition as spaces for female desire and subsequently, ruptures in such desires become practically non-existent within the Tamil filmic convention.

In the years that followed, a number of songs featuring the spurned male lover or the lover who had ‘lost’ in love and could not extricate himself out of that loss began to be produced. They continued to oscillate around the *Kaadhal Kayangale* formula of placing the male protagonist in a bar, the ultimate den of vice and masculine indulgence, brooding over the ‘failure’ of his love. One such song, which appeared a year after *Kaadhal Kayangale*, was *Naan Kandathu Poi Naadagam* (I have witnessed a fake drama) from the film *Paravaigal Palavitham* (Birds are of many kinds; Rajasekhar and Robert 1988). The film featured young actors Ramki and Nirosha as the male and female leads, who were not ‘known’ faces at that point of time. However, the song *Naan Kandathu Poi Naadagam* became rather popular and featured an anguished Ramki singing about how he had fallen for the lie that love was. He sings and dances in a bar, with a bevy of female background dancers performing along with him. Through the course of the song, there are token shots of him downing a drink and lighting a cigarette, almost hinting that these are the ‘natural’ last resorts of men who have ‘failed’ in love. Keeping in sync with the editing patterns of films at that point of time, such shots are intercut with shots of female background dancers performing a quick flash of dance steps. Also, Ramki’s performative mode in the song is reminiscent of Kamal Haasan’s run in the song *Ennadi Meenatchi*, discussed

earlier in this chapter. Both songs feature the male protagonists dressed in white, singing songs while actors pretend to play Western musical instruments such as keyboards and drums in the background. Both songs start with the male protagonist holding a trumpet, an image that allows for the reading of the song's agenda as that of an announcement. In both cases, the songs segue into the male protagonist's memory of better times in love, during which the female lead is visualized through the eyes of the pained male lover. In *Naan Kandathu Poi Naadagam*, for instance, Ramki weeps as he sings the lines '*Manam maariye aval ennai meerinaal, Malar maalaiyai indru yaar soodinaar, Yen yen ilamaiyum thee aanadhu, Yen yen kanavugal veen aanadhu*' (She changed her mind and left me behind/Who has garlanded her today?/Why! Why! Why! Why has my youth been set on fire?/Why! Why! Why have my dreams been shattered?).

Once again, the source of sorrow for the male lover seems to stem from the woman changing her mind. In the eyes of the male protagonists of such songs, love, it would appear, is forever and immortal, and that it is women who upset the apple cart by deciding to move away. This sort of articulation paves the way for more incisive reading of the anxieties of such male protagonists about the role of women and love, as it is a considerable change from the earlier mode where a split between lovers could only be engineered by circumstances, and never be willed by the woman, a reflection of the times within which those filmic texts were produced. The change begins to take shape with *Ennadi Meenatchi* from the film *Ilamai Oonjal Aadikirathu* (1978) and starts contorting in various ways over the years. Ramki's performance in the song *Naan Kandathu Poi Naadagam* is of import in this process of contortion, as it clearly marks the male character's anguish as 'personal,' staying clear of the mode where the song serves as a warning and operating at the level of the individual. Additionally, by allowing for a 'dream' sequence where Ramki and the female protagonist Nirosha are seen dancing in the middle of this song of lament, the male character begins to demonstrate a certain 'lovesickness' in which love can neither be made possible nor can it be completely excised.

The 'failed' lover here, apart from being 'lovesick,' also sees himself as the 'loser,' given that his attempts at courtship and love for the woman did not culminate in marriage. In *Naan Kandathu Poi Naadagam*, Ramki sings the lines '*Malar maalai indru yaar soodinaar*' (Who has garlanded her today?), where he is seen collapsed on a staircase with tears in his eyes. Here, the 'loser' connotation becomes stronger, with the male protagonist being framed as having participated in the 'game' of love and 'defeated' by another man when it came to the final test, i.e., marriage. As Badiou and Truong (2009) suggest, 'marriage is thus conceived not as a strengthening of the social bond against the perils of wayward love, but as the institution that channels genuine love towards its fundamental destination.' MGR's character in the song *Pallaku Vaanga Ponan* from the film *Pannakara Kudumbam* (1964), discussed earlier in this chapter, is another example to this mould, where the male lover sees him as having 'failed' beyond doubt as his lover has gone on to marry another man. The

song *Pallaku Vaanga Ponan*, for instance, is loaded with metaphors about how the male lover, played by MGR, is not ‘fortunate’ enough to get married to the woman he loved. But the key difference between the position held by MGR’s character and Ramki’s character is that the former blames himself for the separation, while the latter is certain that the woman is to be blamed for his ‘loss.’ This, then, becomes one of the key attributes of the ‘lovesick loser’ mode of male protagonists in Tamil cinema and morphs into a few specific articulations of this position in the coming decade.

A key example of this form of ‘lovesickness’ is exemplified in the song *Yaarodu Yaar Endra Kelvi* (The question of who will be coupled with whom) from the film *Idhaya Thamarai* (K. Rajeshwar 1990). *Idhaya Thamarai* (Lotus heart) had music composed by the duo Sankar – Ganesh and the songs were written by Vairamuthu, who holds the record for winning the maximum number of National Film Awards for Best Lyrics (TNN 2013). The song features actors Karthik and Revathi and is picturised besides a hotel swimming pool in the evening. Vijay, the character played by Karthik, sings a song of ‘failed’ love as female background dancers clad in white pirouette and glide around him. Manju, the character played by Revathi, is pained as she hears Vijay’s anguish being evinced through the song. It starts with the lines ‘*Yaaroda yaaru endra kelvi, Vidhi vandhu vidai solluma, Kadal oda nadhi kooda kaayum, Yen kanneer kaayadhamma*’ (The question of who will be coupled with whom/Will fate answer this question?/The sea will dry up along with the river/But my tears will never dry up), thereby making its stance clear right at the onset that the ‘impossibility’ of their love will continue to affect the male lover disproportionately and forever. The song is intercut with visuals of Revathi’s character Manju cringing and tearing up, as the jilted male lover accuses her of setting fire to his heart. With tears in his eyes and the camera looking down upon him, the song frames the male protagonist as the one who has been abandoned. The song, in fact, starts with a shot of Manju being accosted by her husband, a well-heeled man, as Vijay, her lover, watches on. Here, another key aspect of the ‘lovesick loser’ becomes evident, i.e., the male lover’s tendency to attribute his lady love’s decision to marry someone else as stemming from the other man’s sound economic and social status. The song hints at this through the lines ‘*Nizhal thedi vandai, Nijam aaginal, Nijam vandha neram, Nizhal aaginaal, Kannoda sethey, Kanavaaga aanal*’ (She came in search of a shadow/She became real/When reality struck/She became a shadow/Like my eyes, she also became a dream). This line of reasoning i.e., women will always leave men when they find a ‘better’ man, begins to reappear almost as a steady feature of songs showcasing male protagonists cast in the mould of a ‘lovesick loser.’ Consequently, these songs tend to frame the ‘lovesick loser’ as the one to be pitied, for he seems to continue to be ‘lovesick’ *despite* the perceived cold-heartedness of the woman in question. Such a setup then allows for the plot of these films to fold in neatly, with the woman realising her ‘folly’ or being forced by circumstances to see how ‘wrong’ she was, leading to the production of the ‘original’ couple by the end of the film. Films featuring the songs showcasing the male protagonist in the ‘lovesick loser’ mode are, therefore, seldom about rediscovering love with other people and

instead, are usually about the victory of ‘true’ love, which the ‘lovesick loser’ alone can seemingly provide and/or demonstrate.

Another dimension in the oeuvre of songs featuring a spurned or ‘failed’ male lover can be read in the track *Idhayame Idhayame* (Oh, heart! Oh, heart!) from the film *Idhayam* (Kathir 1991). Starring actors Murali and Heera, *Idhayam* (Heart) continues to be one of most popular examples of films dealing with the young Tamil male from a rural background struggling with courtly love and its ‘impossibility.’ With music by Ilaiyaraaja and lyrics by Vaali and Piraisoodan, *Idhayam* is the story of a college student who falls in love with his classmate and struggles to express his love until it is too late. Murali, the male protagonist in an eponymous role, comes to the city from his village to pursue his graduation in medical sciences and Geetha, played by Heera, is an affluent girl from the city. Infatuated with her charms and intimidated by her sophistication, he grapples with his inability to express his love to her and sings the song *Idhayame Idhayame*. Unlike most of the songs discussed earlier in this chapter, *Idhayame Idhayame* is a song of pain at not being able to express love, rather than being spurned or rejected. The fear of getting spurned is enough to paralyse Murali and he sings the lines ‘*Idhayamae idhayamae, Un mounam ennai kolludhey*’ (Oh, heart! Oh, heart!/ Your silence kills me).

But despite never having told the girl Geetha about his feelings, he slips into the mode of having ‘lost’ in love and sings the lines ‘*Idhu endhan vaazhvil nee poatta kolam, Kolam kalaindhadhae puthu sogham pirandhadhae, Nee illaadha vaazhvu ingu kaanaldhaan*’ (This is the design that you put on my life/The design has been disturbed and a new sorrow has appeared/A life without you will simply be a mirage). Murali walks in the rain and sings these lines with a sense of almost predestined ‘impossibility’ with respect to love. This line is picturised with visuals of the female lead’s face being reflected in a pond of water and the ripples in the water distorting the image of her, lending to the reading that the image of her is all that he ever had access to and even that is beyond his reach. The song serves as an important example in understanding what type of protagonists can be considered ‘lovesick losers’ and consequently, what constitutes ‘love failure.’ Even without being in consensual romantic relationship, the male protagonist in this case can be viewed in the mould of the ‘lovesick loser,’ as he blames her for the anguish that he goes through. He declares that his life would be a farce without her presence in it, presupposing a ‘failure’ in a love that is not even announced, let alone reciprocated. This is an essential dichotomy in the framing of male protagonists in the ‘lovesick loser’ mode and one that begets repetition in Tamil cinema, in the years that follow.

While *Idhayame Idhayame* emphasises the anguish of the painfully-shy male lover, the song *Kettale Oru Kelvi* (She asked me one question) from the film *Thai Maman* (Gurudhanapal 1994) showcases the anger and the incredulousness of the village-bred Tamil male who lacks formal education, upon

having his courtly advances rejected. The film had actors Sathyaraj and Meena playing male and female lead respectively, with comedian Goundamani portraying the role of the sidekick or the hero's male companion. In *Thai Maman* (Maternal Uncle), Rasappan, played by Sathyaraj, is an affluent-but-unemployed wastrel who wants to marry his elder sister's daughter Meena, played by the actor of the same name, who happens to be a college graduate. She rejects him, asking for his educational qualifications and it is at this juncture that the song *Kettale Oru Kelvi* appears. Picturised in a village bar, the song features Rasappan and his uncle, played by Goundamani, singing in an anger-fuelled drunken stupor and dancing with the other patrons of the bar. A girl from the nearby food stall joins them in their bawdy dancing, as Rasappan gives vent to his anger and boasts about his masculinity. He sings the lines '*Kaalai maatu ku kaambu edhaku, Kanni kazhikka padippu edhaku, Singham nadakka seruppu edhaku, Selai thoda thaan padippu edhaku*' (Why does the bull need an udder?/Why does one need an education to take away virginity?/Why does the lion need slippers to walk?/Why does one need to be educated to touch a sari?). But when his uncle persuades him to go after other women, Rasappan sings about how he has desired Meena since his adolescent days and how, despite other women throwing themselves at him, he has always had eyes only for Meena.

This is yet another dimension of 'lovesickness,' one that is equal parts archaic and obscene. Rasappan's understanding of marriage as merely *kanni kazhikkardu* (taking away virginity), his incredulousness at being rejected on the basis of lack of education, and his subsequent expression of 'true' love towards Meena as having blossomed from 'puppy' love, in many ways, serves as a manifesto for some of the views held by the 'lovesick loser.' He feels entitled to courtly love and expects it to culminate in marriage without fail. Any rupture in this plan is blamed on the woman's obscene expectations, indecisiveness and/or cunning, which prompts him to 'sing' his pain and/or anger about the 'failure' of his love and how he loves her *despite* her supposedly fetid ways. Such songs almost never feature a rebuttal or a rejoinder to the male lover's charges, given Tamil cinema's observed propensity to hurtle further and further towards filmic texts for men, by men. This characterisation acquires another lineament when seen against the arguments made by Srinivas (2010a) about how 'for film business insiders the "ladies audience" is an important market segment' with films finding favour amongst female audiences imagined as 'having higher rates of success and greater staying power at the box-office,' and how this definition of a 'ladies audience' privileges 'middle class women who are the sought-after demographic.' But Athique (2011) contends:

While the terms of the public debate on the cinema were determined by a male, middle class and upper caste viewpoint, the development of this contest, in its ensuing stages, was to follow a pattern over the following decades where the cinema hall became increasingly dominated by the young men of India's urban underclass at the expense of the middle class spectator. (p.151)

Tamil cinema too, it would appear, has been no exception to this pattern and the ideology packaged in songs such as *Kettale Oru Kelvi* can therefore be read as producers' response to such patterns and their imagination of audiences in such terms. By the time the film *Thai Maman* (1994) featuring the song *Kettale Oru Kelvi* had released, the nature of outlets available for the consumption of Tamil film songs had transformed rather drastically, when seen in comparison to those available to songs discussed earlier in this chapter. The television industry in India was subject to the policy of economic liberalisation in 1991 and had 'opened up' to transnational private entities such as Star TV and also, regional-level private networks such as the Sun Network. Sun TV, their flagship channel featuring Tamil content, began to become popular riding on film-based content and better production values than the state-run broadcaster Doordarshan. Up till 1990, Doordarshan was the undisputed ruler of television airwaves in India, with no competition in sight (Rajagopal 1996). While 48 million (39%) of India's 123 million television-owning households still watch only Doordarshan (Development Communication Division, Doordarshan 2013), Sun TV is no flyweight competitor. When launched in 1992, it was India's first fully privately owned Tamil television channel (Yesudhasan 2006) and continues to be the most watched channel in Tamilnadu. One of its most popular shows during that time was the long-running, dial-in music video programme *Pepsi Ungal Choice* (Pepsi Your Choice), which showcased newly-released Tamil film songs requested by viewers who called in to the show (McMillin 2007). The show's fame inspired other Tamil television channels to produce their own versions of 'call-in' music video programmes and this led to more music-based television programming organized thematically around viewer segments (songs from the black-and-white era in the early morning slot and 'sexy' songs around midnight). Eventually, Sun Network launched its twenty four-hour music programming television channel called Sun Music and this led to another round of replication of this move by competing networks such as Jaya TV and Raj TV. Hence, the avenues available for the screening of Tamil film songs expanded phenomenally in the period starting from 1992 and allowed for further circulation of these songs as independent artefacts excised from the context of the films that they were a part of. Routinely, the songs' popularity exceeded that of the film which featured it and as a result, the songs' deployment as a marketing tool came to be recognised as important for the film's performance at the box office. Furthermore, given that there were numerous twenty-four hour Tamil film music channels keen on such content, the cycle time for the circulation of these songs increased and played on these channels for months after the film featuring it had exited the theatres.

One of the songs of 'failed' love that received (and continues to) receive a vast amount of airplay on television is *Venmathi Venmathi* (Oh, white moon! Oh, white moon) from the film *Minnale* (Gautham Menon 2001). Starring Madhavan, Reema Sen and Abbas, *Minnale* (Oh, lightning!) marked the directorial debut of Gautham Menon and gained positive pre-release 'buzz,' thanks to the popularity of the soundtrack composed by Harris Jayaraj. The male lead, Madhavan, was fresh off the success of

his debut film *Alai Payuthey*, which was a romance drama directed by filmmaker Mani Ratnam. *Alai Payuthey* had carved a niche for Madhavan as a romantic young hero to watch out for and this ‘image,’ along with actor Vivek’s comedy portions, is said to have contributed to an increased interest around *Minnale*. Billed as a Valentine’s Day special, the film was released on the fourteenth of February in 2001. The songs of the film, however, were already quite popular by that time due to healthy audio cassette sales and considerable airplay on FM radio stations and television channels. While *Vaseegara* (Charmer), the sultry song of seduction written by lyricist Thamarai, was the pick of the album, *Venmathi Venmathi*, the song about ‘failed’ love written by Vaali, was also widely appreciated. Vaali, it must be mentioned, also wrote the lyrics for one of the earliest manifestations of the ‘lovesick loser’ mode i.e., the song *Ennadi Meenatchi* discussed earlier in this chapter.

*Venmathi Venmathi* features a teary-eyed Rajesh, played by Madhavan, drinking beer at a roadside eatery along with a bunch of young people and singing about how he will forget the woman he loved. Soon, he breaks into a dance and other youngsters join him, as his friend Chockalingam, played by Vivek, scolds Rajesh for making a fool of himself. He tries to drag away an unrelenting Rajesh, who sings the lines ‘*Unnaalae nenjil pootha kaadhal, Maelum maelum thunbam thunbam vendaam*’ (The love for you that bloomed in my heart/Brings me only more pain, and I don’t want the pain), pushes Chockalingam away and continues to dance. At one point in the song, he sits on the road and sings about the days he spent with his lady love. As he reminisces, the group of young men and women with whom he was dancing, park themselves in a circle around him and sway to the beat of the song. Swiftly, he segues from the ‘good’ times and sings the lines ‘*Oru nimisham kooda ennai piriyaavillai, Vivaram aethum aval ariyaavillai, Ennai iruntha pothum aval ennathillaiye, Maranthupo en maname*’ (We weren’t separated even for a minute/She didn’t know the details/She wasn’t mine even when she was/Forget it all, my heart!). There is a moment’s silence as Rajesh face falls in sadness and the group around him breaks into applause, with some of them giving him an encouraging pat on the shoulder. In the film, Rajesh tries to woo Reena, played by Reema Sen, impersonating the NRI (non-resident Indian) groom that her parents ‘arrange’ for her. So, when Rajesh sings about how she knew no details, he is referring to his act of impersonating the NRI groom to gain access to her and pleads with his heart to forget all of this, while noting that she never ‘belonged’ to him and that their love was always ‘impossible.’ But this assertion is marked by applause from the bystanders who seem to be appreciating his ‘true’ love and pitying him for the resultant heartache. This is another crucial dimension to the stance held by the ‘lovesick loser’ where he expects to be loved by the woman despite his misgivings and tries to evoke pity about his ‘sorry’ state. Never regretful of the actions that caused the ‘failure’ of love and always resentful of the ‘failure’ itself, the ‘lovesick loser’ pleads with his heart to move on but fails. In doing so, he once again seeks to establish the ‘eternal’ nature of his love and to strengthen that claim, positions the woman’s love as ‘transient.’ In doing so, he equates permanence with ‘real’ love (as ‘suffered’ by men) and impermanence with the indecisiveness and/or

wiliness of women. When the context does not permit such positioning, he paints falling in love itself as torturous and seeks to locate himself as suffering from an affliction where he can neither live with that sort of anguish nor live without it.

