

Agrarian Crisis and Seed Science: An Eco-Cinematic Study of *Kadaisi Vivasayi*

A. Mohamed Kurzith Khan¹   Aysha Rizwana Jamal²  

Abstract

Agrarian crisis refers to the issues related to the declining lives of farmers and distress situation in the agricultural sector. The Tamil film Kadaisi Vivasayi (The Last Farmer) taken for the research focusses on the crisis in traditional farming, seed science and aesthetics of nature. The increase in the use of external seeds, disappearance of traditional seed varieties and reliance on hybrid seeds in farming made the setting to research on the view of seed science. Under seed science, it is necessary to understand the improving seed production and breeding, along with the changes made in the agricultural sector aimed to improve the production. This has made the farming industry increasingly reliant on the corporate world. The primary objective of the study is to critically examine the Tamil film Kadaisi Vivasayi from an eco-cinematic perspective with socio-cultural dimensions. The article assesses the cultural and ecological significance of traditional farming through the protagonist, Mayandi, a veteran farmer of eighty years. Ramaiah is a character in the film who personifies the struggle of staying righteous in a flawed world, this ultimately leads others to perceive him as mentally unstable. The intersection of multiple events, characters, nature, human empathy, government regulations, divinity, and law creates a holistic representation of the agrarian crisis, offering an eco-cinematic perspective that shapes the scope of this study.

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Introduction:

Agroecology emphasizes sustainable farming practices that maintain productivity while minimizing environmental harm, as it is “concerned with the maintenance of a productive agriculture . . . minimizing negative environmental and socio-economic impacts” (Altieri 9). Agroecology advocates for the use of indigenous knowledge systems, crop diversity, and natural nutrient cycles to enhance soil fertility and ecological balance. It resists the dependency on chemical inputs and promotes environmentally sound alternatives such as organic manures, mixed cropping, and biological pest control.

The agrarian crisis in India has become one of the socio-economic challenges, threatening both rural livelihoods and the nation’s food security. The declining productivity, market volatility, excessive chemical use, and the erosion of indigenous seed diversity, has not only reflected a developmental failure but also a cultural and ecological breakdown. Small and marginal farmers, who form the backbone of India’s agricultural economy, are trapped in cycles of debt, fragmented landholdings, and dependence on hybrid seeds that compromise sustainability. This situation underscores the importance of seed science, particularly the preservation of native varieties through community seed banks and eco-friendly practices.

Seed Science and the Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge

Seed science forms the foundation of agriculture, because every harvest begins with a seed. It is important not only for ensuring food security but also for conserving biodiversity and sustaining ecosystems. Many people see seeds simply as farming inputs and just mere units of agriculture, but they actually carry genetic memory, cultural heritage and the resilience for the future generations. Seeds are not merely agricultural inputs but carry cultural and ecological significance, as “seed is not just the source of life. It is the very foundation of our being” (Shiva 1).

Farmers today often choose modern hybrid seeds because they prioritize higher yields, uniform crops, and better market value. Vandana Shiva says that the shift toward hybrid seeds contributes to biodiversity loss, as “the erosion of seed diversity is a threat to food security” (6). However, most hybrid seeds lose fertility and require farmers to purchase new seeds each season. But conventional seeds can be saved and replanted for the next batch. This shift reduces farmers’ independence and erodes traditional seed diversity.

Eco-Cinema and Environmental Consciousness

The twenty-first century is facing serious environmental problems. One

major problem is global warming, which has now become more severe and is often called global boiling. This situation affects nature, farming, food, and human life. Cinema plays an important role in showing these problems to society. Eco-cinema talks about the relationship between human beings and nature. It reminds people that all living beings have value, not only humans. Many films still show nature only as something useful for humans. Such films focus on human needs and ignore the rights of plants, animals, soil, and water. True eco-cinema should respect nature as a living system. It should show how humans, land, seeds, animals, and climate are connected to each other. Eco-cinema includes many types of films such as documentaries, animated films, climate-based stories, and regional films that speak about local environmental problems.

Biodiversity Loss and Its Impact on Agriculture

Environmental damage is closely linked with climate change and loss of biodiversity. When forests are destroyed, farmlands are damaged, and water sources are polluted, climate problems increase. Human activities like cutting forests, using plastic, dumping waste, using harmful chemicals, mining, and destroying marine life reduce biodiversity. These actions also affect farmers, crops, and seed varieties, leading to agrarian crisis. Agriculture depends on healthy soil, clean water, natural seeds, and balanced climate. When biodiversity is lost, traditional seeds disappear and farming becomes difficult. Farmers suffer because modern practices often replace native seeds with commercial seeds. This creates dependence, debt, and loss of food security. Seed science and traditional farming knowledge help protect native seeds and support sustainable agriculture.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Responsibility

Every person has a responsibility to protect the environment. Sustainable development means using natural resources carefully so that future generations can also use them. It includes economic, social, and environmental balance. Among these, environmental sustainability is very important today. Natural resources should not be wasted or overused. Environmental sustainability focuses on protecting land, water, forests, seeds, and all forms of life. Films like *Kadaisi Vivasayi* highlight the life of farmers, the importance of traditional seeds, and respect for nature. The film shows how agriculture is not just an occupation but a way of life connected to the earth. Through simple storytelling, it presents eco-friendly values and raises awareness about agrarian crisis, seed preservation, and living in harmony with nature.

