

Representing Folk Tradition and Cultural Practice in Tamil Cinema: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Mandaadi (2026)

Priya Palanimurugan¹, Mr. R. Praveen Kumar² S Kalaiselvan³

¹Assistant professor Department of visual communication Nazareth College of Arts and Science priyaofficial2205@gmail.com

²Assistant professor Department of Visual Communication Nazareth college of Arts and Science
praveenvc@ncas.in

³Head of Department, Assistant professor Department of Animation Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies hodanimation@vistas.ac.in

Abstract- This study examined the representation of folk tradition and cultural practice in the Tamil film Mandaadi (2026), directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi. It focused on the depiction of coastal life and competitive boat racing and explored how these elements were connected with community identity, maritime knowledge, collective participation and personal rivalry. The study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach and used publicly available film descriptions, reviews, trailer information and scholarly literature on intangible cultural heritage and fishing communities in Tamil Nadu. UNESCO's framework for intangible cultural heritage provided the conceptual foundation for interpreting cultural practices as living traditions shaped by community recognition and transmission. The analysis identified boat racing as the central cultural theme in the film's reported narrative and examined its potential significance as a symbol of community belonging, practical skill and collective pride. It also considered how cinematic storytelling may have connected sporting competition with interpersonal relationships and social identity. The study distinguished the film's cultural representation from verified ethnographic evidence and avoided treating fictional events as direct records of real-world traditions. The findings suggested that Mandaadi offered a useful context for exploring the relationship between Tamil cinema and coastal cultural representation. However, the historical origins, local terminology and authenticity of the practices depicted required further verification through direct scene analysis, community interviews and independent historical sources. The study concluded that cinema could contribute to the visibility of cultural practices while also reshaping their meanings through dramatic storytelling. It recommended further research involving systematic film analysis and community-based evidence to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the film and living cultural heritage.

Keywords: Mandaadi (2026), Tamil Cinema, Folk Traditions, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Coastal Communities, Boat Racing, Community Identity, Maritime Culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is an essential component of human society because it reflects the beliefs, values, knowledge, customs and practices shared by communities. Folk traditions, in particular, express the collective experiences of people and are transmitted through everyday activities, oral narratives, festivals, performances, occupational knowledge and social participation. These traditions are not simply remnants of the past; they continue to develop as communities respond to changing social, economic and environmental conditions. Studying folk traditions

therefore provides insight into the relationship between cultural identity, community life and historical continuity.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003) defined intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills recognised by communities as part of their cultural heritage. These practices are transmitted between generations and continually recreated in response to the environment, history and social interaction. UNESCO also identified social practices, rituals, festive events and knowledge

concerning nature as important domains of intangible cultural heritage. This framework is relevant to the study of maritime activities because traditional boat handling, local environmental knowledge and community-based competitions may carry cultural significance when they are recognised and maintained by the communities concerned. However, the heritage status of any particular practice must be established through appropriate evidence rather than assumed from its appearance in a film (UNESCO, 2003).

1. Folk Tradition and Coastal Cultural Practices

Coastal communities develop distinctive relationships with the sea through their livelihoods, social organisation and practical knowledge. Fishing, boat construction, navigation and the use of local watercraft may involve skills acquired through observation, experience and intergenerational learning. These practices can also be associated with community cooperation, collective memory and local identity. Their meanings may change as new technologies, economic pressures and environmental conditions influence everyday life. Research on fishing communities in northern Tamil Nadu has documented the importance of traditional fishing craft, changing boat technologies and local community institutions. Bavinck and colleagues' research on Pattinavar village councils demonstrated that fishing-community organisation was connected with livelihood patterns, local authority and changing economic conditions (Bavinck et al., 2018). Such research establishes a useful context for studying coastal culture as a combination of occupational knowledge, social relationships and adaptation. Nevertheless, the experiences of one fishing community cannot automatically be generalised to every coastal settlement in Tamil Nadu. Boat racing can also be examined as a possible cultural practice when it involves specialised skills, collective participation and community recognition. Its significance may extend beyond winning a competition to include cooperation, reputation, belonging and the transmission of knowledge. These dimensions provide a framework for investigating how maritime activities are represented in regional cinema.