This form of commentary about love also finds flight in the song *Kanave Kalaigirathe* from the film *Azhagai Irukkirai Bayamai Irukkirathu* (Vijay Milton 2006). The film, starring young actors Bharath, Mallika Kapoor and Arun Vijay, dealt with the lives of two playful young lovers and their sacrifices. While the film did not do well at the box office, the songs of the film, composed by Yuvan Shankar Raja, were considered to be popular. Yuvan Shankar Raja happens to be the son of veteran music director Ilaiyaraaja, who composed the song *Ennadi Meenatchi* discussed earlier in this chapter. The film *Azhagai Irukkirai Bayamai Irukkirathu* (You're beautiful and that scares me) is said to have been inspired by 'Addicted to Love,' a 1997 Hollywood film belonging to the romantic comedy genre. It plays out with the lead pair, portrayed by Bharath and Mallika, trying to break up their respective former partners who are now a couple. Bharath's character succeeds in uniting Mallika's character with her lover, but in the process, he ends up falling in love with her. The song *Kanave Kalaigirathe* (Dreams are being shattered) then serves as his cry of anguish about how painful love can be. The song opens with Bharath lying face down in the sand near the woods and has him breaking into a dance along with a bunch of young men. Unlike *Venmathi Venmathi*, which is rooted in 'real' locations such as the street, *Kanave Kalaigirathe* is framed as a 'dream' song and the choreography, done in contemporary style, reflects the 'surreal.' Bharath has a pained expression on his face throughout the song and he dances with a vigour that appears to reflect his anger and sadness. At one point, he sings while standing on top of a car and jumps right where is standing, causing the rear windshield of the car to shatter into pieces. The shots of him dancing on top of the car are intercut with shots of him weeping alone, sitting inside the car, and banging the steering wheel with his bare hands. He sings the lines '*Ithu thaana kaadhal ithu thaana, Ver arundhe veesum puyal thaana, Ithu thaana kaadhal ithu thaana, Anu anuvai saagum vazhi thaana*' (Is this all what love is?/Is it just a storm that uproots?/Is this all what love is?/Is it just a way to die a slow death?). By this time, we see two Bharaths on screen – one is seen sliding along the door of the car and crying while the other looks at the weeping Bharath and continues to sing the song, furthering the 'surreal' visual mode. These visuals lead to a montage where Mallika's character Jo's wedding is being decided and she is seen chatting with her fiancé, as Bharath's character looks on. He even drives her family around as they shop for the wedding. At one point in the montage, she is seen on a chariot as her pre-wedding procession takes place and he weeps, his head rested on the boot of the car. Once again, the 'impossibility' of love and the 'surreal' effect of 'failure' in love comes to define the protagonist of this song as a 'lovesick loser.' He rues love itself and compares it to slow death, whose inevitability loads the metaphor with significance. For the 'lovesick loser,' love is but bound to 'fail' and the abandonment he sees after such 'failure' can seemingly only be delayed, but never denied.

## **‘Love failure’ as experienced by the ‘lovesick loser’ protagonist vis-à-vis the ‘failure’ of Devdas**

The genealogy of the ‘lovesick loser’ male protagonist would be incomplete without a clarification about his position vis-à-vis Devdas, one of the most famous ‘failed’ male lover characters to have appeared on the Indian cine screen. *Devdas*, the Sarat Chandra Chatterjee novel about the travails of romance in the life of a young Bengali Brahmin man of the same name, was published for the first time in 1917 and has since then been adapted for the screen numerous times, in various Indian languages over the years. In Tamil cinema, the character appeared for the first time in the film *Devadas* (Vedantam Raghavaiah 1953). Starring actors Akkineni Nageswara Rao, Savitri and S V Ranga Rao, the film was originally made in Telugu and subsequently dubbed into Tamil. Its music, composed by C R Subburaman and Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao, is said to have aided the blockbuster success of the film (Guy 2002). *Devadas* showcases the story of a young educated man who returns to his village after a long stint in London. In the village, Devadas, the eponymous character, meets his childhood sweetheart Parvathi and love blossoms. Soon, Parvathi’s family proposes marriage. This proposal is rejected by Devadas’ family because of their perception of their own ‘higher’ social status in terms of caste and class. Devadas’ father also warns his son to stay away from Parvathi. Under duress, the young man rejects Parvathi when she comes to him asking for his support in making their love ‘possible.’ Rejected by him, Parvathi goes on to marry another man. Meanwhile, Devadas realises that he is still in love with her and this realisation, along with the knowledge of the fact that she is married to another man, drives him towards alcoholism. He begins to spend most of his time with a courtesan named Chandramukhi, who then falls in love with him. As his condition becomes worse, he decides to meet Parvathi one last time, but dies before he meets her. In the film, Devadas, played by Nageswara Rao, sings the song *Ulage Maayam Vazhve Maayam* (The world’s an illusion, life’s an illusion) as he struggles to cope with his separation from Parvathi. The song, written by Udumalai Narayana Kavi, features Devadas sitting beside a dustbin on a deserted street and singing, as he pets a street dog. His eyes tired and sullen, he coughs and sings the lines ‘*Aavadhu poi aavadhu ellam aasaiyenaale*’ (Whatever becomes false becomes that, thanks to desire). Looking straight into the camera, he laughs knowingly and goes on to sing about how the comforts desired by people are an illusion. Steeped in disillusionment about the world at large and life in general, Devadas wallows in sorrow through the course of the song.

Almost thirty years later, a part of that song’s opening lines was repurposed as the title of the next Devdas film in Tamil. *Vazhve Maayam* (R. Krishnamoorthy 1982), starring actors Kamal Haasan, Sridevi and Sripriya, was loosely based on the novel *Devdas*, unlike the 1953 film featuring Nageswara Rao as Devadas. Incidentally, *Vazhve Maayam* (Life is an illusion) was itself a remake of a Telugu film titled *Premabhishekam* (Dasari Narayana Rao 1981), which was released one year earlier.

The Telugu version had actor Akkineni Nageswara Rao (the protagonist in the 1953 film *Devadas*), Sridevi and Jayasudha playing the lead roles. The Tamil version had actor Kamal Haasan play the role of Raja who leaves his lover Devi, played by Sridevi, when he is diagnosed with cancer. He tries to entice Devi into marrying someone else, without revealing his condition to her. Meanwhile, he begins to spend time with a prostitute, played by Sripriya, and ultimately, marries her, only to die soon after. The film was considered to be a success at the box office and is said to have completed 200-day runs in various theatres in Tamilnadu. The songs of the film, composed by Gangai Amaran (the younger brother of music director Ilaiyaraaja), were also regarded to be popular, especially the title track *Vazhve Maayam*. It was written by Vaali, who also wrote songs such as *Ennadi Meenatchi* and *Venmathi Venmathi* discussed earlier in this chapter. Through the course of the song, Kamal Haasan's character marries the prostitute and also, suffers in pain continuously, only to vomit blood at the end of it all. As he struggles to walk around the hall of his mansion, he sings the lines '*Yaarodu yaar vandhadhu, Naam pogumbodhu, Yaarodu yaar selvadhu*' (Who came along with whom? When we go, who goes along with whom?). This is intercut with visuals of Raja's parents and also, his lover Devi rushing in cars to come see him before it is too late.

Both songs discussed here feature male protagonists steeped in disappointment and singing about the farcical nature of the world. However, they do not fit into the mould of 'love failure' as constructed through the other songs discussed earlier in this chapter, due to a number of reasons. The songs of 'love failure' sung by male protagonists in the 'lovesick loser' mode can be seen as pivoted upon the idea of rejection (or the fear of it) by the woman he loves. *Devadas*, on the other hand, is the one who rejects his lady love and then goes on to rue about the vagaries of life that forced such a situation upon him. It is outside the realm of imagination for the 'lovesick loser' to reject the woman he loves, as his entire struggle is centred on cracking open the 'impossibility' of love that he finds himself resigned to, an end state that he sees as 'love failure.' Also, he blames the woman and/or the act of falling in love itself for the anguish that he goes through, a characteristic that is markedly missing in the songs featuring *Devdas* or *Devdas*-like characters. In addition, as far as the class and caste position of the characters are concerned, *Devdas* clearly belongs to upper echelons of those pyramids as they are imagined.

The 'lovesick loser,' on the other hand, often encounters his caste and class locations, and his often-unstated desire for 'upward' mobility from these locations as key impediments in 'realising' courtly love. They are routinely framed as the main causes for the 'impossibility' of his love, a feature that is particularly visible in a film like *Idhayam* (1991). There, the 'failure' of the male lover, a village-bred boy who comes to the city for education, seems to stem from his inability to articulate his feelings to the woman he loves, a city-bred girl of affluent means. The casting of Murali, a dark-skinned youngster who was the son of a Kannada film producer, as the reticent male protagonist, and Heera, a

model-turned-actor who had grown up in military conclaves, as the 'unattainable' woman only helped to further solidify readings of inequity between the protagonists. So, when Murali's character in the song *Idhayame Idhayame* sings the line '*Nee illaadha vaazhvu ingu kaanaldhaan*' (A life without you will simply be a mirage), he sings in dread and fear of never being able to 'attain' love rather than in disillusionment about the world as seen in the Devdas songs, *Ulage Maayam* and *Vazhve Maayam*. Therefore, the 'lovesick loser' mode can be as the 'true' carrier of the concept of 'love failure' as imagined by Tamil cinema and offers purchase of the various positions likely to be held by male protagonists with respect to courtship and love.

### CHAPTER 3: FEEDING ‘LOVE FAILURE’

Any attempt to read ‘love failure’ through Tamil film songs over the last few years is a particularly challenging proposition, given the reconfigured production practices of the Tamil film industry with respect to a few studios controlling distribution and exhibition, and the highly-fragmented, multi-modal consumption of the Tamil film content by audiences not just in Tamilnadu, but across the globe. Films’ revenue streams have diversified, with the number of screens multiplying, the number of theatres reducing, the windows for theatrical release-based monetisation shrinking and the pie for satellite telecast rights and music rights expanding. These changes in the ‘market,’ along with the gentrification of screening spaces, have altered the approaches embraced by Tamil cinema in relating to certain discourses in society and producing thematic explorations of them. As Krishnan (2008) argues, newer ‘protocols of authenticity’ dependent on ‘consensual notions of culture’ are being negotiated alongside the pressures of globalisation that compel cities like Chennai (the capital of Tamilnadu and the production hub of the Tamil film industry) to ‘to make the urban modern middle-upper class life normative if it is to join the global urban network.’ Tamil films are increasingly staged in the urban, and its attendant anxieties, mediations and contestations now form a critical part of the narrative in Tamil cinema. Young, new actors are called upon to articulate these anxieties and in them, the audience is encouraged to discover scope for reflection of their own realities. Unsurprisingly, this has only furthered Tamil cinema’s preoccupation with romance and love, given that the denomination of the major constituency for consumption of filmic texts in Tamilnadu still remains young and male. But what is interesting is that the construction of the ‘lovesick loser’ mode, with its accompanying positions pertaining to ‘love failure,’ appears to have acquired a greater frequency of recurrence, which is noteworthy given that this character’s views about love and/or the woman he loves are deeply problematic on many fronts. Such perceived recurrence was the nudge that called for a re-examination of songs of ‘failed’ love even more closely, as the film song, brief in its form and powerful in the possibilities that it affords, serves as a useful entry point to enable an analysis of the location of male protagonists ruing ‘love failure’. For this purpose of this study, five songs were selected from mainstream Tamil film soundtracks released within a time period of one year, i.e., from June 2011 to June 2012 for textual analysis. The songs serve to showcase the various articulations of ‘love failure’ as it may be constituted by Tamil cinema in that period.

Much like their counterparts in other film production hubs like Hyderabad and Mumbai, Tamil film producers tend to ensure that the films’ soundtracks are released more than a month before the theatrical release of the film itself to serve as publicity material, designed to garner a positive ‘buzz’ around the film and build anticipation about the film’s theatrical release. However, it must be noted that there has been a significant transformation in the intent and approach of film soundtrack releases

in the last few years. As Baskaran (1991) points out, in the early days of Tamil cinema, ‘film songs were composed with an eye on the gramophone market.’ He also states that the ‘songs usually lasted for three or four minutes, the duration of a 78 rpm disc,’ which he claims is ‘a practice that persists to this day’ (Baskaran 1991: 756) . While the duration of the songs has largely remained unchanged, music industries across the country transformed considerably with the advent of audio cassette technology. Manuel (1991) states that ‘by the mid-1980s, cassettes had come to account for 95 per cent of the recorded music market, with records being purchased only by wealthy audiophiles, radio stations and cassette tape pirates (who prefer using them as masters).’ Film songs were no exception and their producers swiftly shifted to audio cassette technology. Under such circumstances, the audio cassette, with its front cover featuring the lead actors’ faces, was the first point of contact with the audience for Tamil film producers and apart from promotional posters and billboards, remained the only point of contact until the theatrical release. With the advent of cable television in the 1990s, film songs began to be ‘seen’ and not just ‘heard’ in advance of the film’s theatrical release. Eventually, even the films’ soundtrack release events began to turn into television content. Over the last few years, however, a film’s audio release has come to involve a multi-modal ‘marketing’ mix that includes (but is not limited to) releasing compact discs with the film’s songs on it, making the songs available for streaming over the internet and download as ‘ringtones’ and ‘caller tunes’ and releasing ‘making-of’ videos and ‘teasers’ on video sharing websites such as YouTube, in addition to countless hours of advertising of song ‘promos’ on music and general entertainment television channels, and near-constant repetition by radio stations. In a marked departure from the cassette era, Tamil film producers now attempt to ‘engage’ the audiences continuously from the run-up from the film’s audio release to the theatrical release. The promotional activities in this time period are usually led by what is assumed to be the most ‘catchy’ song in the film, based on a supposition that the interest ‘generated’ by the song (along with the lead actor’s popularity) will lead to a greater ‘opening’ for the film on the day of its theatrical release and the weekend that typically follows it. Thus, ‘any encounter with a film is always pre-structured, given that people are never utterly empty-headed when watching it’ and ‘reliance on the film alone is misguided as an overestimation of the secondary discourses’ (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999, in Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008). All of the songs of ‘failed’ love selected for this analysis were songs that ‘led’ their film’s promotional efforts and enjoyed significant airplay on television channels and radio stations even before the theatrical release of the films that they were a part of, with some of them managing to stay on air and in circulation on the web even months after the films had moved out of the theatres.

The first song that was released within the timeframe of analysis was *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* (Love, my love) from the film *Mayakkam Enna* (Selvaraghavan 2011). *Mayakkam Enna* (What is this intoxication?) had actors Dhanush and Richa Gangopadhyay playing the lead roles. While the film was released in theatres in November 2011, the soundtrack of the film was released in September that

year. The songs were composed by G V Prakash, who happens to be music director A R Rahman's nephew, and the soundtrack was released under the audio label of Gemini Film Circuit, the presenters of the film. The lyrics of the songs were written by the director of the film, Selvaraghavan, and his younger brother Dhanush, who also played the role of Karthik, the aspiring wildlife photographer character around whose struggles the film revolves. The song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* appears at a point of time in the film when Karthik grapples with the confusion of trying to stay away from the girl Yamini (played by Richa), who is dating his best friend. She tells Karthik categorically that she is casually dating his best friend Sundar. But Karthik tells her that if something happened between them, it would count as him betraying his friend and with a disturbed look on his face, he even claims that he thinks of her as his sister. She responds with a slap across his face. By this time, Sundar, Karthik's best friend, has already joined the dancers in a 'tribal dance' program that is happening at a jungle resort they all stay in. The leader of the dance troupe then begins to sing the song about 'the pain of love' (announced through a voice-over in the background). Karthik is seething in anger at getting slapped and his eyes tear up. He downs the drink in his hand in one go. As the other guests at the resort watch on, Karthik joins his best friend and the 'tribal dance' group to sing the lines '*Adi da avala, Udha da avala, Vidra avala, Theveye illa*' (Hit her/Kick her/Leave her/No need of her). He dances wildly as the leader of the dance group looks on and the rest of the troupe, along with his best friend, continues to dance away beside the bonfires. These shots are intercut with visuals of Yamini looking on in shock. Meanwhile, Sundar rushes towards Yamini and tries to get cosy with her. Yamini tries to shrug him away. This transpires in front of Karthik, who looks at the two of them with sadness in his eyes and sings the lines '*Aaayiram sonniye, Kaadhu la vaangala, Soup-la thaenguren, Nenjuthaan thaangala*' (Thousands of times, you told me/But I didn't listen/In love failure, I remain/My heart can't take it anymore). It is instructive to examine the use of the word 'soup' here in the lyrics. The lead actor Dhanush, who also co-wrote this song, claimed in interviews with news media outlets that he had come up with the phrase 'soup song' to stand for 'a "love failure" song which a guy sings after getting dumped' (Malini 2011).

In the case of the song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal*, there appears to be no act of 'dumping' preceding the appearance of the song in the film. However, the 'impossibility' of Karthik's love for the woman who dates his best friend is reason enough for Karthik to sing the 'soup song.' In fact, in the run up to the song, there are enough scenes and situations in the film that point to Yamini's disinterest towards Sundar and her concern for Karthik. But Karthik continues to look at her as his friend Sundar's girlfriend and he frames that as him being 'rejected' or having 'failed' in love through the course of the song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal*. At one point during the song, he sings the lines '*Venaam da venaam indha kaadhal mogam, Ponnunga ellam nam vazhvin saabam, Pinnaadi poyi naan kandaen gnanam, Pattaachu saamy ennaku idhuve podhum*' (No need, brother, no need of this passion for love/Women are the bane of our existence/I learnt this by chasing them/I have suffered and god, I've had enough).

Soon after, he finds Yamini dancing with the women in the ‘tribal dance’ troupe and this leads to a three-way ‘dance-off’<sup>1</sup> of sorts between Yamini, Sundar and Karthik, from which the latter seems to emerge triumphant. But Karthik quickly slides back into his ‘lovesick loser’ mode and drinks away as he gets stuck between a drunken Sundar trying to get Yamini to dance. Sundar responds, in song, to Karthik’s retrospection about love, stating that the woman who left him would never prosper. Yamini, standing in between the both of them, walks off as she hears this. The song ends with Yamini, Sundar and Karthik heading towards a jetty near the resort, with the men very drunk and Yamini visibly upset. In an interesting transition shot from the song back to the narrative, a drunken Karthik takes a picture of himself with his camera, as a bewildered Yamini stares at him.