Cinema as Cultural Text: An Eco-Cinematic Reading of *Kadaisi Vivasayi*

Cinema, as a cultural text, often mirrors these socio-economic realities. The Tamil film *Kadaisi Vivasayi* provides an eco-cinematic view through which the crisis of Indian agriculture. By portraying the life of an elderly farmer,

Mayandi who sticks to traditional methods and native seeds, the film captures the tension between ecological wisdom and the pressures of modernity. Thus, an eco-cinematic study of *Kadai Vivasayi* allows us to understand how cinema can narrativize agrarian distress while simultaneously offering a vision of resilience through sustainable seed practices.

Kadai Vivasayi is a Tamil film directed by M. Manikandan. It tells the story of Mayandi, an eighty-year-old farmer. He lives simply in a small village and is respected for continuing farming when everyone else has sold their land. The village asks him to provide the first grain for their annual temple festival. Mayandi plants paddy, but an incident changes his life. He buries some dead peacocks that he finds in his field, but the police accuses him of killing them. He is arrested and sent to jail. His crops are left without care, and later, they are destroyed by pests and neglect.

The film shows the struggles of farmers who face false accusations, poor support from authorities, and ecological challenges. It also highlights traditional farming methods, seed saving, and the dangers of pesticides and chemical farming. Mayandi's insistence on natural practices contrasts with the modern push toward hybrid seeds and agrochemicals. There are also side stories. One is about Ramaiah, who has gone mad but represents hidden wisdom. Another is about Thadikozhantai, who buys an elephant after selling his land. These stories connect to themes of loss, tradition, and survival.

Traditional Farming and Ecological Wisdom

The film uses realism and symbolism to portray the agrarian crisis in Tamil Nadu. It shows how small farmers are pushed to the margins by modern policies and markets. At the same time, it values the knowledge of older generations who believe in natural farming and respect for seeds. The movie is both a story of one man and a reflection on the fate of Indian agriculture. Studying seed science is not only a scientific pursuit but also a cultural and ecological necessity, especially in the context of India's agrarian crisis. The film *Kadai Vivasayi* powerfully illustrates how indigenous seed varieties, nurtured for centuries, embody resilience, biodiversity, and local adaptation to soil and climate. While modern agriculture promotes hybrid seeds and chemical inputs, which often weaken ecological balance and trap farmers in cycles of debt, seed science emphasizes germination, plant breeding, and genetic preservation as pathways to sustainable farming. By protecting native seeds, farmers like Mayandi represent resistance to ecological destruction and the loss of agrarian traditions.

Hybrid Seeds and the Loss of Seed Sovereignty

In *Kadai Vivasayi*, the seed is compared to human sperm to remind the audience that reproduction is the essence of life. Just as sperms are necessary for the continuation of human life, a viable seed is required for the continuation

of plant life. Conventional seeds are naturally reproductive, producing viable seeds that farmers can replant season after season. In contrast, many current hybrid seeds are made to enhance the output while producing infertile progeny or offspring. This is because hybrid vigour (heterosis) often breaks down in subsequent generations, leading to low fertility or loss of desired traits. Agricultural scientists note that dependence on such seeds makes farmers reliant on external seed companies rather than self-sustaining practices (Altieri, 2018). When the farmer discovers that hybrid tomato seeds are infertile, he sighs and adds that the maker of such seeds should have a son without sperm, which is a powerful metaphor for showing us how odd it is to create life without the potential to reproduce.

Public Awareness and the Importance of Seed Literacy

It is crucial for the general public to understand seed science, as it directly impacts food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. Individuals with knowledge in this field can make informed dietary decisions about the food they consume, including understanding the benefits and risks associated with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and hybrid seeds. In addition to it, due to the exponential increase in global population and rapid climatic changes, awareness of seed science improves the support for innovative sustainable agricultural practices and production of resilient crop varieties. An informed public can advocate for responsible agricultural policies and practices which promotes healthy ecosystem, ultimately contributing to a more secure future.