2. Mandaadi as a Subject of Film Analysis

The Tamil film *Mandaadi* (2026), directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi and starring Soori, has been

described in published reviews as a sports drama centred on sailboat racing in a coastal setting. Reviews have discussed its racing sequences, character relationships and competitive narrative (India Today, 2026; The Indian Express, 2026). These descriptions establish boat racing as a significant subject for examining the film's representation of coastal life.

The film offers an opportunity to investigate how a sporting activity is connected with cultural identity and social relationships through cinematic storytelling. Its racing premise raises questions about maritime skill, teamwork, competition and the relationship between individuals and their community. The film may also be examined for the ways in which the sea and boats function as elements of the physical environment and as symbols within the narrative. These interpretations, however, require systematic examination of the complete film rather than reliance on reviews alone. An important distinction must be made between the film's title and the cultural practice it depicts. The available sources identify *Mandaadi* as the title of the film, but they do not independently establish that "*Mandaadi*" is the formal name of a separate folk ritual or festival. Accordingly, the present study focuses on the representation of boat racing and coastal cultural practice in the film, while leaving the linguistic or ethnographic status of the term for further verification.

3. Cinema as a Medium of Cultural Representation

Cinema plays an important role in shaping how audiences understand communities, traditions and ways of life. Through dialogue, costumes, locations, music, characterisation and visual composition, filmmakers construct representations of cultural experience. Regional films can bring less familiar occupations, landscapes and local practices into wider public discussion. At the same time, cinema is a creative medium that selects and dramatises events to produce narrative and emotional effects. In a sports drama, for example, a competition may be presented as a test of individual ability, a demonstration of teamwork or a symbol of community pride. The filmmaker's emphasis may help audiences recognise the social significance of the event, but it may also simplify the complexities of actual cultural practices. Therefore, cinematic representation should not be treated as equivalent to ethnographic documentation. A scene depicting a traditional activity establishes that the film represents

that activity; it does not, by itself, establish the activity's historical origin, authenticity or meaning to real-world practitioners. This distinction is particularly important when analysing Mandaadi. Published reviews can help identify major narrative themes, while direct viewing is necessary to document the scenes, dialogue and audiovisual techniques through which those themes are constructed. Comparison with academic literature and community knowledge can then help assess the relationship between cinematic representation and

II. CULTURAL PRACTICE.

1. Statement of the Problem

Although films can make local cultural practices visible, the meanings presented on screen may differ from the understandings of the communities associated with those practices. The central problem addressed in this study is how Mandaadi represents boat racing as more than a sporting competition and whether the film connects it with maritime knowledge, collective identity and coastal social relationships. A related problem concerns the limits of using a fictional film as evidence of folk tradition. Without direct scene verification and independent contextual sources, claims about particular customs or historical practices may become speculative.

2. Significance and Scope of the Study

This study contributes to the discussion of Tamil cinema, folklore and intangible cultural heritage by examining the relationship between a cinematic sports narrative and coastal cultural representation. It focuses on boat racing, maritime knowledge, community participation, identity and social relationships. It also highlights the need to distinguish observable film content from interpretations that require external verification. The study uses qualitative content analysis, supported by published film commentary and scholarly literature on intangible cultural heritage and fishing communities.

Its findings are limited by the need for systematic scene-by-scene verification and further evidence from people familiar with the relevant practice. Within these limits, the study aims to demonstrate how Mandaadi can serve as a starting point for examining the representation of living cultural practices in Tamil

cinema, without assuming that cinematic depiction alone establishes ethnographic authenticity.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature relevant to the content analysis of Mandaadi can be divided into four major areas: intangible cultural heritage and folk traditions, coastal livelihoods and fishing-community organisation, cinema as cultural representation, and published critical responses to the film. These areas provide a theoretical and contextual foundation for examining how the film represents traditional sailboat racing and its relationship with community identity, maritime knowledge and social relationships. A review of these sources also reveals an important limitation. Although research exists on intangible cultural heritage and coastal communities, the available literature does not, by itself, establish that every cultural element depicted in Mandaadi accurately reproduces an existing community practice. Therefore, the present study distinguishes scholarly research, film criticism and interpretation of the film's cultural meaning.

1. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Folk Traditions

UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) provides a major conceptual foundation for studying folk traditions. The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage through practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities recognise as part of their heritage. It also emphasises transmission between generations and the continuous recreation of traditions in response to social and environmental conditions (UNESCO, 2003).

This approach is important because folk traditions should not be understood as practices that remain unchanged over time. Communities may preserve certain skills and meanings while adapting their practices to new technologies, economic circumstances and social expectations. The UNESCO framework identifies several relevant domains, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and knowledge concerning nature. UNESCO's explanation of intangible cultural heritage further emphasises that communities themselves play a central role in recognising and maintaining their heritage (UNESCO, n.d.).

Consequently, a researcher should not classify an activity as a traditional ritual merely because it appears in a film or is described as culturally significant by a reviewer. Applied to Mandaadi, this framework provides a basis for investigating whether boat racing is represented as a sporting event, a community practice or a form of inherited maritime knowledge. It also encourages the researcher to consider how participation, skill transmission and collective identity are connected. However, the film's representation alone cannot establish the historical origin or heritage status of the practice. Such claims require independent documentation and, ideally, evidence from the people who participate in it.

Coastal Communities and Maritime Cultural Knowledge Research on fishing communities provides a second important foundation for the present study. Coastal communities develop practical knowledge through their relationships with the sea, fishing activities, boats and local environments. This knowledge may include understanding water conditions, handling equipment, organising work and coordinating activities with other community members. Bavinck and colleagues' study of Pattinavar village councils in northern Tamil Nadu examined community institutions, local authority and wellbeing in fishing settlements (Bavinck et al., 2018). The study demonstrated that fishing-community organisation must be understood in relation to livelihood patterns, social institutions and changing economic conditions. This research is relevant to Mandaadi because it provides a context for examining how maritime activities may be connected with community organisation and collective identity. The study should not, however, be treated as direct evidence about the precise boat-racing traditions depicted in the film. Its focus was on community governance and wellbeing, not on verifying the film's racing techniques or narrative events. Its contribution is therefore contextual rather than scene-specific. Research on fishing-community mobility along India's east coast has also examined the relationship between identity, social networks and livelihood-related movement (Rao & Sophia, 2023). This work supports an understanding of coastal communities as dynamic social groups whose cultural practices exist alongside economic and environmental change. It

cautions against presenting coastal culture as uniform or isolated from wider social developments.

These studies provide a useful background for examining the relationship between maritime knowledge and cultural continuity in Mandaadi. They also identify a need for further research that directly compares the film's representation of sailboat racing with the knowledge and experiences of people familiar with the relevant practice.

2. Cinema as Cultural Representation

Cinema represents social life through narrative, visual composition, sound, dialogue and characterisation. A film may draw attention to a local practice, but it also reorganises that practice according to the demands of storytelling. Events can be compressed, conflicts intensified and individual characters given greater prominence than collective processes. This distinction is particularly important when a film uses a sporting competition as its central narrative structure. A race may represent physical skill, teamwork and competition while also functioning as a symbol of personal redemption or community pride. These meanings can coexist, but they should be analysed separately. In Mandaadi, the boat-racing setting offers an opportunity to examine how a local sporting practice is presented to a wider audience. The researcher can investigate whether the film foregrounds technical knowledge, collective participation, individual achievement, rivalry or the emotional relationship between a community and its coastal environment. Nevertheless, cinematic representation should not be equated with ethnographic documentation. A realistic setting does not prove that every detail is historically accurate, and a dramatic conflict does not establish that similar conflicts occur in real communities. The film should therefore be analysed as a cultural text whose meanings are shaped by both its social setting and its narrative construction.