The song earned flak for its lyrics that, even when accounting for the ‘drunken’ mode in which it is staged, appears to espouse violence against women who ‘leave’ men. The film’s plot and eventual resolution being centred around how Yamini, who later marries Karthik, supports him through physical and mental abuse to help him realise his ambition of becoming a world-renowned wildlife photographer, only furthers such a reading. This is in line with Tamil cultural artefacts’ tendency to position the female protagonist as one who supports the man in all his struggles and puts up with all his abuse (physical, mental and even sexual) so as to ensure that he is ‘reformed’ (Lakshmi 2008). More than three months after the release of the film’s soundtrack, the song’s lyrics became the subject of a complaint filed by a private individual named K Ramasubramanian against the director of the film Selvaraghavan, who also co-wrote the song. The complaint took exception to the lines suggesting that women were the bane of men’s existence and men must hit them, kick them and leave them, stating that the lyrics were ‘not only derogatory by nature, but are intimidatory and also tend to incite hatred and violence towards women’ and consequently, were ‘totally against our deep rooted culture of celebrating womanhood in the form of Shakti’ (Malini 2012) . The complaint, in invoking the sacredness of the goddess Shakti, harks back to cultural notions of womanhood produced over the years in the patriarchal order that often defines Tamil society. The song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* is then an artefact that furthers the construction of the female protagonist Yamini in the mode of, as Chinniah (2008) suggests, a ‘passive subject’ whose chastity deserves to be guarded at all costs. In the eyes of the male protagonist Karthik, his friend Sundar is ‘in charge’ of her, a position that is often vested, as Pandian (1992) argues, in the hero of the film. Karthik, therefore, can be read as singing not just a song of ‘failed’ love but also a song of denied possibilities with respect to being the hero. He appears to believe that he has ‘lost’ to Sundar in love and blames the woman for the pain and anguish resulting from such ‘loss.’ The lyrics written by Dhanush and Selvaraghavan then allow for the deployment of this trope of the woman as the ‘heartbreaker’ in waiting, while setting up the struggle for love as being played out between two men with the woman’s preference mattering little in the scheme of

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<sup>1</sup> A ‘dance-off’ refers to an informal competition which involves two or more people dancing sequentially, so as to prove their superiority in that particular dance form.

things. If, as Sarrazin (2008) argues, ‘the act of performing a song is a reflection of the moral value of the characters themselves as well as the emotional content being conveyed,’ *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* offers a vantage view of the ‘failed’ lover’s misogyny and the producers’ contorted ideas as to what constitutes ‘love failure’ being used to explain away or even justify this misogyny.

The popularity of *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* was swiftly superseded by another ‘love failure’ song that, under inexplicable circumstances, became a sensational success worldwide. The song *Why This Kolaveri*, written and performed by Dhanush, the same person behind *Kaadhal En Kaadhal*, rapidly established itself as the textbook example of a ‘soup song’ or a ‘love failure’ song without any apparent ambition of the same when it was first released. While not straying too far away from the staple themes handled by songs of this mould earlier in Tamil cinema, it managed to demonstrate resonance across the globe through ‘catchy’ lyrics written and simple ‘sing-along’ style music. A part of the then yet-to-be released film *3* (2012), it was released online on YouTube as a ‘single’<sup>2</sup> along with a ‘making of’ video starring actors Dhanush and Shruti Haasan (daughter of actor Kamal Haasan). The video featured them ‘jamming’ in a studio recording session with the director of the film Aishwarya Dhanush (actor Dhanush’s wife) and the music composer Anirudh Ravichander (the director’s cousin). Four days after its release by the record label Sony Music in November 2011, it was the ‘most searched and played YouTube video in India’ (Marur 2011). Later that week, the composer of *Why This Kolaveri*, Anirudh Ravichander, revealed the circumstances behind the creation of the song, during an interview to journalists from the *Times of India* (Bagchi and Dhamija 2011):

Basically, Aishwarya gave me a situation, which in a nutshell is about a *love failure*. In five minutes, I had a composition. Then, Dhanush enters, listens to the track and just starts singing. His first line was ‘Why this kolaveri di?’ which sort of translates into ‘Why do you have such a rage towards me, girl?’ We loved the line and the Tamil-English phrase, and then decided to just go ahead with that. There were no lyrics, [*sic*] it was all done impromptu by Dhanush in 25 minutes [emphasis mine].

Aishwarya, the director of the film *3*, also happens to be the daughter of the ‘superstar’ of Tamil cinema Rajnikanth. When the film was originally announced as her directorial debut with her husband Dhanush playing the lead role, numerous media outlets had carried reports about how the entire industry was watching Aishwarya keenly, given that she decided to debut behind the camera and not in front of it. With the release of *Why This Kolaveri*, the ‘buzz’ around the film skyrocketed and soon, it became one of the most awaited films of that season. The song was played almost incessantly on radio stations and television channels across India, not just by the outlets addressing Tamil audiences. Meanwhile, on the internet, the song *Why This Kolaveri* was being repurposed by various individuals to create versions in other languages, complete with videos featuring amateur musicians and dancers.

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<sup>2</sup> A ‘single’ refers to a song that is released separately from the album. Usually, the song that has the maximum chances of becoming popular is released as a ‘single’ ahead of the rest of the album, for promotional purposes.

Of the reasons oft mentioned in media reporting about the ‘viral’ nature of the song’s spread, the most prominent one was the assertion about how it was aided by lyrics written in ‘Tanglish,’ (Roy 2011) which is a portmanteau of the words ‘Tamil’ and ‘English’ and is often used to connote English spoken in a Tamil accent or with Tamil influences. Subsequently, the song also spawned dozens of parodies and ‘mash-ups’ and was also deployed in ‘flash mobs’ in various cities across the globe. It even led to the release of political campaign songs, set to the same tune, particularly in Punjab where elections were held at around the same time (Kahol 2012). The popularity of the song also prodded the producers to scale up the theatrical release of the film, from the original outlay of releasing four hundred prints to a whopping one thousand prints (TNN 2012; IBN Live 2012). When the film eventually released in theatres in March 2012, it was considered to have not matched the expectations generated as a result of the popularity of the song *Why This Kolaveri* (Bhaskaran 2012). Also, given that the ‘making of’ video had managed to get millions of views on video sharing sites online in the months leading up to the theatrical release, the picturisation of the song within the film’s narrative was being awaited with bated breath. However, the picturisation in the film, while adhering to the plot, could not manage the ‘virality’ of the original ‘making of’ video whose ‘real-to-life’ (Antao 2011) vibe is often mentioned in any analysis of the song’s success.

Within the film, however, the scenes leading to the song set up the dramatic context for it to occur rather directly. Ram, played by Dhanush, and Janani, played by Shruti Haasan, are in love with each other. But Janani’s parents are shown trying to get her to shift to the United States of America (USA) for better prospects. Ram learns that Shruti has gotten her USA visa and is heart-broken. On the same day, he also learns that his childhood friend Kumaran is moving to Singapore for work. Saddened by their impending departures, Ram and Senthil, played by the actor Sundar (who also portrayed the role of the best friend in *Mayakkam Enna*) are seen drinking at the beach in Chennai. Senthil asks Ram to stop cribbing about them leaving and requests him to also stop drinking. Ram, meanwhile, pulls out his phone and looks at Janani’s display picture on Facebook, lamenting about how the photo of her seems to be a shot of her bidding goodbye to him. Scenes showing male protagonists in Tamil cinema talking to or at their lady love’s photograph have appeared on the screen at regular intervals over the years. But the shot of the Janani’s picture on a Facebook application on the mobile phone, where only the phone in Ram’s hand is visible on screen, appears to be an attempt to situate the protagonists as young, urbane and clued in to the ‘newer’ modes of courtship enabled by mobile phone technology and social media platforms. While talking about the Hindi film ‘Love Sex Aur Dhokha’ which was presented in the ‘found footage’ style, Pinto (2011) suggests that ‘it ain’t love until it has been recorded somewhere and turned into a figment of virtual reality.’ Ram’s act of pulling up Janani’s photograph on Facebook on his mobile phone can then be seen as recognition of this position in setting up the characters of the film for the audience to identify with or simply, identify. Also visible in the shot of the phone’s screen is the logo of the telecommunication network brand Aircel. In fact,

throughout the song *Why This Kolaveri*, numerous instances of in-film ‘branding’ can be seen. This can be attributed to the video of the song for the film having been shot after the success of the song as a ‘single,’ with branding deals struck with companies based on the presumed ‘wave’ of anticipation for the song as a key selling point for the film itself.

Another moment in the run-up to the song that calls attention to itself is the sequence where Senthil, bored senseless by Ram’s continuous lamenting, calls out to a young boy who is selling *sundal* (stir-fried chickpeas) on the beach. The young boy runs up to them and scoops out the dish from his tin to serve Senthil, asking him why Ram is not getting some for himself. Ram, eyes sullen and speech slurring, responds by saying ‘*Ava ennaku soup-u kudutha, nee ennaku sundal kudukariya da*’ (She gave me the boot and now you’re giving me chickpeas to chew on, is it?). The boy continues to scoop out chickpeas for Senthil and responds to Ram’s question with a derision-laced counter question ‘*Oh! Soup-u case a?*’ (Oh! You’re a love failure case, is it?). He then goes on to mock Ram asking why he is feeling bad, given that all women do ‘this’ to men. Ram walks away, as the young boy continues to talk to Ram’s friend Senthil. The young vendor furthers his claim of understanding women, courtship and love by saying that he, too, was dumped by the girl who sells *bajji* (fried snacks) at the beach and that he did not wallow like Ram because if he did that, the *bajjis* would not sell themselves. This sense of ‘wisdom’ endowed upon the character of the young vendor, who speaks with the tone of one who has seen it all despite being no older than ten years of age, appears to have been set up to offer legitimacy to both the term ‘soup’ (‘love failure’) and the position that women are but likely to dump men, as being ‘common knowledge.’ The use of the word ‘soup’ to connote ‘love failure,’ however, occurs for the first time on the Tamil screen in the song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* co-written by Dhanush for his earlier film *Mayakkam Enna*. The sequence with the young vendor can therefore read as an attempt to pass off an intertextual element as the widely shared knowledge of a cultural meme, which is then deployed to encourage the audience to adopt the meme as currency in conversation. The song, in fact, starts with Dhanush, playing a drunken Ram, announcing to the ‘boys’ that he is going to sing a ‘soup song,’ which he says will be a ‘flop song.’

The song starts with Ram, Senthil and the young boy beginning to dance together on the beach. When the boy proceeds to perform a step ahead of the other two, Ram looks at him, smiles and compliments him for getting the ‘rhythm correct.’ They continue dancing amidst the stalls in the beach and soon, other men at the beach join Ram, Senthil and the young boy. Once again, the ‘widely accepted’ nature of the song’s central message is reiterated through the composition of the male dancers who join Ram. The set includes a couple of men who look like college students, a couple of white collar workers (replete with formal clothing and messenger bags) and a couple of *lungi* (a traditional garment worn around the waist) clad men, thereby providing some visibility into the composition of the producers’ imagined audience. Women are also part of the mix, but they do not dance with Ram. Instead, they

push him away when he totters and falls on them, drunk. There appears to be audience profiling in the case of women as well, with one woman dressed in a shirt and trousers (with headphones on her ears), one woman dressed in a traditional half-saree (who joins in on the dance briefly) and another young woman dressed in a *salwar kameez* (traditional costume of loose pajama-like trousers and a long tunic) whose hair he pulls. She pushes him away, as the refrain '*Why This Kolaveri Di*' (Why this rage, woman?) plays in the background. Ram spins away and falls on a 'white' woman. His eyes light up and he sings the lines '*White skin-uh, girl-uh girl-uh, Girl-uh heart-uh black-uh! Eyes-uh eyes-uh, meet-uh meet-uh, My future-uh, dark-uh!*' (White-skinned girl, your heart is black/Our eyes have met, now my future is dark). The casting of fair-skinned Shruti Haasan and the dark-skinned Dhanush as the lead romantic pair vests these lines with significance, as the male protagonist sees his act of falling in love with the fair-skinned woman as signalling a bleak future for him. The casting also reflects the industry-wide tendency to privilege fair-skinned women, which draws from, and contributes to, the larger effort to position 'fair' skin as a beauty ideal. An analysis of the list of 'top' heroines in Tamil cinema in the 1990s and the 2000s throws up a litany of names such as Khushboo, Simran, Jyothika and Shriya Saran, all fair-skinned women from the northern parts of India. Their fair skin and their 'non-Tamil' origins were often used to further their acceptance as 'glamorous' heroines, given that Tamil women, compelled by the strictures imposed on them under the aegis of 'Tamil culture,' would not (and could not) pull off such roles. The same beauty ideals, with respect to skin colour, were not operative upon male actors, with their dark-skinned appearances only allowing them to consolidate their claim of 'Tamilness.'

As the song progresses, other men selling wares like balloons and cotton candy on the beach join Ram as he dances away and drinks some more. He proceeds to slip on a pair of red plastic 'devil' horns on his head and begins to hallucinate, seeing Janani in front of him at the beach. But the other men pull him away as he stands there, his eyes transfixed at a distance. He continues to hallucinate about her and at one point, lies on the bonnet of a luxury car parked at the beach and sings the lines '*This-uh song-uh for soup boys-uh, We don't have choice-uh*' (This song is for men who have been dumped/We don't have a choice). As Ram continues to sing the refrain '*Why This Kolaveri Di*' and the other men crowd around him in a manner that resembles a very large 'group hug,' he 'sees' Janani again at a distance and goes after her. He weaves through the crowds at the beach, but loses her as the song ends with the pronouncement 'flop song.' In *Why This Kolaveri*, the male protagonist sings of the impending separation from his lover as something that was already known to the woman and therefore, accuses her of giving him '*bou-vu*' (dumping him). This can be seen as a recurring theme in the songs of 'failed' love sung by male protagonists in Tamil cinema, whereby men position themselves as having put their lives on hold for love and position women as 'cold hearted' pragmatists who only seek to further their own goals. This form also finds favour in the prologue of the song *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai* from the film *Kulamagal Radhai* (1963), which was discussed in

the previous chapter. Such a position is of further import in the case of 3, where Dhanush plays a wealthy upper class boy and Shruti Haasan plays a middle class girl. The class divide, while indirectly propped up as the reason for Shruti's character to be packed off to USA, is portrayed as 'just' another problem to be surmounted, so as to further universalise the 'problem' of love and the 'inevitability' of anguish that results from it. Class-related cues are present throughout the film, with notable examples being how Shruti's character is shown walking or cycling to tuition classes in the early portions of the film while Dhanush's character zips around in a motorbike. Nonetheless, there is a sense that even his 'upper class' comforts and associated benefits could not save him from becoming a 'lovesick loser,' thereby framing 'failure' in love as an universal affliction from which there is no escape. So, when Ram sings about how men do not have a choice at the end of *Why This Kolaveri*, he delivers the final dimension to the posturing of the 'lovesick loser' where he sees 'failure' as a definite milestone in the journey of love between young lovers.

Days after the release of the original *Why This Kolaveri* video on YouTube in November 2011, the soundtrack of the film *Kazhugu* (Sathyasiva 2012) was released. Given that *Why This Kolaveri* was beginning to occupy the airwaves and garner attention from the press worldwide, the music album of the film *Kazhugu* (Eagle) remained relatively low-key in terms of promotion and reportage by the film press, despite being released by Sony Music, the same record label behind *Why This Kolaveri*. However, in March 2012, days before the theatrical release of the film *Kazhugu*, the video for the song *Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avasaram* (Men and women are in a hurry) was released as a 'promo.' This video featured visuals of various Tamil cinema actors, directors and music composers listening to the song and dancing along, intercut with the song itself. At around the same time, the song began to receive more airplay on radio and television channels in Tamilnadu, leading to a 'buzz' being created around the theatrical release of the film. The song stayed on radio and television programming for months after its release and was popular for its commentary on love between young men and women. Composed by Yuvan Shankar Raja (son of veteran music composer Ilaiyaraaja) and written by Snehan, it is said to have played a considerable role in ensuring the success of the film at the box office. Lyricist Snehan, incidentally, had been in the news for a while a few years earlier for his scathing comments on women poets writing sexually explicit poetry in Tamil (Anantharaman 2004). The film *Kazhugu*, starring actors Krishna Sekhar (brother of Tamil film director Vishnuvardhan), Karunas, Thambi Ramaiah and Bindu Madhavi, had no 'big' names in the star cast and was directed by debutant Sathyasiva. It was based on the adventures of a crew of four men, running the 'shady' trade of recovering the bodies of people who committed suicide by jumping off a particular cliff in Kodaikanal in Tamilnadu. The song *Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avasaram* occurs within the first half hour of the hundred and fourteen minute film and the scenes that lead up to it are worthy of examination to understand yet another dimension of songs about 'failed' love.

Sera, played by Krishna, Nandu, Shanmugam and their mute friend are the men who are referred to as *kazhugu* (eagle) and they are seen undertaking an operation to recover dead bodies from the gorge. Used to finding the bodies of young lovers who commit suicide because of circumstances that force their separation and/or cause 'failure' in love, Sera and his crew risk their lives to pull the bodies out. It happens to yet another young couple. They find the man's body smashed into pieces and fish out only decomposing body of the young woman. They take the gold ornaments off her and deposit the body with grieving family of the woman at the funeral ground, which leads to a tiff between the two families there when they inform the boy's parents about their inability to bring back his dead body. Krishna's character Sera breaks off the fight and the crew goes on to sell the ornaments to a 'pawn broker.' Having made some money off the assignment, they go to a bar to drink and sing the song *Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avasaram*.

A couple of key moments stand out in this sequence of events leading to the song. After extricating the body out of the gorge, Sera and the crew get some rest as the body is prepared for the uphill journey back. A radio is hung on the branch of a tree and playing on it is the song *Yaarukaaga* from the film *Vasantha Maaligai* (1972), one of the most popular songs of 'failed' love in the history of Tamil cinema as discussed in Chapter 2. Sera and fellow crew member Nandu sing along, mimicking the dramatic actions of the protagonist in the original song. This leads to a discussion about love, where Shanmugam, the eldest member in the crew, speaks about how love is not to be mocked and how the resolve of young lovers who commit suicide rather than separate or 'fail' in love deserves to be understood and respected. Sera and Nandu mock him for his emotion-filled suggestion and they all begin the journey uphill. The other 'moment' occurs at the bar where they are all drinking. Sera indulges in this charade of sorts, crying and announcing to all other customers at the bar that love is the only 'truth' and that they must all never forget this. Nandu and Shanmugam, his accomplices, meanwhile scan the bar for the most depressed faces and the ones who appears to be responding negatively to Sera's outburst and follow one such young man outside the bar to the food stalls, where the song is then performed. As they exit the bar in drunken cheerfulness fuelled by the anticipation of business arising from yet another person committing suicide, another patron in the bar stands up and warns the bar's customers of the crew's modus operandi. He asks them to not fall for any of the statements made by Sera about love. These two 'moments' are crucial in understanding the attempt to situate the song as one commenting about love between young men and women in present day Tamilnadu. *Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avarasam* is set up as a song about love and what its 'failure' can do, rather than as a song of 'failed' love. It positions itself not as a song featuring a protagonist in the 'lovesick loser' mode, but as commentary that is most likely to resonate with men who see themselves as 'lovesick losers.' The tone, therefore, is markedly different from songs discussed earlier in this chapter. In fact, the prologue to the song starts with Sera asking the elderly Shanmugam about how happy he used to be back in the days when many more lovers used to commit

suicide. The song then starts off with Shanmugam singing the lines '*Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avasaram, Atha kaadhalunu solluraanga anaivarum, Kaadhal oru kannampoochi kalavaram, Athu eppothume bothaiyana nelavaram*' (Men and women are in a hurry/And everyone calls that love/Love is a violent game of hide-and-peek/ It's a permanent high).