Dialogue Analysis: Critique of Hybrid Seed Economy

In *Kadaisi Vivasayi*, the seed seller begins by saying, “This seed is of hybrid variety” (00:12:10). This line introduces modern seed science. Hybrid seeds are made for high yield but cannot be reused. When he adds, “It will yield huge bunches of fruit” and “You will harvest several sackfuls”, he speaks only about quantity and profit (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:16). There is no mention of soil health, seed saving, or long-term farming. These promises attract farmers who are already struggling. The farmer then asks, “I won’t have to come back to you? I can sow the next batch of seeds?” (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:20). This shows the farmer’s traditional mindset. He believes seeds should come from the harvest itself. The seed seller replies, “No, no. You will have to come back. These are seedless” (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:23). This sentence reveals the core of the agrarian crisis. Seedless farming breaks the natural cycle and forces farmers to depend on seed companies every season. The farmer is shocked and asks, “How could a fruit tree not have seeds?” (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:27). This question is not ignorance but wisdom. For him, seed is life. When the seller says, “It’s a white man’s invention. The fruits don’t have seeds” (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:31). It shows that the seed is imported and disconnected from local farming culture. The farmer again questions, “No seeds? How come?” (*Kadaisi Vivasayi* 00:12:33). His confusion shows resistance to unnatural farming

methods.

To prove his point, the farmer lists natural examples: “The ichi tree, neem tree . . . tamarind tree, tomato . . . they all have seeds” (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:37). He explains how nature works when he says, “Trees even grow when we eat a fruit and take a shit” (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:40). Though the language is crude, the idea is deep. It shows that seeds survive even after digestion and return to the soil, completing the natural cycle. His question, “How come this fruit doesn’t have seeds?” highlights how hybrid seeds go against nature (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:42). The seed seller replies honestly, “I have no idea. He supplies and I sell. I’m just a businessman” (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:48). This line shows the separation between farming and knowledge. The seller does not understand the seed. He only sells it. This represents the modern market system where profit matters more than ecological understanding. When he adds, “And people are buying this. How did he get his seeds then? This will grow well. Buy it”, he pressures the farmer to accept the product without thinking (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:56).

The farmer then says, “I don’t understand this plant’s character. No thanks” (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:12:59). This line is very important. Traditional farmers judge crops by their nature, behaviour, and seed quality. Since the plant cannot reproduce, he rejects it. His final curse, “I hope the man who invented this seed will have a baby boy... born seedless - without balls” expresses deep anger and fear (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:13:04). It is not personal hatred but protest. He feels that seedless invention kills fertility, continuity, and future farming. His words, “Some seed he has invented! Brainless moron”, conclude his rejection of seed science driven by greed (*Kadaiasi Vivasayi* 00:13:21). Through this dialogue, *Kadaiasi Vivasayi* clearly shows how hybrid and seedless crops create dependency, destroy seed sovereignty, and deepen agrarian crisis. The farmer’s voice stands for ecological wisdom, while the seller represents market-controlled agriculture. The scene strongly supports eco-centric farming and questions modern seed technology that ignores nature.

Soil Seed Banks and Natural Regeneration

In a particular scene, a fellow prisoner asks the farmer to teach him agriculture. The farmer simply tells him to take a small container, fill it with soil, add a little water, and leave it under sunlight. After a few days, to his surprise, a tiny neem plant sprouts from the soil. The man was shocked and asked the farmer if he had planted a seed secretly. The farmer replies that there are several seeds hidden in the soil by the Almighty’s grace and if necessary conditions are met, they will sprout and provide food for the humanity. This scene blends science with wonder, where, scientifically speaking, it illustrates the principle of seed dormancy where millions of seeds remain in the soil, waiting for necessary moisture, warmth and other environmental triggers (Baskin & Baskin 150–162).

Chemical Farming and Ecological Consequences

In the film, a man who is asked to take care of the farm is told to prepare a traditional herbal mixture to control pests. But he ignored the advice and used a chemical pesticide, which resulted in devastating outcome. The rice crops withered and died. This moment highlights the crucial danger of chemical farming where it was prepared as broad-spectrum and kills all pests, damages the fertile soil, pollutes the water and kills the beneficial soil micro biota (Kibblewhite et al 685-701) (Pimentel 229-252). In contrast, when the farmer is informed about the pest infestation, he had a close observation with the insect or pest and prescribed a traditional remedy. Hence, this scene is a sharp reminder that while chemical pesticides may seem convenient and quick, but often ends up destroying the very foundation of sustainable farming and shows the danger of replacing careful ecological practices with blanket chemical solutions.

Conclusion: Eco-Cinema as a Voice for Agrarian Sustainability

The study of *Kadasi Vivasayi* shows how cinema can reflect the deep agrarian crisis in India. The film highlights the struggles of small farmers, the neglect of traditional practices, and the dangers of chemical-based farming. It also shows the value of indigenous seeds, seed science, and eco-friendly farming. By using eco-criticism and agrarian theories, the research connects the lived reality of farmers with cultural expression. Mayandi, the last farmer, becomes a symbol of resistance, dignity, and ecological wisdom. The film thus acts as both a social critique and a call for sustainable practices. This is at the same time, this study opens up scope for further research, such as examining how other Indian films portray farming and ecology, exploring the role of indigenous seed banks in preserving biodiversity, and making comparative studies between Indian and global cinema on agrarian themes. Future research can also connect eco-cinema with agricultural policy and give space to the real voices of farmers, allowing us to understand both lived experiences and their cultural representations more deeply.

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