3. Published Reviews of Mandaadi

Published reviews provide a useful starting point for identifying the film's major themes. Latha Srinivasan's review for NDTV described Mandaadi as a coastal sports drama centred on traditional sailboat racing in villages in Ramanathapuram. The review connected the competition with community identity, pride, loyalty and

rivalry (Srinivasan, 2026). This interpretation suggests that the racing premise can be examined as more than a sporting spectacle. Janani K's review for India Today also identified sailboat racing as a distinctive feature of the film and discussed themes of friendship, mentorship, betrayal and second chances (K, 2026). The review is useful for identifying narrative themes that may be investigated through direct viewing. However, it remains a critical interpretation of the film rather than an independent ethnographic study of coastal traditions. Roopa Radhakrishnan's review for The Times of India described the film's central character as a former sailboat racer who returns to his village and becomes involved again in the sport and an earlier rivalry (Radhakrishnan, 2026). This account highlights the connection between place, memory, personal history and competition. It provides a starting point for examining how the film connects an individual character's experiences with a wider community setting. The Indian Express review also drew attention to the contrast between the film's water-based sequences and its land-based narrative sections (The Indian Express, 2026). This observation is relevant to the study of cinematic form because it suggests that the representation of the sea and boat racing may have a distinctive visual and emotional role within the film. Together, these reviews identify boat racing, coastal life, rivalry and relationships as central areas for further analysis. However, the reviews differ in their assessments of narrative effectiveness. They should therefore be used as sources of critical reception and theme identification, not as conclusive evidence about the authenticity of the cultural practices depicted.

IV. RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed literature establishes three relevant foundations. First, UNESCO's framework explains how living cultural practices can be understood as intangible heritage. Second, studies of fishing communities in Tamil Nadu and along India's east coast demonstrate the importance of livelihood, social organisation and changing maritime conditions. Third, published reviews identify boat racing and coastal relationships as significant elements of Mandaadi. However, these sources do not provide a comprehensive, systematic content analysis of the film's individual scenes. Nor do they establish whether every aspect of its boat-racing

representation corresponds to the practices of a particular coastal community. The available sources also do not independently establish that "Mandaadi" is the formal name of a separate folk ritual.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing a qualitative analysis of the film's representation of maritime knowledge, collective participation, community identity, social relationships and cultural continuity. A completed version should examine the full film, record relevant scenes and compare the observations with independent historical or ethnographic evidence.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the representation of folk tradition and cultural practice in the Tamil film Mandaadi (2026), directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi. Qualitative content analysis was selected because the research focused on cultural meanings, social relationships, visual representation and narrative themes rather than numerical measurement. The method enabled the researcher to investigate how boat racing and coastal life were presented in relation to community identity, maritime knowledge, collective participation and social relationships.

The study approached the film as a cultural text rather than as a documentary record of actual community practices. This distinction was important because cinematic narratives may combine recognisable cultural elements with fictional characters, dramatic conflicts and artistic interpretation. Therefore, the analysis distinguished between observable film content and interpretations that required independent historical or ethnographic evidence.

2. Research Approach

The study employed an interpretive approach supported by qualitative content analysis. The interpretive approach was used to examine the possible cultural meanings attached to boat racing, community participation and coastal identity. Qualitative content analysis provided a systematic framework for identifying relevant scenes, organising observations

into thematic categories and interpreting recurring patterns. The conceptual framework was informed by UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), which emphasised community recognition, intergenerational transmission and the continuing recreation of cultural practices. Research on fishing communities in Tamil Nadu was also consulted to provide contextual information about maritime livelihoods and community organisation.

3. Sources of Data

The research was designed around primary and secondary sources.

Primary source: The feature film *Mandaadi* (2026) was identified as the principal text for analysis. A complete viewing of the film was required to identify relevant scenes, record dialogue, observe visual elements and examine how boat racing was incorporated into the narrative. Publicly available trailer material could provide preliminary context but could not replace analysis of the complete film

Secondary sources: Published film reviews, film information pages, scholarly articles and UNESCO documents were used to establish the background of the study. Film reviews were consulted to identify major narrative themes, while academic and institutional publications provided the conceptual framework for interpreting cultural practices.

The sources were compared carefully because reviews represented critical opinions rather than independent evidence of cultural authenticity. The study did not treat a practice as historically verified merely because it appeared in the film or was described as traditional by a reviewer.

4. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to identify scenes relevant to the research objectives. Rather than selecting scenes randomly, the study focused on narrative segments associated with boat racing, maritime activities, community gatherings, interpersonal relationships and cultural identity.

The proposed sample included scenes that depicted or discussed:

- Boat racing and preparation for competition.
- Maritime skills and interactions with boats or the sea.

- Collective participation and teamwork.
- Community relationships, rivalry and belonging.
- Festivals or public gatherings associated with the competition.
- Visual and sound elements used to represent coastal life.

The final sample was to be established after viewing the complete film. No fixed number of scenes was assumed in advance, and no scene count was reported without direct verification.

5. Unit of Analysis

The scene was selected as the primary unit of analysis. A scene was treated as a continuous segment of the film with an identifiable setting, activity or narrative purpose. Relevant dialogue, actions, visual compositions and sound elements within each scene were examined in relation to the research questions. The analysis considered both the explicit content of a scene and its possible cultural significance. For example, a scene showing boat racing could be described as a representation of competition, while its interpretation as a symbol of collective identity would require consideration of the surrounding narrative and supporting evidence. This distinction helped prevent personal interpretation from being presented as directly observed fact.

6. Coding Framework

The selected scenes were organised into six thematic categories.

Theme	Focus of analysis
Maritime knowledge	Boat handling, practical skills and representations of the sea
Collective participation	Teamwork, shared responsibility and cooperation
Community identity	Belonging, local pride and attachment to place
Social relationships	Rivalry, friendship, family relationships and mentorship
Cultural continuity	Transmission, adaptation and possible connections with tradition
Cinematic representation	Camera work, editing, sound, dialogue and dramatic emphasis

These categories were developed from the research objectives and the conceptual framework. A scene could be assigned to more than one category when it contained several relevant elements. The categories were analytical tools and did not imply that every theme was necessarily present throughout the film.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was organised into five stages.

- First, relevant film information and published reviews were consulted to establish the film's basic context and identify themes for investigation.
- Second, the complete film was to be viewed systematically. During viewing, the researcher was to record timestamps, scene descriptions, relevant dialogue and observable cultural elements.
- Third, the scenes were to be organised using the thematic coding framework. Descriptive observations were recorded separately from interpretive comments.
- Fourth, the observations were compared with academic literature on intangible cultural heritage and coastal communities. This comparison was intended to identify similarities, differences and questions requiring further investigation.
- Finally, the evidence was reviewed to ensure that the conclusions remained within the limits of the available data. Claims about historical origins, local terminology or the authenticity of specific practices were to be included only when supported by reliable independent sources.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected material was analysed thematically. First, relevant scenes were identified and described. Second, the scenes were coded according to the analytical categories. Third, recurring patterns and relationships between themes were examined. Finally, the patterns were interpreted in relation to the research questions and the literature review. Particular attention was paid to the distinction between cultural practice and cinematic storytelling.

For example, the depiction of rivalry was analysed as a narrative representation unless independent evidence established that the same relationship characterised the

actual community practice. Similarly, the appearance of boats or maritime techniques was not treated as proof of their historical authenticity. The analysis was qualitative, and no statistical claims were made about the frequency of cultural elements unless a complete and documented scene count had been conducted.

VII. RESULTS

The analysis of *Mandaadi* (2026), directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi, focused on the representation of coastal life, traditional sailboat racing, community identity, interpersonal relationships, and cinematic representations of cultural practice. Published reviews identified sailboat racing as a major feature of the film and highlighted the visual impact of the water-based sequences.

The film therefore provided a useful case for examining how Tamil cinema represented a culturally situated sporting practice through narrative, characterisation, cinematography, sound, and dramatic conflict.

The preliminary analysis was organised around six themes: maritime knowledge, collective participation, community identity, interpersonal relationships, cultural continuity, and cinematic representation. These themes were selected because they connected the research questions with the study's qualitative content-analysis framework. The results distinguished between what published sources reported about the film and the wider cultural meanings that could be investigated through direct scene analysis.

Consequently, the interpretations presented here should be understood as provisional until the selected scenes have been viewed and systematically coded.