Sera and Nandu start dancing and soon, Shanmugam joins them as well. The song is performed amidst tables in an outdoor eatery near the bar, where the *kazhugu* crew comes to eat after getting drunk. There are a number of couples walking around, and some of them are sitting at their tables and eating. Shanmugam points to an elderly couple and sings about the days when men and women used to live peacefully together, in love. He then starts to weep as he sings about the pain he used to experience when he had to fish out their bodies from the gorge. Sera and Nandu mock him and continue to dance, as other customers at the eatery begin to join in them. Nandu then sings the lines '*Nee sollum kaadhal ellam malaiyeri pochu sikku, thumbalapola vanthu poguthu intha kaadhalu, kaadhalunu solluraanga, kandapadi suththuraanga, dabbu koranja, mabbu koranjaa, thalli poraanga*' (The love that you're talking about is now long gone, man/Love comes and goes like a sneeze, these days/They say they're in love and roam around together wildly/If they run short of cash or enjoyment, they move away). Sera and Nandu's articulations vis-a-vis Shanmugam's nostalgic view of love between men and women is a key aspect in the evolution of ideas pertaining to 'failure' in love. For Sera and Nandu, the kind of 'pure' or 'true' love that Shanmugam refers to no longer exists. In *Kazhugu*, Sera and Nandu's views on love appear to be framed as organic wisdom that stems from their lack of formal education and their bewilderment about the imagination of love and courtship by urban, educated folks is also captured as a counterpoint. Krishna, playing Sera, sings the lines '*Inniki kaadhal ellam romba romba maariduchu, Kanna paakuthu kaiya kookuthu roomu kekuthu, Ellam mudinja pinnum friendunu solli kittu, Vaazhuravanga romba perudaa ketupaaruda*' (Today, love has changed a great deal/Eyes meet, hands entwine and a room is booked/After everything is done, there are many who live on saying that they were 'friends'/Go ask about them!). As Sera sings about how physical intimacy is becoming casual in relationships between men and women, the two middle-aged women who dance alongside Sera walk away in disgust. It is here that Nandu delivers a dialogue, in the middle of the song, where he asks Sera whether casual physical intimacy can be explained away as 'friendship' and suggests that that would be 'fake love.' Sera shrugs and responds by stating that it is educated men who says such things. That love is being 'corrupted' by young, educated people from the big cities, is a position that they hold with a sense of obviousness seemingly shared by all those who dance with the crew. At one point in the song, Shanmugam, agreeing with Sera and Nandu's assertions about love and courtship in today's times, wonders whose curse this might be. Nandu immediately jumps in and suggests that it is certainly the '*vellaikaaran*' (white man). By further suggesting that this 'curse' is currently staged in the urban, Sera, Nandu and the rest of the crew are shown to be livid about the 'westernization' of mores in the

case of urbanized middle and upper class youth. If, as Srinivas (2010b) argues, ‘class mobility in the city is associated with perceived “cosmopolitanism” and movement away from the local,’ then Nandu and Sera’s assertions can be read as such the attribution of the ‘demise’ of ‘true’ love to such class mobility. Love itself is then painted as having ‘failed’ and when Nandu sings the line ‘*Kaadhalila tharkulaigal kuranje pochu*’ (Lovers don’t commit suicide anymore), he speaks not only from the point of view of business being bad for his crew, but also from the perspective that the reduction in the occurrence of ‘true’ love can be used to explain lesser rates of suicide. In essence, he is seen to be suggesting that ‘true’ lovers would believe that death is better than ‘defeat’ in love and appears to be holding urbanized, ‘westernized’ youth responsible for casualising love, thereby adding yet another dimension to the probable sources of ‘impossibility’ experienced by ‘lovesick losers.’

About ten days before the theatrical release of the film *Kazhugu* in March 2012, the soundtrack of the film *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi* (M. Rajesh 2012) was released by the same record label Sony Music. The film *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi* (A stone, a mirror) marked the acting debut of Tamil film producer Udhayanidhi Stalin (son of former mayor of Chennai M K Stalin and the grandson of former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu M Karunanidhi). The film, directed by Rajesh, also starred actors Hansika Motwani and Santhanam in key roles. The music for the film was composed by Harris Jayaraj (who also composed the song *Venmathi Venmathi* from the film *Minnale*, discussed in the previous chapter) and the lyrics were written by N Muthukumar. The songs were considered to be catchy and immediately began to receive significant amounts of airplay on radio and music television channels, serving as pre-release publicity for the film which hit the theatres in April 2012. This ‘buzz’ was led by the song *Venaam Machan Venaam* (No need, brother! No need!), which was composed and performed in the style of a *gaana paatu*<sup>3</sup> (melancholic philosophical songs set to a simple, repetitive rhythm pattern) sung in the fisher folk colonies of Ayodhikuppam and Injambakkam (Muthukumaraswamy 2000) in Chennai. It became one of the selling points of the film, billed as a romantic comedy, when it was released in April 2012. The song appears at a time in the film’s plot when Saravanan, played by Udhayanidhi Stalin, reunites with his childhood friend and co-worker Partha, played by Santhanam. They quarrel earlier when Hansika Motwani’s character Meera, who Saravan loves, asks him to end his friendship with Partha, as she considers the latter to be a bad influence on him. Saravanan, determined to win Meera’s approval, does so. But Meera rejects him, nonetheless. Saravanan patches things up with his friend Partha and the duo then proceed to sing the song *Venaam Machan Venaam*.

The song is framed as a manifesto for the position that friendship is the ‘antidote’ to the ‘poison’ that courtship and/or love can be, a consistent theme that runs through the length of the film as well. It is

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<sup>3</sup> The song *Why This Kolaveri*, discussed earlier, also draws upon the form of the *gaana paatu*.

performed in the mode of a dialogue between the two friends, where Saravan is shown to adopt the typology of the ‘lovesick loser’ who sings about how his love has ‘failed’ while Partha is positioned as the friend who ‘warned’ him about impending pain and anguish. The idea of posturing friendship between young men as stable, useful and ‘good’ for life and contrasting it against courtship or love which is unpredictable, time-consuming and ‘bad’ for life, is not new to Tamil cinema. Traces of this mode can be seen, for instance, in the song *Kaadhal Kayangale* from the film *Aangalai Nambathe* (1987) discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Typically, this sort of assertion about friendship as being ‘greater’ than love is preceded by the male protagonist ‘abandoning’ or letting go of friendship with his male friends for the woman he loves and then, ‘realising’ his folly when he runs into difficulties in his relationship or attempts to establish a relationship with the woman. The song *Venaam Machan Venaam*, for example, is preceded by a scene where Partha tries to ‘test’ Saravanan’s resolve to renew ties with him. They are drinking sitting in a balcony and Partha goes on to suggest that his friendship can be ‘useful’ only to help Saravanan unite with his lover and is likely to be discarded after the couple is ‘produced.’ Partha does this, by comparing Meera to alcohol, Saravanan to water and positioning himself as the plastic tumbler that is thrown into the bin after the drink is mixed and consumed. Saravanan refutes this and reminds Partha that he knows Meera only for a few months and that love will ‘come and go’ while their friendship dates back to when they were still toddlers who could not speak. Partha, impressed by Saravanan’s affection for him, asks him what he wishes for. Saravanan states that he simply wishes to be happy and the duo then land up in a fishing hamlet near Chennai where the song is then performed along with fisher folk, into the night.

The song starts with the fisherwomen dancing and encouraging Saravanan to join them. Partha, meanwhile, tries to pacify a visibly upset Saravanan. Buoyed by the call of the fisherwomen, Saravanan and Partha start dancing. With fishing boats lined up in the background and fishermen dancing alongside on the sand, Partha sings the lines ‘*Venaam machan venaam, Indha ponnuga kaadhalu, Adhu moodi thurrakkumpodhey unna kavukkum quarterru, Kadala pola kaadhal oru salt water-u, Adhu konjam karikkum podhey nee thooki pottudu*’ (No need, brother, no need of these women’s love/It’s like alcohol whose whiff topples you/Like the sea, love’s also just salt water/ Throw it away when it gets even slightly bitter). The ‘intoxication’ of a woman’s love in comparison to that provided by the consumption of alcohol is a metaphor that is deployed throughout to denote the temporary nature of the ‘high’ that it provides and strengthen the pre-declared binary of friendship as ‘permanent’ and a woman’s love as ‘transient.’ The friend is then framed to sing the song as a ‘warning,’ which he knows will remain unheeded by the ‘lovesick loser.’ Partha, for instance, goes on to sing about how it would all be fine if men married the women that their mothers asked them to marry and how they are likely to lose their pants if they marry those they pursue. Two men are seen conversing with each other standing near a fishing boat and the camera zooms out to reveal that they are not wearing any pants, as Partha hits his head with his hand in sadness and sings the above-

mentioned lines. A counterpoint is readily provided in the form of a chorus seen to be sung by the fisherwomen, asking Saravanan to dazzle them. The fisherwomen's assertions to the duo can then be read as standing in to represent the 'voice' of young women in Tamilnadu who appear to encouraging men like Saravanan to pursue them. In doing so, there seems to an attempt to endow legitimacy upon the view that falling in love with a woman is likely to cause anguish and position young women as being aware of this, but still 'encouraging' men to court them. The male friend, consequently, becomes the 'voice of reason' in such a scenario.

The song unfolds with visuals of a sunrise onscreen and the setting changes to a bright morning. Saravanan is seen singing about his courtship days, as some fishermen continue to dance with him while others go about their work. Partha appears to be scoffing at Saravanan's nostalgia and sings the lines '*Kaadhalikkum podhu ada kannu theriyadhu, Un kannu muzhichikitta anga kaadhal kidaiyathu*' (You'll go blind when you fall in love/But if you open your eyes, you'll see that it isn't love). Partha and Saravanan then join in and sing in chorus the lines '*Figure-u sugar-u maadri, Pasanga odamba urikkidum, Natpu thaduppu useeda, Odanja manasa thethhidum*' (Girls are like diabetes/They suck the life out of boys/Friendship is the vaccine/It mends the broken heart). The fisherwomen are shown to be singing along, as they dance away with Saravanan and Partha. Saravanan goes on to sing with regret about how he even 'abandoned' his friendship with his childhood buddy for the woman he loved and how he ruined his own life by trusting her. Partha responds, in song, by pointing out how he had warned Saravanan about the fair-skinned woman and how she would make his life 'topsy-turvy.' Partha, the 'all-knowing' friend, is therefore constructed as the perfect foil to the 'lovesick loser' that Saravanan is framed as, and proceeds to turn into a philosopher and guide to Saravanan, singing the lines '*Kannula maiya veippaada, Adhula poiyo poiyaiyo, Udhattil saayam veippaada, Unakku kaiyo kaiyaiyo*' (She'll put kohl on her eye/On that, she'll put a lie/She'll put lipstick on her lips/Using that, she'll put a wound on you). Saravanan and Partha's assertions based on Meera's physical features like her 'fair' skin, her eyes and her lips are not dissimilar to those made by the male protagonist in the song *Why This Kolaveri* from the film 3. Women's physical features and attempts undertaken by women to 'enhance' them are taken up by male characters as data points to 'prove' that the woman 'uses' these attractive attributes to further her own desires, which run in contravention to the chaste, subservient and steadfastly loyal conception held by such men. As Chinniah (2008) argues, 'when a woman assumes a contrary position, placing her body for the view of others in a public arena, she becomes a spectacle losing her latent *sakti*, thus taking on the position of a "pleasurable object" especially for the male gaze.' The song draws to a close with a charged Saravanan singing the lines '*Kanna kalanga vaikum figure-u venaanda, Enakku kanneer anjali<sup>4</sup> poster ottum nanban pothunda*' (I don't want the girl who makes me cry/I want the friend who cries for me), thereby resolving Partha's

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase '*kanneer anjali*' actually refers to an elegy, circulated sometimes in the form of posters, especially when the deceased in question is an important person.

original question of who Saravanan will side with – the friend or the girl he loves. Saravanan's choice further affirms the view of his own love as having 'failed' and the song then serves as vehicle of 'realisation' mobilized by his friend who was aware of its impending 'failure' all along.

The song's use of certain words to refer to women and the casting of Udhayanidhi Stalin as the male protagonist who 'fails' in love deserve further examination in order to locate the song's intended audiences and situate the mode of the 'lovesick loser.' In referring to women as *figures*, the song riffs on the vocabulary of a male youth spectatorship in Tamilnadu and positions itself as 'their' song, thereby enabling identification. The problem of 'failing' in love can then be read as a 'common' concern, with the blaming of women or love itself turning into the 'accepted' reason that is merely reflected on the screen. This sort of attempted claim to 'realism' is further bolstered when seen against the casting of a 'new face' as the male protagonist. Udhayanidhi Stalin, while belonging to one of the most powerful political families in Tamilnadu, is considered to possess the physical characteristics of an 'average' young Tamil man and therefore, helps the film *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi* to assert its position as featuring a character who could be any one of 'us.' Nakassis and Dean (2007), while talking about the Tamil film '7G Rainbow Colony,' state:

Such 'new faces' bring anonymity and ordinariness, and hence authenticity, to the characters they play. Such new heroes are less muscular and darker skinned in appearance (e.g., Dhanush), dress in everyday clothing, and speak terse dialogue in spoken Tamil sprinkled with English (and not, as in the past, in extended monologues, often times thinly veiled political speeches, in 'pure' literary Tamil). He is the average young man. (p.90)

The song of 'failed' love can then be seen as functioning not just as the song of young Tamil men, but also as a song *to* young Tamil men. *Venaam Machan Venaam*, like the other songs analysed in this chapter so far, represents this mode, providing friendship between males as a frame of reference to further complicate the understanding of how courtship and love appears to operate within this sphere of Tamil cinema.

Days after the theatrical release of the film *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi* (2012) in April 2012 featuring the song *Venaam Machan Venaam*, the soundtrack of the film *Kalakalappu* (C.Sundar 2012) was launched. Promoted as the twenty fifth film of director Sundar C (popular for his comedy-led family entertainers), *Kalakalappu* (Melee) starred young actors Vimal, Shiva, Anjali, Oviya and Santhanam (who played the role of Partha in *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi*), belonged to the comedy genre and had its theatrical release that summer in May 2012. The film was originally titled *Masala Cafe*, named after the ancestral restaurant in the film that the male protagonists struggle to manage and resurrect. The title was later changed to *Kalakalappu @ Masala Cafe* and eventually, the film was released as just *Kalakalappu*. The soundtrack for the film was composed by Vijay Ebenezer, who was brought

onboard fresh off the success of his debut film soundtrack *Kandaen*, and the lyrics were written by P Vijay, a former winner of the National Award for Best Lyrics. Given that it was a comedy film, most of the ‘promos’ that were telecast before the theatrical release featured one-liners and dialogues. But amongst the songs in the film, the most publicised track was the song *Ivalunga Imsai* (The nagging of these women). *Ivalunga Imsai* was positioned in the film as a ‘pre-climax’ ‘item song,’ a relatively recent phenomenon in Tamil cinema. Writing about another Tamil film song situated in a similar setup, Weidman (2012) refers to such an ‘item number’ as a song ‘in which an actress dances suggestively before a male patron or male audience’ and goes on to speak about how it ‘is usually distinct from the rest of the film and marked by an abrupt aesthetic shift in both visual and aural aspects.’ While these attributes apply to the song *Ivalunga Imsai*, it also deviates from the format of other ‘item numbers’ in its deployment of the two female protagonists as the ‘item girls,’ instead of the usual practice of having another female actor appear for the ‘item song’ alone in the film. But the ‘abrupt aesthetic shift,’ mentioned by Weidman (2012), occurs in *Ivalunga Imsai* as a result of the highly sexualised dance moves of the two female protagonists, which is discordant when compared to their roles in the film, otherwise.

The song occurs at a point in the film when both Seenu, played by Vimal, and his brother Raghu, played by Shiva, are ‘dumped’ by their respective lovers Madhavi (played by Anjali) and Maya (played by Oviya) for different reasons. Madhavi moves away from Seenu when she comes to know of his role in her grandfather’s kidnapping and Maya ‘dumps’ Raghu for gambling away the restaurant that they all work to retain. Both men then land up at the same bar and try to drown their sorrows in alcohol. Intoxicated, they imagine their respective lovers dancing with them as they sing the song *Ivalunga Imsai*. The song is set up as the men drink and converse about how women change their mind in a moment and how they ‘love’ quickly, but also forget quickly. Seenu and Raghu start singing, as Madhavi and Maya ‘appear’ on screen along with a bunch of female background dancers. Seenu and Raghu join them, as other patrons in the bar continue drinking. The song starts with the men singing the lines ‘*Ivalunga imsai thaanga mudiyala, Ivalunga illaamalum irukka mudiyala*’ (The nagging of these women, we can’t stand/But without them, we can’t live), bringing to the fore another dimension in the arc that can be traced through the songs of ‘failed’ or spurned love in Tamil cinema. The men rue the fact that they cannot live without being in love with women, while making their irritation clear about the perceived ‘troubles’ caused by women. In doing so, they re-establish the location of the ‘lovesick loser’ mode as one where the man is an iterant lover whose life is ravaged by the very same love that he spends so much time pursuing. The song, meanwhile, progresses to a male chorus, enacted by a group of drunken men with their heads down on the table in front of them. They sing the lines ‘*Thallunga yesamaan thallunga, indha ponnungale ippadi thaan thallunga*’ (Push them away, boss, push them away/These women are like this only, push them away). However, in the version of the song that was originally released as a part of the soundtrack, the lines in the chorus

were ‘*Kutthunga yesamaan kutthunga, indha ponnungale ippadi thaan kutthunga*’ (Stab them, boss, stab them/These women are like this only, stab them), a reference to a dialogue from the film *Sigappu Rojakkal* (P. Bharathiraja 1978). *Sigappu Rojakkal* (Red roses) was a thriller film starring Kamal Haasan as a woman-hating psychopathic serial killer. An actor playing a younger version of Kamal Haasan mouths the dialogue when he witnesses his mentor murder his own wife for indulging in adultery. In *Ivalunga Imsai*, the drunken men who enact these portions mimic the actions of the actor in the film *Sigappu Rojakkal*, leaving no room for doubt about the deployment of that intertextual element. The referencing of this line, more than thirty years after it originally appeared, can be read as using the chorus to ‘approve’ the ‘attack’ on womenfolk mounted by the male protagonists of *Kalakalappu*. However, the reference seems to have been altered and tempered down before the theatrical release, so as to ‘lighten’ the mood of the song. This may have been, in part, a measure to avoid complaints like the one that was filed about the song *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* from the film *Mayakkam Enna* (discussed earlier in this chapter).

After the chorus, the song slips back into familiar territory with Raghu singing about how the woman wears lipstick on her lips and how she wears a helmet on her heart. There is a sense of righteous indignation in Raghu’s assertion. As someone who has ‘failed’ in love, he expresses resentment at her attempts to ‘enhance’ her beauty, by wearing lipstick (which he assumes as being done to attract him), and then being extremely cautious about matters concerning the heart, a position that appears dichotomous to him. This is yet another lineament in understanding the posturing of the male protagonist in the ‘lovesick loser’ mode and is one that exposes his rigorously patriarchal views with respect to women ‘dress up’ for and how their role is limited to ‘yielding’ to men’s wishes, without accounting for her own preferences. Seenu then sings the lines ‘*Polapa keduthu deal viduva, Porupa irrunthu feel pannuva*’ (She’ll spoil your livelihood and leave you hanging/She’ll also be concerned like a responsible person), further re-affirming the tendency to pin the blame, of all ills that befall men when they fall in love, upon the woman they ‘love’ or ‘love’ itself. The song does not leave this to be implied and this portion of the song ends with Seenu and Raghu singing to each other the lines ‘*Unna solli kutham illa, Enna solli kutham illa, Kaadhal oda kutham thaana ada*’ (You are not to be blamed/I am not to be blamed/It’s all love’s fault!). These lines in the song allow for a useful comparison with the song *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai* (You’re not to be blamed) from the film *Kulamagal Radhai* (1963), discussed earlier in Chapter 2. In *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai*, actor Sivaji Ganesan sings a song of ‘failed’ love where he blames the twists of time, circumstances and god for causing separation and anguish. Almost fifty years later, circumstances are no longer deigned as worthy causes in the eyes of the ‘lovesick loser’ when it comes to analysing why love has ‘failed’ and in *Ivalunga Imsai*, aspiring to courtly love is marked as the starting point for all pain and love itself becomes the problem, given that its ‘failure’ is considered inevitable in such songs. Also, in *Unnai Solli Kutram Illai*, the song starts with the male protagonist accusing the woman he loves of being ‘stone-hearted,’ but eventually

absolves her of responsibility in causing the separation, choosing to talk about the changing tides of time. But in *Ivalunga Imsai*, the male protagonists absolve each of responsibility and pin the blame squarely on the need to love and the women they love.

The song *Ivalunga Imsai* also segues into sections where the Madhavi and Maya individually lead a band of female background dancers and dance to the instrumental interludes in the song. They are dressed in *sarees*, which are draped in such a way that their cleavage, midriff and legs (knee down) are visible and the steps are designed to be ‘seductive,’ with the swinging of hips and thrusting of their bust. These segues allow the song to function as an ‘item number,’ but within certain limits. In order to prevent it from becoming a song about the female protagonists celebrating their own sexuality, the camera frames them in such a way that a perpetual ‘male gaze’ (Mulvey 1999) is activated. Their performance is positioned as being only for the benefit of the male protagonists. Also, the drunken male protagonists join the women in these dances, garnering ridicule and/or admiration for their steps. But throughout, not one line of the song is sung by women. The instrumental interludes always lead back to the male voices continuing with the song. At one point, Seenu and Raghu sing the lines ‘*Love-u kulla maatinaalum, Stove-u kulla maatinaalum, Theenji povom maapillangala*’ (Whether you fall in love/Or fall into a stove/You’ll get burnt, my fellow grooms!), thereby clearly addressing other young men in love who look at their relationship as ideally culminating in marriage and positioning such expectations as ‘painful’ by default. The song trails off with Seenu and Raghu walking out of the bar in a drunken stupor, glasses of alcohol in hand, as the male chorus (discussed earlier) plays in the background, with Maya, Madhavi and the other female background dancers thrusting their breasts and buttocks as a part of their dance and the camera moving slowly towards them. The song is yet another example of the various modes in which ‘failure’ of love is sung about by male protagonists in Tamil cinema. The analysis so far has thrown up a number of intertextual elements in the songs. But there are also numerous extratextual elements that are referenced from the claim of them being ‘common’ knowledge. A key concern in this range would be the definition of ‘love failure’ as imagined by the audiences that these songs are intended for, i.e., a Tamil male youth spectatorship. Additionally, given that none of these songs allow for the articulation of the female point of view beyond reiteration of what the male protagonists sing, there appears to be a plethora of possibilities arising from the exploration of how a Tamil (male and female) youth spectatorship makes meaning of these songs of ‘failed’ love. In doing so, claims to realism and resonance with youth culture made by these songs can be unpacked and analysed to allow for further theorisation with respect to how male protagonists in Tamil cinema talking about ‘love failure’ can possibly serve as the narrators of the socio-cultural context in Tamilnadu.

## CHAPTER 4: LOVE IN THE TIME OF *KOLAVERI*

An analysis of the songs of ‘failed’ love in Tamil cinema of the last few years allows for the unpacking of narratives of not just gendered representations of young lovers, but also those of the changing modes of address adopted by Tamil film producers. More importantly, it sets the ground for the investigation of ideas pertaining to how audiences in Tamilnadu make meaning of the filmic texts in question. All of the songs discussed so far have been a part of mainstream Tamil films which have often been characterised as ‘escapist’ and as Derne (2000) points out, this appears to be a routine observation that finds its way into everyday conversations about Tamil films. In painting the Tamil commercial film as ‘escapist,’ there appears to be an insinuation that these films are briefly enjoyed and forgotten as soon as they leave the theatres. This position is of import when seen against the fact that the viewers of such films in Tamilnadu continue to watch, discuss and reference portions of films’ dialogues and/or song lyrics in day-to-day conversations. The films and their songs, therefore, are truly ‘popular,’ where the term ‘popular’ may be seen as denoting acceptance by the audience and the subsequent deployment of certain ideas by the viewers to functionally serve as a way to deal with their own anxieties and problems with respect to love. There is, then, a need for a nuanced understanding of audience reception, the meaning making processes that are operative in such contexts and eventually, the social relations within which such meanings are inserted. But the need to reconcile this so-called ‘escapist’ nature of Tamil cinematic texts against their implied or claimed realism based on, say, the ‘ordinariness’ of male protagonists in such songs, persists. Nakassis (2009), while speaking about the Tamil commercial film, argues:

Realism has been a long-standing topic of discussion in the literature of film theory. To my mind, however, theorizing realism has largely suffered from some crucial problems: its narrow focus on cinema from Europe and the United States; its overly textual analysis; its neglect of actual audiences; and its reliance on deduction from unreflected-upon premises about the audience. (p. 211)

Engaging with audiences and attempting to understand the reception of ideas of ‘love failure’ posited by these songs then becomes a central plank in efforts to theorise Tamil cinema’s long-standing obsession with themes of love between young men and women, and the socio-cultural insertions that it possibly enables. In interviews conducted in Chennai with men and women within the age group of 18 – 30 years and hailing from different parts of Tamilnadu, Tamil cinema’s preoccupation with *kaadhal* (romantic love) was explained by viewers as ‘natural’ and as being the one *unmai* (truth) that binds together an imaginary mass of youngsters. Gowri, a 20-year-old lower middle class woman from Chennai pursuing her Bachelor’s degree from a government college, reports that ‘love failure’ has become a key theme for Tamil cinema in the recent past and argues that the ‘ubiquity’ of ‘love failure’ can be attributed to how ‘natural’ love has become:

These days, in Tamil films, love failure gets a lot of importance. That is because everybody has started to love. Falling in love is a normal thing nowadays. So, love failure has also become normal. Also, with our culture becoming more and more modern, love failure has become common and is no longer the big deal it used to be. If songs about these things are released, they will be definite hits. Everyone identifies with them.

Gowri's use of the word 'modern' with respect to culture gives rise to important questions about popular cinema's relationship with this culture and also, about what is considered modern. Talking about the prohibition of the kiss in Indian cinema, Prasad (1993) suggests that there is an 'aestheticist tendency' to regard popular cinema as 'not-yet-cinema, a formless and anarchic bricolage of titillation, violent spectacle and moral conservatism.' When read against Gowri's assessment of the reasons behind Tamil cinema's preoccupation with love and its 'failure,' the songs can then be seen as responses to the naturalisation of romantic love as a key component of the present-day 'Tamil culture' where the surge to become 'modern' is painted as having tided over the 'moral conservatism' that Prasad (1993) refers to. However, this is a negotiation that contorts in many other ways as respondents continued to engage with the other threads that united the five songs analysed. The broader theme of 'naturalisation' of love, meanwhile, recurred during fieldwork, but with respondents deploying other modes of analysis to explain the same. Lokesh, a 25-year-old middle class man hailing from Chennai and working with a private firm, suggests that love is but deigned to happen when you have a lead pair belonging to 'opposite' genders:

When you have a man and a woman, people of two opposite genders, it is but obvious that they will try to impress each other. They may not have the need to do so. But when people are of opposite genders, there is an automatic attraction. That's what they show in Tamil cinema. Like, in college, you have to try your hand at love, no? Boys will mimic their favourite film stars' actions and girls also sometimes like that kind of cuteness. Films have to show these things to become hits. If there's a happy ending, then it's even better.

Heteronormative ideas with respect to gender and love find mention repeatedly during interviews, reflecting both the hegemony of certain types of gendering and the nature of Tamil cinema's construction of youthful femininities and masculinities. For Gowri and Lokesh, however, a film's 'success' itself is inseparably entwined with the possibilities of romantic love between male and female youth as offered by films and consequently, their songs. Also, in Lokesh's assessment of what Tamil films 'need' to show, there is a clear attempt to situate the space of a college as one where young men and women are *expected* to fall in love. This assertion is of import, given the fact that many Tamil films featuring young actors in a romantic 'track' continue to be set in colleges. While the idea of a 'college romance' continues to remain a recurring pattern in Tamil cinematic texts, there has been a spurt of films in the recent past situating romantic love between young men and women in other contexts. For instance, all of the five songs discussed in Chapter 3 occur within plots where the male and female protagonists are shown to be falling love in spaces outside of colleges. In 3 (2012),

the couple Ram and Janani are shown to be falling in love while in school itself and in *Oru Kal Oru Kannadi* (2012), Saravanan, who is employed with a private company, ‘pursues’ Meera through the streets of Chennai. In *Mayakkam Enna* (2011), the male lead is shown to be an aspiring photographer while the female lead is shown to be a working professional. Their love blossoms, once again, on the roads of Chennai. The other two films, *Kalakalappu* (2012) and *Kazhugu* (2012), are set in locations outside of Chennai, but adhere to the pattern of love between the male and female lead being enabled in settings outside of colleges. Therefore, if one were to accept the assertion that romantic love in Tamil cinema is increasingly seen to be developing outside of colleges then it must be read against the changing nature of screening venues for Tamil cinema and the redefined spectatorship over the last few years. Colleges in Tamilnadu have, for long, been envisaged and referenced not just as a crucial space for Tamil films to be set within, but also as a funnel or ready catchment of theatrical audiences for such films. The theatrical success of Tamil films cannot be read without taking into account the spatial coordinates of cities and towns in Tamilnadu and the options for mobility offered by them (Hughes 2006). Colleges, bus stands and theatres have traditionally been positioned as ‘natural’ spaces for youthful femininities and masculinities to play out in, by and for Tamil cinema. However, with more multiplexes being established in the state and screening spaces becoming increasingly gentrified (Athique 2011) despite state-directed caps on ticket prices, watching Tamil films in the theatre is no longer the only default leisure activity for college students, as it has been conceived of earlier. In such scenarios, the songs of the films, with their ubiquity, ease of access and possibilities for personal consumption, become even more important as filmic texts and may be read as carrying the burden of holding within themselves the mandate of the film itself, both before and after its theatrical release. Extending that argument, it is imperative then that the audiences’ ideas of romantic love, the possible trajectories of such love, its ‘failure’ and the audiences’ engagement with the songs of such ‘failure’ are examined in detail in order to comprehend the meaning-making processes that are operative amidst this reconfigured spectatorship.

During fieldwork, a majority of the thirty respondents reported that they had watched all of the five songs discussed in Chapter 3. Almost all of them had seen at least three out of the five songs before being interviewed (in case they had not watched it already, they were shown the song clips). However, most of them also claimed that they did not listen to these songs actively any more when asked in May 2013 (when the fieldwork was conducted). Some mentioned that their engagement with the songs subsequently was limited to not changing the channel when it appeared on television or played on the radio. The avenues to access these songs and their videos ranged from radio and television channels to websites from which they were downloaded onto the mobile phone or personal digital audio player and online video streaming sites like YouTube. At the time of fieldwork, all of the five songs had been in circulation for more than a year at least, with songs like *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* and *Why This Kolaveri* having enjoyed airplay for over a year and a half. Given that the songs being

referred to were not from a different era, most interviews started with an instant recognition of the songs mentioned. In the few cases where respondents said that a particular song had been heard but not watched (as it was the case a couple of times with the song *Ivalunga Imsai*, incidentally the last to be released out of the five), it was recognized as having been watched in passing while channel surfing on television, as soon as the video of the song was played to them. Twenty out of the thirty respondents claimed that they had watched at least two of the five movies, of which the songs were a part of. Most of them also said that they had watched these movies in the theatre with a bunch of friends or with family, while others stated that they had downloaded them from peer-to-peer sharing sites on the internet and watched them at home or in their hostel rooms. Many of them also recounted specific reactions when asked about how they had responded to some of these songs at the time of their release. Irene, a 23-year-old upper middle class woman from Chennai who works as a journalist in an English newspaper, speaks about how the song *Venaam Machan Venaam* ‘offended’ her when she first watched it in the theatres with her parents:

See, I am more into the lyrics than the music of the song, whether it’s an English song or a Tamil movie song. These lyrics, to some extent, did offend me. You know, it always makes out the woman to be the bad one. You don’t have any girl singing *Kolaveri* type songs. In Tamil cinema, it’s always the girl who breaks the guy’s heart. And if the guy is breaking the girl’s heart, it is always for a good reason. They always have noble intentions. Girls are always shown to have bad intentions or to misunderstand the guy.

For Irene, the songs of ‘love failure’ in Tamil cinema disproportionately pin the blame on the woman for the aforementioned ‘failure’ while often explaining away a male character’s decision to step away from love as a necessary or even ‘noble’ decision, reiterating the ‘for men, by men’ characterisation of Tamil cinema discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Further prodding with respect to why women in Tamil cinema are seldom seen singing about ‘love failure’ allows the discussion to hark back to familiar tropes about conduct that is acceptable and even possible for a woman within ‘Tamil culture.’ Sahana, a 25-year-old middle class woman from Salem pursuing her Master’s degree from a government university, brings up the lack of space for women to discuss their difficulties with respect to love:

Cinema is, after all, a reflection of what really happens. Women can often not find or access the spaces where conversations about ‘love failure’ and such topics can happen. Men, on the other hand, can stand near a tea stall and talk for hours. Women can’t do that. They’ll be considered...many things. In real life, women don’t have these alcohol parties where they can crib about their relationships. Yes, a certain class of women can afford that. But a large majority can’t. So when it doesn’t happen in real life, I don’t think we can blame the directors for not showing women singing onscreen about love failure. Maybe, because they don’t have a voice in real life, it doesn’t get translated on screen.

In arguing that the ‘alcohol parties,’ which often work as the setting for songs of ‘failed’ love in Tamil cinema, are not an option for most women in real life, Sahana activates a reading of the filmic space as an extension of physical spaces accessed by or forbidden to women in their day-to-day lives. By

doing so, her assertions further the position argued by Lefebvre (2006) who states that to speak of a filmic space is ‘to invoke a particular way we have of *representing* a given filmic space to ourselves, of *interpreting* it’ [emphasis author’s]. He goes on to suggest that ‘it implies reference to some way of *using* a film’ [emphasis author’s]. Sahana’s argument can, therefore, be read as an example of utilizing a filmic text to make meaning of anxieties surrounding the gendered nature of access to spaces in real life. Also, by suggesting that the producers of the filmic texts are merely reproducing these gendered modes faithfully onscreen, Sahana appears to be ascribing to the widely held view that cinema only reflects real-life happenings while pointing to the ways in which inequitable power relations within the society are ‘produced’ onscreen. However, it is crucial that these discussions are staged within larger frameworks operative in ‘controlling’ women, curtailing their access to certain kinds of spaces and consequently, delimiting specific interactions. For instance, when Sahana mentions that women would be considered ‘many things’ if they are found chatting outside a tea stall for hours, her concerns can be read with respect to codes of propriety that typically govern the lives (and the sexualities) of ‘Tamil women.’

A key pillar in the mechanisms of control embedded within the discourse of ‘Tamil culture’ is that of *karpu* (chastity). From *Thirukkural*, the venerated ancient Tamil text containing 1330 verses about different aspects of life, to Tamil epics such as *Silapathikaaram*, the kernel of ‘Tamil culture’ is often positioned as being centred on the chastity of the woman. These texts are regularly invoked in Tamilnadu, producing the continuance of ‘Tamil culture’ and its progress as being dependent on the woman ‘maintaining’ her virtuousness, a theme that gets mimicked and repeated in Tamil films songs even today. The foregrounding of such themes by Tamil cinema can be traced back to notable examples such as the film *Parasakthi* (R. Krishnan and S. Panju 1952), whose screenplay and dialogues were written by M Karunanidhi (who later went on to lead the political party DMK and become the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu). Popular for its fiery monologues, the film was initially opposed by the then ruling government for its atheist and non-Gandhian positions, but acquired cult status over the years, with its dialogues remembered and recited even today. Pandian (1991), in his analysis of *Parasakthi* as the ‘DMK film,’ speaks about how the film ‘valorised chastity and deployed it as a sign for Dravidanadu,’ marking chastity as an important pillar of Dravidian state as imagined by the Tamil nationalist party DMK. Referring to the ‘Tamil nationalism of the DMK’ as a ‘masculine dream,’ Anandhi (2005) argues that ‘women, as markers of Tamil national identity, had to reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct’ and that their ‘gender interests could only be articulated within these parameters, set by cultural nationalists.’ These sorts of boundaries continue to be operational as evidenced by the assertions of Raji, a 23-year-old middle class woman from Salem pursuing her Master’s degree from a government college. Raji points out to how the ‘rules’ of conduct apply differently to boys and girls:

There is this feeling, even within families that the male child is better than the female child. So, boys grow up all brave and entitled, while girls are trained to avoid trouble and be timid. Therefore, when a boy goes through 'love failure,' he can drink, sing and crib about it publicly. But a girl cannot mention her 'love failure' publicly. Even if the parents know about this affair, they will ask her to keep quiet about it. They think that if people get to know, the girl's marriage prospects will be affected adversely. But that is not a problem for boys. They can do whatever they want.