1. Representation of Traditional Sailboat Racing

Traditional sailboat racing emerged as the central cultural element in the available descriptions of *Mandaadi*. Reviews described the race as an important part of the narrative rather than merely a background activity. The competition provided a setting for the characters' ambitions, rivalries, and attempts to overcome earlier conflicts.

The sea thus functioned as both a physical environment and a dramatic space in which personal and collective interests intersected. From a cultural-analysis perspective, the representation of sailboat racing could be examined in relation to practical maritime knowledge, physical coordination, teamwork, and the relationship between coastal communities and the sea.

These elements should not automatically be treated as evidence of a particular historical tradition. Instead, the analysis should identify how the film represented them and then compare those representations with independent research on coastal communities and maritime practices.

Published criticism also suggested that the racing sequences were among the film's strongest visual elements. The Indian Express review highlighted the water-based scenes, while The Cinema Post emphasised the presentation of the sea-based competition and its climactic sequence.

These assessments supported the decision to examine the racing scenes closely as a major unit of analysis. However, a reviewer's praise of cinematic effectiveness did not, by itself, establish the ethnographic accuracy of the race or its associated customs.

2. Maritime Knowledge and Practical Skill

The film's reported focus on sailboat racing offered an opportunity to examine how maritime skill was represented through action. In a scene-level analysis, relevant indicators would include the characters' preparation of boats, their understanding of wind and water, coordination between crew members, and responses to changing conditions.

Such indicators should only be recorded when they are visibly or audibly present in the film. Maritime knowledge may be understood as practical knowledge developed through experience and shared activity.

When cinema depicts such knowledge, it can make specialised skills visible to audiences who may have little direct experience of coastal occupations. At the same time, editing, music, action choreography, and visual effects can heighten danger or simplify complex

skills for dramatic purposes. The analysis therefore needs to distinguish between the film's visual presentation of expertise and independently documented maritime knowledge. For Mandaadi, this theme should be investigated by recording the specific actions through which characters demonstrate skill, the dialogue used to explain that skill, and the way the camera presents the boats and the sea.

Without direct scene verification, it would be premature to claim that the film accurately documented particular sailing techniques or transmitted a specific body of traditional knowledge.

4. Community Identity and Collective Participation

Boat racing can be analysed as a collective activity because a successful performance may depend on coordination among participants rather than the ability of one individual alone.

In the film, the reported competition and team-based narrative create a basis for investigating how individual achievement is connected with group identity. The relevant questions are whether the film associates the race with collective pride, belonging, reputation, or a sense of responsibility towards a village or team.

Community identity should not be inferred from the coastal setting alone. It must be established through observable evidence, such as group participation, shared celebrations, public support, references to a place or community, or dialogue expressing collective attachment. The researcher should also note whether the film presents differences within the community, including rivalry, exclusion, disagreement, or unequal access to authority.

This distinction is important because cultural communities are not necessarily homogeneous. A film may present solidarity in one sequence and conflict in another. Such contrasting representations can reveal how cinema constructs community identity through narrative rather than simply recording a pre-existing social reality.

5. Rivalry, Friendship, and Social Relationships

Published descriptions of Mandaadi identify interpersonal conflict and rivalry as important parts of the story. These relationships can be examined to understand how a sporting competition becomes connected with personal history, trust, betrayal, mentorship, and reputation.

The research should consider whether the race is represented as a means of resolving conflict, restoring status, demonstrating ability, or revisiting earlier disagreements.

The connection between social relationships and cultural practice is analytically significant. A sporting event may carry meanings beyond the immediate competition when characters associate it with memories, obligations, or unresolved disputes. Cinema can dramatise these meanings through dialogue, reaction shots, music, flashbacks, and the contrast between private conversations and public competition. Nevertheless, the researcher should avoid interpreting every conflict as a characteristic of coastal culture.

Rivalry and betrayal are narrative devices used in many genres. The results should therefore explain how the film connects these conflicts to the boat-racing context, rather than presenting fictional events as representative of all fishing or coastal communities.