In Raji's analysis, articulations of 'love failure' by women are forbidden as they destabilize a carefully constructed image of chastity that women are supposed to embody both before and after marriage, reaffirming the theorisation by Anandhi (2005). Men, on the other hand, appear to be burdened by no such expectations. Suresh, a 22-year-old lower middle class man from Chennai working as a marketing executive with a private firm, also brought up the issue of women not being able to speak about 'love failure' openly so as to not jeopardize the chances of getting married. He also identified the concern of chastity affecting women disproportionately as a part of 'Tamil culture.' He then went on to speak about how rarely 'love failure' happens to women and how, more often than not, it is the woman who leaves the man, as shown in the songs discussed earlier in Chapter 3. Stating that women also 'acknowledge' the 'fact' that occurrence of 'love failure' skews towards men, he argues:

Even girls welcome love failure songs. During my college farewell party, at least 4 girls took the mic and sang love failure songs that were actually sung by guys in films. These were film songs that were scolding girls for leaving the guy. But still, these girls were singing them and other girls were clapping and enjoying. The credit for this must go to the music directors and the lyricists. You just have to see the messages that appear on the screen on Sun Music, when such songs play. Take *Venaam Machan Venaam*, for instance. The ticker on the screen will be full of messages from girls saying 'I like this song.' So, it is clear that girls are also going through love failure. But surely, it happens to guys more often. Girls also know that.

In using the perceived acceptance of songs of 'failed' love in Tamil cinema by girls, Suresh seeks to establish how these songs (and consequently, the themes that they touch upon) cut across gender lines. But in doing so, his assertions, like the views articulated by Sahana, come across as being sympathetic to the producers of 'love failure' songs. The 'reality' of these songs is painted to be a given, which then permits the blurring of boundaries between the reel and the real, and clears the decks for the use of such songs and their dominant readings as commentary on present-day Tamil society. Suresh also refers to the twenty four-hour music channel Sun Music and the ticker that appears on all of its shows (mostly dial-in music video programmes). The ticker displays a phone number and asks viewers to send song dedications or comments as text messages, which it then claims are displayed on the show. By framing his argument on the basis of the names of those who send these messages (the syntax demands that the sender's name be attached with the message) and further positing that those who seemingly like or enjoy the song must have also gone through 'love failure,' Suresh enables an understanding of the songs as cultural phenomena that allow for the *definition* of ideas of 'failed' love amidst or by audiences. Some female respondents, for instance, questioned the 'veracity' of some of

the claims made by songs of 'failed' love sung by male protagonists. Pointing out to a line in the song *Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum Avasaram* (discussed in Chapter 3) which suggests that girls only 'love' boys so as to get them to spend money, Kavita, a 20-year-old lower middle class woman from Chennai who is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in a government college, argues:

Nowadays, girls spend more money while in love. From what I know, girls spend lots more money when they go out with their lovers than boys do. Even the recharge for the boy's mobile phone is done by the girl. After doing all this, girls still get blamed for love failure and get painted as the bad person in the equation. But the truth is, girls also go through love failure quite often. It's just that boys can be open about such things. He can even put a Facebook status message saying 'I've gone through love failure.' But if girls do this, it will not be accepted.

Kavita reiterates Raji's concerns when she speaks about how boys can be 'open' about having gone through 'love failure.' The fact that she invokes the use of 'status messages' on an online social networking platform like Facebook to strengthen her point, gives rise to pertinent questions about the whether such platforms are the new, reconfigured 'public spheres.' Invoking notions of the 'public sphere' to refer to a 'realm of freedom' as discussed by Habermas (1991) allows for further investigation into the modes of address permitted and preferred within platforms like Facebook and what that may mean for gendered asymmetries in articulating 'failure' in love. Feminist critics, for instance, have questioned Habermas' defence of normativity in modern public spheres. Johnson (2006) goes on to suggest that 'Habermas' early efforts to shore up a division between the public and the private have been seen to require a repressive essentialisation of sets of power relations generated out of, and legitimated by, the conjugal family.' The same set of power relations appear to be operational when Raji refers to 'marriage prospects' getting affected or when Kavita speaks how it 'will not be accepted' if she articulates 'failure' in love.

But what does the phrase 'love failure' mean to audiences? In interactions with the respondents, it became apparent that 'love failure' was not being framed as one type of occurrence or happening. Rather, a number of scenarios were spoken about as pointing towards 'failure' in love, permitting the reading of 'love failure' as a spectrum of states of being as opposed to a unitary idea. A majority of the respondents categorically stated that romantic love which did not culminate in marriage was certainly 'love failure.' A few disagreed and suggested that 'love failure' could occur even after marriage. Some referred to even the denial of courtship by the man or woman they loved, as 'love failure.' In analysing the common threads between such divergent ideas, it soon became clear that the phrase 'love failure' was often being deployed to stand in for a temporary or permanent separation between lovers. It was also used to explain the recognition or acknowledgement of the 'impossibility' of one's love for the other, be it due to class or caste differences, or an outright rejection by the person they loved. A couple of male respondents even used the term 'love failure' to describe their inability to express their affections for the person they loved, reflecting the dilemma of the male lover in the song

*Idhayame Idhayame* discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Some male respondents referred to their friends' 'love failures' and mentioned that they had gotten 'soup,' utilizing the term popularised by actor and lyric writer Dhanush in the songs *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* and *Why This Kolaveri*, analysed earlier in Chapter 3. A couple of other respondents claimed that the term 'love failure' was archaic and that no one used them anymore. These respondents said that they preferred to use the term 'break-up' to describe a separation between lovers and explained that it felt more 'casual' and 'less dramatic.' However, twenty two out of the thirty respondents stated that 'love failure' was a 'real' thing and also, used the Tamil equivalents of the words 'common,' 'normal,' 'usual' and 'routine' to exposit the frequency of its occurrence in real life. Through the course of the interviews, there was often a distinction being drawn, although not consciously, by a number of respondents between having 'failed' in love and love having 'failed' them. Those respondents who claimed to have gone through 'love failure' tended to side with the latter proposition, analysing the ways in which separation was caused and invariably marking the 'failure' as 'unavoidable,' 'pre-destined' or even 'expected.'

Respondents, who answered in the negative when asked whether they had been through what they would call a 'love failure,' invariably said that they had met 'such' characters in the course of their day-to-day lives. Some of them referred to these people (invariably male) as being 'addicted' to love. A few female respondents said that they looked at claims of 'love failure' with derision, as they considered such claims to reflect attempts at invoking pity and/or unfairness to the other person involved. The same respondents also reported that they found cinematic portrayals of 'love failure' to be 'exaggerated.' In such interviews, phrases such as '*unmai-ye thaan kaatraanga*' (They are showing the truth only) were mentioned, only to be followed by an assertion on the lines of '*romba perusu padithi kaatraanga*' (They are making it bigger than it seems). On the other hand, those respondents, who claimed to have gone through 'love failure,' said that songs of 'failed' love were simply giving wings to the suppressed feelings of what they thought was a vast majority of 'failed' lovers in Tamilnadu. Some even attributed the success of the songs to their ability to reflect this '*adi manasu dhukkam*' (misery in the core of one's heart, typically arising from loss) in a catchy, easily transmittable/performable package. Nakulan, a 19-year old middle class male from Nagercoil pursuing his Bachelor's degree from a private college, mentioned how his friends used to sing the song *Venaam Machan Venaam* to him when they realised that he was falling in love. He states:

As soon as I told some of my friends that I was beginning to fall in love with girl from college, a couple of them sang the song *Venaam Machan Venaam*. I know my friends care for me. Just like how the friend's character in that film tries to help with the hero's love, my friends also support me, saying that I will be able to convince the girl to be with me. But what that song says is 100% true. One day, the girl I love may suddenly turn around and say that her marriage has been fixed. If that happens, I am sure that, again, only my friends would stand by me. Without friends, love failure would be very hard to deal with.

Nakulan's views can be read as being in sync with those espoused by the song *Kaadhal Kayangale*, discussed earlier in Chapter 2. The positioning of friendship with other young males by the male protagonist as a sort of defence mechanism to save oneself from the possible or even eventual difficulties anticipated, is a recurrent theme in Tamil cinema that finds expression in various modes, ranging from melancholy (as in the case of the song *Kaadhal Kayangale*) to foreboding (as in the case of song *Venaam Machan Venaam*). Of interest here is Nakulan's retelling of how his friends 'used' the song *Venaam Machan Venaam* to warn him. During interviews, the 'use value' of songs of 'failed' love was repeatedly brought up by many of the respondents. Female respondents reported that they had often heard their male friends sing or reference 'love failure' songs to make a strong statement or illustrate a point during everyday conversations. Some of the younger male respondents, like Nakulan, spoke about 'love failure' songs being sung to point to similarities in their own lives. Others like Rajesh, a 29-year-old middle class man from Krishnagiri working as a sales executive with a private firm in Chennai, spoke about how they used songs like *Why This Kolaveri* and *Venaam Machan Venaam* as ringtones and/or caller tunes (the tune heard by the caller when they call him on his mobile phone) to articulate how they were feeling about their own attempts at romantic love. Rajesh states:

I am in the field of sales and people keep calling me all the time. So, I also keep changing my caller tunes to reflect my mood. As soon as I find a song that says what's on my mind, I set it as my caller tune. There are many nice, catchy film songs. But what is important is the message that I am trying to give. When I had *Why This Kolaveri* as my caller tune, people thought it was because of its immense popularity. But the song affected me on a personal level, as I had also gone through love failure then. The music isn't a big deal. It is the thought behind the song that really counts.

While some respondents pointed to the 'catchiness' of songs, their lively beats and their simple tunes which made them hummable as the reasons for initially getting hooked to the songs, others like Rajesh were more concerned about what he calls the 'thought' of the song (he actually used the English word 'thought' in conversation). The caller tune on his phone then functions as a mode of self-expression and the filmic text mobilizes his expression in a manner that he considers worthy of being shared with others who try to call him. He paints the setting up of this technology of self-expression (or representation by proxy) and the utilisation of the filmic text as an activity that provides him with pleasure. It would, therefore, be imprudent to conclude that songs in Tamil cinema are produced only to serve as additional material designed to lead to theatrical engagement, or, as it has been previously argued, to serve as welcome or necessary interruptions in the narrative schema of Tamil films. The Tamil film song, it must be clarified, is produced to be performed, shared, referenced, mimicked, discussed and deployed by the audiences. In the case of 'love failure' songs, such use cases play out in ways that simultaneously accentuate and retool existing ideas pertaining to audiences, their reception of the filmic texts and the meaning making processes activated by them. During discussions about 'love failure' songs, respondents were also asked about the causes of 'love failure' as they saw it and about what 'success' in love meant for them. The answers received

intricately entwined causes of ‘love failure’ and ideas of ‘successful’ love in ways that complicated the understanding of meanings made by audiences. Questions pertaining to ‘failed’ love were invariably answered with direct (and sometimes, oblique) references to marriage. A majority of respondents squarely positioned marriage as the ‘real’ marker of ‘success’ in love, painting circumstantial and societal hurdles in the path to marriage as the number one cause for ‘love failure.’ The heterosexual conjugal family unit was clearly defined as the preferred end state for lovers, with songs of ‘failed’ love in Tamil cinema framed as expressions of anxiety surrounding what appears to be the ‘impossibility’ of this occurrence to the male protagonist in these songs.

Such discussions also led to interesting observations by respondents about the ways in which society responded to romantic love vis-à-vis marriage. A majority of the respondents, for instance, claimed that while men and women did not consider the caste of the other person while falling in love, marriage could never be a possibility without the caste equations of the couple being settled in an ‘acceptable’ manner. As argued by Chadda (1997), caste and language have for long served as the ‘principal bases of Tamil nationalism.’ While Tamil linguistic pride continues to be directly referenced in a variety of contexts both in day-to-day life in Tamilnadu and in Tamil film songs, narratives pertaining to caste affiliations have increasingly moved out of the ambit of Tamil cinema. Of late, Tamil film producers, in their attempt to avoid trouble during screenings of the film or a ban being imposed on the film by the state or even non-state actors, have been steering clear of plots based on caste discrimination and/or caste relations, with explicit articulations of caste ethos being not just out of question, but also looked being down upon as ‘regressive.’ For instance, Krishnan (2008), while speaking about how Tamil films, in the last few years, have resorted to privileging Chennai as the marker of both social and economic progress, argues that this has been achieved by portraying the southern parts of Tamilnadu as being ‘backward,’ with their entrenchment in caste politics held up as the totem to justify this ‘backwardness.’ Referring to the film *Kaadhal* (Balaji Sakhivel 2004) which dealt with teenage love between an affluent school girl and a mechanic, Krishnan (2008) states that ‘the caste identities of the characters are verbally unsaid in the film but anyone who knows the everyday markers of the castes can immediately guess them.’ Anand (2005), while discussing the same film (whose title is the Tamil word for ‘love’), puts forth the following account:

An aspiring filmmaker friend who watched *Kaadhal* in a Madurai cinema talked of how Thevars--the dominant 'backward caste' of the southern districts--in the hall shouted aloud: 'Fuckers, this will be your fate if you think you can get our girl.' Dalits watching the movie in the southern districts were intimidated both by the depiction of the hero and by the participative enthusiasm of the Thevars among the audience.

Romantic love, therefore, has always been feared and curtailed for its ability to transcend existing caste equations. Also, the contestations around romantic love in such scenarios have always played out on the bodies of women, which are vested with ‘honour’ that must then be protected at all costs.

'Honour' killings of couples who dare to step outside caste boundaries continue to occur in Tamilnadu at chillingly regular intervals. Thufail (2010), writing for the magazine *Tehelka*, quotes Kathir, an employee of a Madurai-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) called Evidence, who points to how 90% of the 1,971 cases of women's suicides from January 2008 to June 2010 involved women under the age of 30 and how a majority of them could be 'honour' killings, passed off as suicides and committed to prevent inter-caste marriages. Therefore, any discussion pertaining to romantic love and marriage in Tamil society cannot be considered useful without an analysis of the ways in which caste operates. Some respondents answered specific questions about the role played by caste in causing 'love failure' with brief but focussed delineations that illuminated the complex ways in which such phenomena operate within society. Patrick, a 23-year-old lower middle class man from Kanyakumari pursuing his Master's degree from a government college, declared that specific caste identities were no longer being hailed in the district that he was from and mentioned that it was now a question of what he refers to as 'categories.' He states:

When it comes to love and marriage, no one looks at particular castes in my area. Instead, they try to find people in the same caste category. I belong to the Backward Caste category. So, my parents will look for a girl from the same background. That's all. They will not say that I should get married to a girl from this particular caste or that particular caste. If I find someone from the same category, they would be okay with it. But there's no chance of them trying to marry me off to someone from, say, the Scheduled Caste category. That's because their lifestyle and background is not good. It will not match our lifestyle. I've seen some Scheduled Caste people who have come upon money recently. They show off blatantly. It will not work out if I marry someone from a family like that.

Patrick's assertions provide yet another dimension to issues pertaining to caste, love and marriage. In adopting the administrative classification of castes to describe the determination of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' marriage choices, he exposes the fault lines of prejudices about other caste groups using a vocabulary that postures caste categories as the primary handle through which citizen subjects render themselves as identifiable to the state and subsequently, to themselves (Bairi 2012). Like Patrick, a number of respondents mentioned that it was the parents who were particular about caste. Mani, a 25-year-old lower middle class man from Villupuram studying in a government university, spoke about the gendered nature of caste equations as understood and articulated by parents. He mentioned how, in his village and surrounding areas, it was acceptable (though not preferred) for a boy belonging to a Backward Caste community to marry a Dalit girl and how that equation, if upturned, would get both the boy and the girl killed. According to him, a 'lower' caste boy marrying or even trying to court an 'upper' caste girl was always considered as an attempt at upward social mobility and such attempts were invariably closed off by 'upper' caste men seeking to protect the honour of 'their' women and consequently, their caste identity itself. Some of the respondents went on to narrate instances of friends not being able to marry their lovers over such caste differences. Also, six upper middle class respondents from Chennai (male and female) claimed that caste would not be a

major consideration if they fell in love with someone and wanted to marry that person, with some of them even stating that caste had to be looked at an ‘individual’ level and was becoming ‘irrelevant nowadays.’ This is in sync with the often-implicit framing of caste as, in the words of Bairy (2012), ‘a *private* value-practice for the urban, educated, middle class, “upper caste” subject’ and ‘a *public* identity of the “lower castes”’ [emphasis author’s], and can be read as an extension of the tendency to limit caste ‘to the electoral political space’ while negating ‘its continuing and resilient role in the distribution of life chances in contemporary India.’ The connections between caste and honour were reactivated in some interviews, when respondents spoke about how marrying outside the caste would give the family a ‘bad name’ in society and how parents were morbidly scared of what relatives, neighbours and friends would say if they sanctioned a relationship between their child and a person belonging to another caste. Bhanu, a 22-year-old middle class woman from Chennai working with an English newspaper, suggested that societal pressure to adhere to caste norms was a leading cause for ‘love failure’ and mentioned that it was often impossible to ‘convince’ parents if caste was the only issue in ‘accepting’ the other person. Interestingly, she attributed the success of the ‘love failure’ songs in question to their ability to articulate this sticky situation of having realised the ‘impossibility’ of love, but not being able to move away, a state that she felt was immediately identifiable for young men and women across Tamilnadu.

Differences in religious practices were also pointed out as a key factor in causing ‘love failure,’ during interviews. For instance, Taufeeq, a 25-year old middle class man from Madurai working as a marketing executive with a private firm, spoke about growing up with Hindu and Christian male friends, and how they all knew that, irrespective of their close friendships, they could never marry someone from each other’s families. He also brought up the issue of how falling in love with a friend’s sister or any other female relative was considered the worst form of betrayal and how that was a ‘sure’ way to lose that friendship *and* land up with ‘love failure.’ Interestingly, he also mentioned how this theme had been dealt with in a number of Tamil films and how the ‘ideal’ mode of action prescribed by most of these films (privileging friendship over romantic love) was the ‘good’ thing to do, thereby reaffirming the patriarchal tendency to think of the male friend’s female relative as friend’s ‘property’ and any exploration of romantic love in such scenarios as ‘trespass.’ Often, male respondents, while speaking about the women they love/loved, used analogies of dispossession to refer to difficulties in romantic love and/or rejection. Some of them spoke about the pain of ‘*ezhappu*’ (loss), while others spoke how a decision taken by the woman to part ways was the worst form of ‘*tholvi*’ (defeat) in love. Women were often referred to as ‘*porul*’ (things) and the ‘*aasai*’ (desire) for such ‘things’ was positioned as the signal for the eventuality of ‘love failure.’ Some women respondents, on the other hand, spoke of men pursuing them aggressively whilst claiming to be in

love with them. This was described as '*veri*'<sup>5</sup> (rage) which induced '*bhayam*' (fear), with some of them lamenting the lack of 'decency' amidst such young men. 'Decency' was then qualified with the Tamil words for 'respectable' and 'honourable,' with 'success' in love often being linked to these qualities and '*porumai*' (patience).

But over the course of 30 interviews, the number one impediment to 'success' in love was pointed out to be differences in class (or 'status,' as some of the respondents referred to it). In the case of respondents who had mentioned that they had gone through 'love failure,' further questioning with respect to the circumstances leading to the said 'failure' invariably led to discussions about class identities and hierarchies. These axes, which appear to have been largely internalised, were also brought up during conversations. Most of the respondents, while engaging in such discussions, remarked that romantic love between an upper class person and a lower class person was something that was clearly 'impractical' in what some of them referred to as Tamil society's '*nadaimurai*' (worldly ways). Some of the respondents, for instance, delved into specific ways in which asymmetries in class positions played out within the arena of romantic love. Arun, a 24-year-old lower middle class man from Chennai working as an office assistant with a private firm, argues that pragmatism, with respect to the possibilities of couple formation vis-à-vis one's own class position, could help avoid 'love failure':

If a girl is of high status, then it's best to avoid her. For instance, if her father is, say, a bank manager, it is likely that she would have a big house, a car and other comforts. Even if she happens to like a low class boy who manages to 'look' middle class, it will not work out the moment he reveals to her that he is poor. Out of hundred girls, there will perhaps be about five girls who will still stick to that boy. But mostly, they will walk away. And that's because they are used to living in high status. They will have an air-conditioned room. Their house will have a dining table. They will get breakfast in the morning. Different items will be prepared for lunch. If they come to the boy's house and see that it is only one room, obviously they will not want to continue the relationship. They will definitely cut him off. This scenario has been seen in so many films and is a main reason for the appearance of a love failure song. Shouldn't we see these things, think about whether it would work out and take a decision accordingly? That way, it's better for everybody involved.

Arun's understanding of economic status as a clearly insurmountable barrier falls in line with the posturing adopted by many of the 'love failure' songs discussed so far, with his views feeding into their general cynicism about rejection as an inevitable occurrence if one is poor. In framing the 'love failure' song as 'good' advice that provides the scope to avoid (and not just deal with) the pain of separation during romantic love, Arun allows for a reading of the 'love failure' songs in Tamil cinema against the backdrop of assertions by Dyer (1985), as cited in Dickey (1995), that while entertainment 'responds to real needs created by society,' it also tends to help produce 'what constitutes the

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<sup>5</sup> This is the same construction that gets deployed in the term *Kolaveri*, where *kolai* refers to a killing or a murder and *veri* points to rage or frenzy.

legitimate needs of people in the society.’ Romantic love or the need for it has been legitimised beyond doubt by Tamil cinema. Nonetheless, it is also proscribed by a number of factors which delimits this legitimacy to apply only to heterosexual, able-bodied persons from similar caste and class positions. This can then be seen as an attempt by Tamil film producers (almost always upper class, upper-middle class and middle class persons) to frame filmic texts in such ways that dominant ideas of what is ‘good’ for society and how the social order can be preserved as is, find repeated expression. The elites’ ability to manage the maintenance of a status quo with respect to the social order comes across as being particularly powerful, while examining some of statements made by respondents. For example, Thiru, a 27-year-old middle class man from Chennai working with a private engineering firm, speaks of how ideas of class mobility have undergone a change in terms of its portrayal in Tamil film songs:

If you watch Rajni’s films, he will go being from poor to extremely rich over the course of one song. But that is Rajni’s appeal. He offers hope like that. But today’s films are more realistic. If you look at some of Dhanush’s films, his status is the same from beginning to end. It does not change very much. When young men sing about ‘love failure,’ they are not speaking about having lost hope in love, but in life itself. But in most of these movies, if you notice, love always wins in the end. And watching that gives us some hopes that if you struggle like anything, good things will happen to you. But once you walk out of the theatre, you realise that applies to love, but not status.

Thiru, in one go, pulls together a number of threads, ranging from the transformation of the male protagonist vis-à-vis the divergent roles played by ‘superstar’ Rajnikanth and his son-in-law Dhanush to the selective ways in which hope emanates from the screen and operates in spheres such as romantic love and class mobility. He paints as ‘real’ the inescapability of one’s own class position, while acknowledging Tamil cinema’s role in easing some insecurities with respect to life outcomes when one is involved in an ‘unacceptable’ courtship. But in posturing ‘love failure’ songs as embodying the nadir of hope in life, his reading of such songs allows for them to be understood as the ultimate vehicle of insecurities, with respect to social and economic status. Such assertions serve to upturn notions of popular cinema as purely ‘escapist’ or mindlessly fantastic. Thiru’s views on the possibilities enabled by Tamil film songs and the meanings produced while engaging with them, when seen alongside the assertions of many of the other respondents, push for newer explorations of ideologies in cultural forms such as popular film songs and the ways in which audiences embrace and/or challenge them.

The last few years, with crucial changes in the nature of spectatorship and sweeping advances in terms of the distribution avenues available to the songs and films, have only served to solidify such demands. The hyper-connected, market-led socio-cultural complex that Tamil film songs (and especially the songs of ‘love failure’) find themselves embedded in seems to have modified the ways in which the ideas put forth by the songs transcend the screen and render themselves available to

audiences, in their efforts to make sense of changing class, caste and gender positions and the bearing of these changes on romantic love. The songs, therefore, go beyond their hitherto understood role of assuaging the anxieties pertaining to love in the case of young men and women in Tamilnadu, and begin to acquire a social life where the 'love failure'-ridden protagonist becomes an important narrator of the socio-political context in Tamilnadu, thereby offering a ringside view of the meaning-making processes operative in such contexts. And as it has been discussed earlier in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, this is almost always a certain kind of male protagonist, i.e., one who falls in love despite knowledge of its 'impossibility' and rues love itself. The commonalities between such protagonists go beyond just their claimed status of having 'failed' in love, and extend to the modes in which their anger and/or anguish about said failure is articulated. Certain tropes with respect to women's roles in Tamil society, and possibilities and impossibilities associated with courtly love and marriage, appear to get repeated while others, pertaining to caste and class identities and their role in enabling or delimiting romantic love, get rearticulated while adhering to notions of 'acceptability' that reflect the dominant modes pervasive in Tamil society. The 'responsiveness' that these songs seem to demonstrate (as mentioned by many of those interviewed) with respect to 'reflecting' a Tamil society in flux then furthers their claims to a particular kind of 'realism,' one in which the 'reel' not only accentuates experiences of the 'real,' but also springs forth to define it.

## CHAPTER 5: THE INEVITABLE ‘SOUP’

In May 2013, when the fieldwork for this study was being conducted in Chennai, one of the summer releases running to packed houses in the theatres was the film *Ethir Neechal* (Durai Senthilkumar 2013). Produced by actor Dhanush, the film *Ethir Neechal* (Swimming against the tide) was a comedy drama, starring a bunch of relatively-new young actors and had music composed by Anirudh Ravichander, who burst into the Tamil film music scene with the hit ‘single’ *Why This Kolaveri*. The film featured a guest appearance by the producer Dhanush in the song *Sathiyama Nee Ennaku Thevaiye Ille* (I promise I don’t need you). The director of the film, Durai Senthilkumar, wrote the lyrics for the song (referred to as ‘Local Boys’ in the official soundtrack album) and it was sung by Dhanush and playback singer Velmurugan. The song is set in an outdoor bar, where the male protagonist, played by actor Sivakarthiskeyan, is seen drinking away the sorrows of his ‘love failure’ along with a male friend. An altercation ensues with a couple of rough-looking chaps in the bar, who taunt Sivakarthiskeyan’s character for whining about ‘love failure.’ One of the ruffians mocks him for not taking the ‘simple’ route of wooing the girl, renting a room on East Coast Road (a long stretch of road on the outskirts of Chennai lined with beaches and farmhouses available on rent), and finishing the ‘matter’ (a reference to sexual intercourse). As they berate a visibly upset Sivakarthiskeyan, the ruffians are attacked and sent flying.

The rhythm pattern of the drums in the background score paces up and marks the on-screen appearance of a silhouette of Dhanush downing alcohol, straight from the bottle. He looks straight into the camera, demolishes any semblance of a fourth wall, and promises that while he never interferes in anyone else’s business, he would not tolerate anyone disturbing ‘love failure’ boys. Upon being asked who he is, Dhanush declares that he is also a ‘soup boy’ like Sivakarthiskeyan’s character, referring to his own coinage of the term to denote young men who claim to have gone through ‘love failure,’ popularised through songs such as *Kaadhal En Kaadhal* and *Why This Kolaveri*. He goes on to ask Sivakarthiskeyan and his friend to look around and assures them that there are many more like him. As he finishes uttering these lines, a series of men across age groups (including a couple of elderly men) raise their hands and claim that they too are ‘soup boys.’ The song, then, starts with Dhanush pacifying a weeping Sivakarthiskeyan, as the other men in the bar take their positions around the duo and start dancing, alcohol bottles in hand. Dhanush and Sivakarthiskeyan join in and the fast-paced song plays out as a summary covering many of the tropes of ‘love failure’ songs discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, thereby mimicking the power relations within which these songs tend to be embedded and the modes in which they are engaged with. Actor Nayanthara puts in a ‘special’ appearance, dancing with Dhanush as he sings about how men cannot cry over ‘love failure’ and have to move on. Dhanush also blames women for coming into the lives of men and destroying them, and

asks whether he was a fool to have run around crazily trying to earn money to provide for her. But he also declares that his heart has no place for anyone except his lover, thereby fitting the song back into the seemingly standard graph followed by most of the ‘love failure’ songs analysed so far. In framing Dhanush as the patron saint of sorts to ‘soup boys’ and attempting to embody in him what is suggested to be a widely-prevalent state for young heterosexual men in Tamilnadu, the song tries to bring about a mode of address that predicates itself on no longer needing to contextualise the phenomena of a ‘love failure.’ Of import here is Dhanush’s dialogue as he looks straight into the camera in his introductory scene, serving to formalise the imagined collective of men having gone ‘love failure’ as ‘soup boys.’ Dhanush, therefore, not only creates the category, but also stages its acceptance and attempts to demonstrate the perceived validity of such interpellation. In doing so, he allows a certain sense of ‘normativeness’ to apply to the ‘lovesick loser’ mode of male protagonists (discussed in Chapter 2) that contemporary commercial Tamil cinema seems to favour and/or privilege. This may be evidenced by the steady stream of ‘love failure’ songs featuring such male protagonists to have been released since then.

In May 2013, another ‘love failure’ song titled *Yemathita* (She cheated me), from the film *Yaaruda Mahesh* (Who is Mahesh?; Madhan Kumar 2013), was released as a ‘single’ through a music video featuring the male protagonist and his friend dancing with other men, near a bar. Soon after, two songs from two different upcoming Tamil films were announced for release as ‘singles’ with music videos and both of them were promoted by their respective producers as ‘love failure anthems.’ The less popular one amongst them was the song titled *Kaila Bottle* (Bottle in hand) from the film *160 km* (Sathish 2013). The song’s release was presided over by veteran playback singer S P Balasubramaniam who also sang the one of the most famous ‘love failure’ songs in Tamil cinema, *Ennadi Meenatchi* (discussed earlier in Chapter 2). The track *Kaila Bottle*, at one point, even directly references *Why This Kolaveri*, the song often touted to have opened the flood gates for the release of a whole range of ‘love failure’ songs in Tamil cinema. But the song *Kaila Bottle* did not attain even a fraction of the popularity enjoyed by *Why This Kolaveri*. A month later, in June 2013, the other ‘love failure anthem’ titled *Kaadhala Kandupidichadhu Yaaru* (Who discovered love?) was released to promote a film titled *Kutralam* (Sanjayram 2013). The music video for the song was widely promoted online and received a minor spurt of attention from English news media outlets in the form of reports stating that major stars had appreciated the makers of the song (Ramanujam 2013). The song, however, petered out of circulation rather quickly. A couple of months later, yet another ‘love failure’ number was released when the song *Enge Ponaalum* (Where ever you go), from the film *Idharkuthane Aasaipattai Balakumara* (Isn’t this what you wished for, Balakumara?; Gokul 2013), was launched as a ‘single.’ The song featured the male protagonist, played by upcoming indie film star Vijay Sethupathi, singing about the various forms of bad luck that ought to haunt the woman who left him. The song, detailing a number of ‘petty’ ways in which the ex-lover could be inconvenienced,

was an instant success and offered possibilities for actor Vijay Sethupathi to be positioned as one of the most viable contenders for films deploying the ‘lovesick loser’ mode of male protagonists. In fact, when asked about Vijay Sethupathi’s career graph, Dhanush, by now recognized as the face of the ‘love failure’ turn in Tamil cinema, is reported to have said ‘just wait and watch, he will become bigger than me’ (Kamath 2013). At around the same time, the run of ‘love failure’ songs in Tamil films continued with the release of the track *Indha Ponnungale Ippadithaan* (These girls are like this only) from the film *Varuthapadatha Valibar Sangam* (Carefree youth association; Ponram 2013). The audio soundtrack of the film was launched by actor Dhanush and the male lead of the film was actor Sivakarthikeyan, who earlier appeared with Dhanush in the film *Ethir Neechal* (2013). Different from most other ‘love failure’ songs of the season in the sense that it was not set in an urban background, the song *Indha Ponnungale Ippadithaan*, once again, featured the male protagonist and his male friend, drinking and singing about how women are out to break men’s hearts. Thus, the rendition of the concept of ‘love failure’ continues through the Tamil film song, with new filmic texts being produced with seemingly unflinching regularity and little variation, save for minor alterations in the tone and manner of expression.

But Tamil cinema’s apparent preoccupation with the phenomena of ‘love failure’ cannot be reduced to readings that deploy the classical frame of understanding this phenomena as merely producers ‘supplying’ what the audience is ‘demanding.’ Often, the success of these songs is passed off as evidence to further such arguments, reflecting what can only be termed as deductive reasoning that does not account for the complexity of dialectics pertaining to ‘love failure’ as constructed by the filmic texts and as envisaged by audiences. Before declaring that songs of ‘love failure’ are recurrent in Tamil cinema because they ‘work,’ it is imperative to question and analyse ‘why’ it appears to ‘work’ and with ‘whom.’ Such queries must also be contextualised against fundamental questions of whether they even ‘work,’ how they ‘work’ if they indeed do so and what are the possibilities mobilised by the heterosexual young male protagonists who seem to be inveterate ‘failures’ in love, in such portrayals. This study has pertained itself chiefly with some of these questions and has attempted to locate these queries within the cultural frameworks activated by Tamil cinema.

Hence, the genealogy of ‘love failure’ as seen to be experienced by young heterosexual male protagonists in Tamil cinema has been traced through a series of songs spanning across decades, with each song adding and/or remaking certain contours of ‘love failure’ as imagined by producers of Tamil films over the years. In doing so, their assessment of and response to changes in spectatorship has also been delineated. Additionally, the seemingly-increased frequency of ‘love failure’ songs in the last few years has been discussed through five popular songs in an attempt to capture the various flows operative in these recent filmic texts, and the articulations and disarticulations enabled by them vis-à-vis ideas of ‘love failure’ propped by songs until then. In order to extend beyond the text and

grapple with the idea of ‘love failure’ outside the screen, where meaning is known to be produced, there has been an attempt to provide an understanding of audiences’ engagement with these filmic texts. The ways in which young men and women in Tamilnadu appear to be making meaning of ideas of ‘love failure’ within the social contexts that they find themselves inserted in, have also been explored. But much scope exists for far more detailed explorations of audience reception and meaning-making processes, which would then allow for more nuanced engagement with the ways in which ideological positions contained within the screen transcend its membrane and operate within the socio-cultural complex inhabited by audiences. Given the intricate circuits of power traversed and furthered by Tamil filmic texts, the possibilities offered by the various intersectionalities for rigorous study is immense and not to mention, underexplored.

In terms of strands that function both independently and as a part of the fabric of a rapidly evolving Tamil cinema, production and exhibition practices, spectatorship, gender roles, class and caste identities, fan cultures and many other concerns are yet to be explored and analysed against the reconstituted ideas of Tamil society and its trysts with broader flows such as globalisation, urbanisation and newer modes of consumption. Such analyses would undoubtedly serve as invaluable resources for those seek to understand not just the changing nature of the Tamil film industry, but also the recasting of Tamil society as it were. In asking the question ‘*Why this kaadhalveri?*’ (Why this rage of love?) and choosing to ask it through the Tamil film song, there has been an attempt to draw into the ambit many of the concerns mentioned above and delve into the codes that signal these concerns and the conditions that produce them, within and outside of the realm of popular culture. The theme of ‘love failure’ as evinced in Tamil cinema has served as an interesting, if unconventional, handle to anchor this exploration of the ‘real’ within the ‘reel’ and vice versa, and this work is but a modest contribution to the understanding of the relationship between cinema, culture and society.

## APPENDIX I: FILMOGRAPHY

(in alphabetical order)

- 160 km.* Directed by Sathish. 2013.
3. Directed by Aishwarya Dhanush. 2012.
- Aangalai Nambatheey.* Directed by K Alex Pandian. 1987.
- Azhagai Irukkirai Bayamai Irukkirathu.* Directed by Vijay Milton. 2006.
- Devadas.* Directed by Vedantam Raghavaiah. 1953.
- Ethir Neechal.* Directed by Durai Senthilkumar. 2013.
- Idharkuthane Aasaipattai Balakumara.* Directed by Gokul. 2013.
- Idhayam.* Directed by Kathir. 1991.
- Idhaya Thamarai.* Directed by K Rajeshwar. 1990.
- Ilamai Oonjal Aadikirathu.* Directed by C V Sridhar. 1978.
- Kaadhal.* Directed by Balaji Sakthivel. 2004.
- Kalakalappu.* Directed by C Sundar. 2012.
- Kalathur Kannama.* Directed by A Bhimsingh. 1960.
- Kalidas.* Directed by H M Reddy. 1931.
- Kalyana Parisu.* Directed by C V Sridhar. 1959.
- Kazhugu.* Directed by Sathyasiva. 2012.
- Kulamagal Radhai.* Directed by A P Nagarajan. 1963.
- Kutralam.* Directed by Sanjayram. 2013.
- Mayakkam Enna.* Directed by Selvaraghavan. 2011.
- Minnale.* Directed by Gautham Menon. 2001.
- Mythili Ennai Kaadhali.* Directed by T Rajendar. 1986.
- Oru Kal Oru Kannadi.* Directed by M Rajesh. 2012.
- Pannakara Kudumbam.* Directed by T R Ramanna. 1964.
- Parasakthi.* Directed by R Krishnan and S Panju. 1952.
- Paravaigal Palavitham.* Directed by Rajasekhar and Robert. 1988.
- Premabhishekam.* Directed by Dasari Narayana Rao. 1981.
- Sigappu Rojakkal.* Directed by P Bharathiraja. 1978.
- Thai Maman.* Directed by Gurudhanapal. 1994.
- Vanambadi.* Directed by G R Nathan. 1963.
- Varuthapadatha Valibar Sangam.* Directed by Ponram. 2013.
- Vasantha Maligai.* Directed by K S Prakash Rao. 1972.
- Vazhve Maayam.* Directed by R Krishnamoorthy. 1982.
- Yaaruda Mahesh.* Directed by Madhan Kumar. 2013.

## **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Hometown:

- 1) When and where did you first listen to these songs? Do you still listen to them? If yes, how often?
- 2) Have you watched the movies that feature these songs? Where did you watch them and with whom?
- 3) Do you recall how you reacted when you heard them for the first time?
- 4) What are your views on the depiction of romantic love in these songs?
- 5) Do you identify with what the protagonist says/sings in these songs? Do you agree/disagree with him? Why?
- 6) Have you seen people like these protagonists in real life? If yes, when? Where? How would you describe them?
- 7) What are your thoughts on Tamil cinema's depiction of 'love failure'?
- 8) What are your views on falling in love? Would you consider yourself to be in love with someone currently? Why do you think it is love?
- 9) Why do you think these songs are so popular?
- 10) Do you think that there is 'true' love and 'false' love? If yes, then what do you think are the distinctions? Would you consider the protagonists' love in these songs true? What about the girl's response to the same?
- 11) How would you describe the protagonists in these songs? If you were asked to extrapolate their success in life based on these songs, what would you say?
- 12) What are your views on being rejected in love? What is the best way to avoid or overcome it?
- 13) Why do you think romantic love plays such a huge role in Tamil cinema?
- 14) Do you think that some of the lyrics in these songs are disrespectful to women in general? If yes, then how so? Also, do you think that these songs encourage or promote violence against women?
- 15) How common do you think are the problems that these songs refer to? Do these problems occur everywhere or only in the cities?
- 16) Why do the protagonists in these songs attribute their troubles to love and the woman they're in love with? Do you think this is a correct assessment? Why?
- 17) Have you had any experience with being rejected by someone you've been in love with? If yes, how did it make you feel and how did you deal with it?

- 18) What are your views on how modernity is spoken about in these songs? Who is a 'modern' man?  
Who is a 'modern' woman?
- 19) What are your thoughts on what is referred to as the 'pain' of love? Is it a pain? If yes, then why do you think so?
- 20) Why do you think we seldom see women in Tamil cinema sing about the perils of love or being rejected in love?

**APPENDIX III: DETAILS OF INTERVIEWEES**

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age (in years)	Hometown	Occupation
1	Anita	Female	25	Salem	Chartered Accountant
2	Sneha	Female	22	Chennai	Intern at a English newspaper
3	Raji	Female	23	Salem	Masters student in a government medical college
4	Priya	Female	23	Chennai	Journalist with an English newspaper
5	Sahana	Female	25	Chennai	Masters student in a government university
6	Kavita	Female	20	Chennai	Bachelors student in a government college
7	Bhanu	Female	22	Chennai	Journalist with an English newspaper
8	Deepa	Female	24	Chennai	Journalist with an English newspaper
9	Irene	Female	23	Chennai	Journalist with an English newspaper
10	Gowri	Female	20	Chennai	Bachelors student in a government college
11	Krishna	Male	25	Chennai	Manager at a private firm
12	Harish	Male	24	Chennai	Intern at a government medical college
13	Rajesh	Male	29	Krishnagiri	Sales executive at a private firm
14	Lokesh	Male	25	Chennai	Engineer with a private firm
15	Mani	Male	25	Villupuram	Masters student in a government university
16	Patrick	Male	23	Kanyakumari	Masters student in a government university
17	Sarath	Male	24	Chennai	Marketing executive at a private firm

18	Prakash	Male	26	Chennai	Analyst at a private firm
19	Murugan	Male	24	Chennai	Car reviewer for a website
20	Akhilan	Male	23	Vellore	Masters student in a government university
21	Nataraj	Male	21	Chennai	Bachelors student in a private engineering college
22	Taufeeq	Male	25	Madurai	Marketing executive at a private firm
23	Arun	Male	24	Chennai	Office assistant at a private firm
24	Suresh	Male	22	Chennai	Marketing executive at a private firm
25	Thiru	Male	27	Pondicherry	Civil engineer at a private firm
26	Venkat	Male	22	Salem	Masters student in a government college
27	Narayanan	Male	28	Chennai	Journalist with an English newspaper
28	Aditya	Male	23	Trichy	Mechanical engineer with a private firm
29	Sukumar	Male	23	Kanchipuram	Business development executive with a private firm
30	Nakulan	Male	19	Nagercoil	Bachelors student in a private college

## APPENDIX IV: TRANSLATIONS OF SELECTED SONGS

All of the songs mentioned below (discussed earlier in Chapter 3) have been translated by me.

Song: Kaadhal En Kaadhal

Movie: Mayakkam Enna

Producer: Gemini Film Circuit and Aum Productions

Director: Selvaraghavan

Music Director: GV Prakash Kumar

Lyricist: Dhanush and Selvaraghavan

Soundtrack Release Date: September 2011

Music Label: Gemini Audio

Love, my love,  
Is in tears.  
Gone, it is,  
Along with the water.

*(dialogue)*

Brother! Let it go!  
Aye! Let me sing.  
I will definitely sing!  
Fine! Sing and get it done with.

Love, my love,  
Is in tears.  
Gone, it is,  
Along with the water.

Bruises, new bruises,  
There are, inside me.  
My wounded heart,  
Is now in hot water.

Hit her!  
Kick her!  
Leave her!

No need of her!  
Can't understand anything,  
Can't see the world.  
It didn't work out,  
And now, there's nothing.

Spinning, my head is spinning,  
Due to the beer I just downed.  
Lie down, lie down for a bit,  
You'll snap out of it when you have buttermilk in the morning.  
Spinning, my head is spinning,  
Due to the beer I just downed.  
Lie down, lie down for a bit,  
You'll snap out of it when you have buttermilk in the morning.

Thousands of times, you told me,  
But I didn't listen.  
In soup (love failure), I remain,  
My heart can't take it anymore.

Small, small dreams I had had,  
She poured acid into my eyes.  
My friend, you're crying, it hurts me,  
She isn't worth it, at all.

A heart brimming with honey,  
Is now filled with liquor.  
What do I say?  
Oh, the boat is there,  
So are the nets.  
Are there not other fish in the sea?

No need, brother, no need of this passion for love,  
Women are the bane of our existence.  
I learnt this by chasing them,  
I have suffered and god, I've had enough.

*(chorus)*

Hit her!  
Kick her!  
Leave her!  
No need of her!

Eyes like deer,  
Words like honey.  
She was my parrot,  
And I was the sacrifice.

Lover,  
Merciless woman,  
My girl's a virtuous woman.

You should be with your friends, brother,  
When a girl gets involved, it gets messy.  
The woman who scorched you will not prosper,  
I have nothing in this except you.

Dreams are there,  
Colours are missing.  
In the film, I'm watching,  
The story is missing.  
The body is there,  
The soul is missing.  
The relationship is there,  
But there isn't a name for it now.

No need, brother, no need of this quest for love,  
Women are the bane of our existence.  
I learnt this by chasing them,  
I have suffered and god...

*(dialogue)*

Enough, brother!

*(chorus)*

Hit her!

Kick her!  
 Leave her!  
 No need of her!

Can't understand anything,  
 Can't see the world.  
 It didn't work out,  
 And now, there's nothing.

Spinning, my head is spinning,  
 Due to the beer I just downed.  
 Lie down, lie down for a bit,  
 You'll snap out of it when you have buttermilk in the morning.  
 Spinning, my head is spinning,  
 Due to the beer I just downed.  
 Lie down, lie down for a bit,  
 You'll snap out of it when you have buttermilk in the morning.

Good night...  
 Aye, good night...  
 Good night...  
 (*dialogue*)  
 Thank you so much, brother...

Song: Why This Kolaveri  
 Movie: 3  
 Producer: Wunderbar Films and RK Productions  
 Director: Aishwarya Dhanush  
 Music Director: Anirudh Ravichander  
 Lyricist: Dhanush  
 Soundtrack Release Date: November 2011  
 Music Label: Sony Music

Yo, boys! I am sing song,  
 Soup song,  
 Flop song.

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Rhythm correct...

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Maintain, please...

Why this murderous rage... di

In the distance, moon-uh moon-uh,

Moon-uh colour-uh, white-uh!

White background night-uh, night-uh,

Night-uh colour-u, black-uh!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

White skin-uh, girl-uh girl-uh,

Girl-uh heart-uh black-uh!

Eyes-uh eyes-uh, meet-uh meet-uh,

My future-uh, dark-uh!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

*(dialogue)*

Brother, notes you take,

And in your hands, some snacks you take.

Pa pa paan, pa pa paan, pa pa paa pa pa paan (*gibberish verse*)

*(dialogue)*

Play it properly...

Super, brother!

Ready? Ready... 1, 2, 3, 4!

*(dialogue)*

Wah! What a change-over, brother!

Okay, brother. Now, tune change-uh...

Glass in the hand...

Only English-uh!

Glass in the hand,

Scotch in the glass,

Eyes-uh full-uh, tear-uh!

Empty life-uh, girl-uh come-uh

Life, reverse gear-uh!

Love-uh, love-uh,

Oh my love-uh!

You showed me boww-uh

Cow-uh cow-uh, holy cow-uh,

I want you here now-uh!

God, I'm dying now-uh,

She is happy how-uh!

This-uh song-uh for soup boys-uh,

We don't have choice-uh!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

Why this murderous rage, murderous rage, murderous rage di!

*(dialogue)*

Flop song...

Song: Ambalaikkum Pombalaikkum

Movie: Kazhugu

Producer: Talking Time Movies and Arun Film Entertainments

Director: Sathyasiva

Music Director: Yuvan Shankar Raja

Lyricist: Snehan

Soundtrack Release Date: November 2011

Music Label: Sony Music

Men and women are in a rush,  
 And everyone calls that 'love.'  
 Love is a violent game of hide-and-peek,  
 It's a permanent high.

Men and women are in a rush,  
 And everyone calls that 'love.'  
 Love is a violent game of hide-and-peek,  
 It's a permanent high.

Back then, men and women lived in harmony,  
 They loved each other so much that they forgot the world around them.  
 When they lived and when they died,  
 They never split and their love never disappeared.  
 Every day, couples used lie dead here,  
 And my heart used to ache as I lifted their bodies.

*(Dialogue)*

Don't lie!  
 You would've jumped in joy.

The love you're talking about is now long gone, man.  
 Love comes and goes like a sneeze, these days.  
 They say they're in love and roam around together wildly,  
 If they run short of cash or enjoyment, they move away.  
 Love is essentially a game of hide-and-peek,  
 In which both men and women are missing.  
 Lovers don't commit suicide anymore.

True love doesn't exist anymore, uncle,  
 Today, one dies while the other thrives.  
 What sort of world is this?  
 So much conniving,  
 Here, love itself is a sin,  
 I wonder whose curse this is.

*(Dialogue)*

Who else?

It's the white man's curse!

Men and women are in a rush,  
And everyone calls that 'love.'

Today, love has changed a great deal,  
Eyes meet, hands entwine and a room is booked.  
After everything is done, there are many,  
Who live on saying that they were 'friends,'  
Go ask about them!

*(Dialogue)*

Stop it!

Is this what you'd call friendship?

This is false love.

*(Dialogue)*

Am I the one saying it?

Only the educated fellow says things like these.

If love fails, no one dies any more,  
If one goes, there are two more already waiting.  
There are no Devdas-es anymore!  
He looks at a girl to pass time,  
She just wants a sucker who will spend on her.  
They are both being false here,  
So, when things go sour, they just shake hands and split.

He looks at a girl to pass time,  
She just wants a sucker who will spend on her.  
They are both being false here,  
So, when things go sour, they just shake hands and split.

Song: Venaam Machan Venaam

Movie: Oru Kal Oru Kanaadi

Producer: Red Giant Movies

Director: M Rajesh

Music Director: Harris Jayaraj

Lyricist: Na. Muthukumar

Soundtrack Release Date: March 2012

Label: Sony Music

*(Fisherwomen chorus)*

We have different types of fish and mackerel,

Get down and dazzle us, Gopal-uh!

We have different types of fish and mackerel,

Get down and dazzle us, Gopal-uh!

No need, brother, no need of these women's love,

It's like alcohol whose whiff topples you.

No need, brother, no need of these women's love,

It's like alcohol whose whiff topples you.

Like the sea, love's also just salt water,

Throw it away when it gets even slightly bitter.

There'll be no trouble if you marry the girl that your mom finds for you,

You'll lose your pants if you marry the girl you love.

There'll be no trouble if you marry the girl that your mom finds for you,

You'll lose your pants if you marry the girl you love.

We don't need girls who make us cry,

We need the friend who cries for us.

*(Fisherwomen chorus)*

We have different types of fish and mackerel,

Get down and dazzle us, Gopal-uh!

We have different types of fish and mackerel,

Get down and dazzle us, Gopal-uh!

We went on the bike together every day,  
 Now, I can't find her sitting behind me.  
 We used to whisper sweet nothings to each other at the beach,  
 Even the sea would be welling up in tears if it saw me now.

We went on the bike together every day,  
 Now, I can't find her sitting behind me.  
 We used to whisper sweet nothings to each other at the beach,  
 Even the sea would be welling up in tears if it saw me now.

You'll go blind when you fall in love,  
 But if you open your eyes, you'll see that it isn't love.  
 She's left me like a fish out of water,  
 I am a wounded bird and I sing this song of pain now.

*(chorus)*

Girls are like diabetes,  
 Janaku-janakku, vavalu! (*gibberish verse*)  
 Friendship is the vaccine.  
 Janaku-jaanu, Gopal-uh! (*gibberish verse*)  
 Girls are like diabetes,  
 They suck the life out of boys.  
 Friendship is the vaccine,  
 It mends the broken heart.

No need, brother, no need of these women's love,  
 It's like alcohol whose whiff topples you.  
 Like the sea, love's also just salt water,  
 Throw it away when it gets even slightly bitter.

Trusting the girl who came into my life mid-way,  
 I abandoned the friendship I grew up with.  
 She tore me apart like an old piece of paper,  
 I suffered because I trusted that 'angel.'

Only her skin is fair,  
 She toppled you slowly.

What's the point of crying now?  
Didn't I tell you right at beginning?  
She's locked down my heart,  
Please bring a key and set me free.

*(chorus)*

She'll place kohl on her eye,  
On that, she'll place a lie.  
She'll place lipstick on her lips,  
Using that, she'll wound you.  
She'll place kohl on her eye,  
On that, she'll place a lie.  
She'll place lipstick on her lips,  
Using that, she'll wound you.

No need, brother, no need of these women's love,  
It's like alcohol whose whiff topples you.  
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There'll be no trouble if you marry the girl that your mom finds for you,  
You'll lose your pants if you marry the girl you love.  
There'll be no trouble if you marry the girl that your mom finds for you,  
You'll lose your pants if you marry the girl you love.

I don't need the girl who makes me cry,  
I need the friend who cries for me.

Song: Ivalunga Imsai

Movie: Kalakalappu

Producer: UTV Motion Pictures and Avni Cinemax

Director: Sundar C

Music Director: Vijay Ebenezer

Lyricist: Pa. Vijay

Soundtrack Release Date: April 2012

Music Label: Saregama

Beautifully, beautifully, they laugh,  
 One moment later, they stare.  
 They think of you as their life itself,  
 And immediately, they forget.

Experience...

*(dialogue)*

Brother! Brother!

The nagging of these women, we can't stand,  
 But without them, we can't live.  
 The nagging of these women, we can't stand,  
 But without them, we can't live.

They nudge us if we walk past,  
 But they kick us if we follow them.  
 They nudge us if we walk past,  
 But they kick us if we follow them.  
 What do we do?  
 What do we do, Dharmendra?

*(chorus)*

Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.  
 Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.

The nagging of these women, we can't stand,  
 But without them, we can't live.

On her lips, she wears lipstick,  
 On her heart, she wears a helmet.

The nagging of these women!

Oho-oh!

She'll spoil your livelihood and leave you hanging,

She'll also be concerned like it's her responsibility.

The nagging of these women!

Oho-oh!

Kannadasan also said it,

Kamal Hassan also said it.

Can a bottle of water and a bottle of alcohol be separated?

There's no point blaming you,

There's no point blaming me,

It's all love's fault!

*(chorus)*

Push them away, boss,

Push them away.

These women are like this only,

Push them away.

Push them away, boss,

Push them away.

These women are like this only,

Push them away.

The nagging of these women, we can't stand,

But without them, we can't live.

We don't know what makes her laugh,

We don't understand why she gets livid.

The nagging of these women!

Love will rock in the beginning,

The earthquake will start later.

Nagging, nagging!

It is in India,

That the most number of cigarettes are sold.

Have you wondered why?  
 It is because of the hordes of men,  
 Who lament and suffer as they smoke.  
 Whether you fall in love,  
 Or fall into a stove,  
 You'll get burnt, my fellow grooms!

*(chorus)*

Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.  
 Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.

The nagging of these women, we can't stand,  
 But without them, we can't live.

They nudge us if we walk past,  
 But they kick us if we follow them.  
 They nudge us if we walk past,  
 But they kick us if we follow them.  
 What do we do?  
 What do we do, Dharmendra?

*(chorus)*

Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.  
 Push them away, boss,  
 Push them away.  
 These women are like this only,  
 Push them away.

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