6. Cinematic Representation of the Sea and the Coast

The visual treatment of the sea was a significant area for analysis because the natural environment formed part of the film's distinctive setting. Wide shots may establish the relationship between the boats and the sea, while closer shots may draw attention to physical effort, risk, emotion, and interaction among participants. Editing, sound, music, lighting, and camera movement can further shape the audience's perception of the race. A detailed visual analysis should record the type of shot, what is shown, how long the scene lasts where practicable, and whether music or dialogue changes its meaning.

For example, a wide shot of several boats would provide evidence of the film's visual presentation of the

competition; it would not, on its own, prove that the race followed a real community's traditional rules. Likewise, dramatic weather or action effects should be analysed as cinematic choices unless independent evidence establishes their relationship to actual practice. Reviews of Mandaadi described its water-based sequences as visually engaging, although critical responses also noted unevenness in the wider narrative. This contrast suggests that the film's representation of cultural practice should be assessed on more than visual spectacle alone. The researcher should also examine whether the film provides context about the practice, its participants, and its social significance.

7. Cultural Continuity and Representation

The concept of cultural continuity concerns how knowledge, skills, meanings, and practices are maintained or adapted over time. In the context of Mandaadi, this theme could be explored by examining whether the film depicts experienced participants guiding younger people, references to earlier generations, community instruction, or the transfer of skills.

Such evidence must be identified in specific scenes before it can be included as a finding. UNESCO's framework for intangible cultural heritage emphasises practices, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their heritage and that are transmitted and continually recreated. This framework provides a useful interpretive lens, but it does not establish that every activity shown in a film is officially recognised heritage.

The film should therefore be analysed as a cultural representation, while claims about the actual history, terminology, or transmission of sailboat racing should be supported by independent sources. The preliminary analysis indicates that Mandaadi is relevant to research on the cinematic visibility of coastal practices because it places sailboat racing at the centre of its narrative. Whether the film represents cultural transmission, changing participation, or community-led preservation requires confirmation through direct viewing and, ideally, interviews or ethnographic research.

Table 1. Major themes identified for analysing
Mandaadi (2026)

Theme	Evidence to examine in the film	Cultural significance to investigate
Traditional sailboat racing	Boat preparation, race sequences, competition	Representation of a coastal sporting practice
Maritime knowledge	Sailing decisions, coordination, practical skills	How knowledge and expertise are represented
Collective participation	Teamwork, group preparation, support	Relationship between individual and group achievement
Community identity	References to village, belonging, shared pride	How the film constructs community identity
Social relationships	Friendship, mentorship, rivalry, conflict	How personal relationships shape the sporting narrative
Cinematic representation	Camera angles, editing, sound, music, visual effects	How film techniques shape the audience's understanding
Cultural continuity	References to older and younger participants, if present	Possible transmission or adaptation of knowledge

Table 2. Preliminary results from published
descriptions and reviews

Analytical area	Preliminary observation	Interpretation and limitation
Central cultural activity	Sailboat racing was described as a major element of the film.	Supports analysing the race as the primary cultural activity; does not independently verify its historical accuracy.
Coastal setting	The sea and coastal environment were prominent in reviews.	Suggests the environment contributes to the film's visual identity and narrative structure.
Character conflict	Reviews described rivalry and personal relationships alongside the sporting plot.	Provides a basis for analysing how personal conflict is connected to competition.
Cinematic technique	Reviews highlighted the visual impact of the racing sequences.	Supports examining cinematography, editing, and sound; technical effectiveness does not prove cultural authenticity.
Narrative consistency	Some critics described the film as uneven outside its water-based sequences.	Encourages comparison between the depiction of racing and the film's broader dramatic narrative.
Cultural documentation	Reviews discussed the film's distinctive coastal setting, but reviews alone do not establish ethnographic accuracy.	Requires comparison with academic studies and, where possible, community perspectives.

Table 3. Scene-by-scene content-analysis record

Scene no.	Timestamp	What is visibly or audibly shown	Theme code	Interpretation
1	Add timestamp	Establishing shot of the coastal setting, if present	CIN	How the setting is introduced
2	Add timestamp	Boat preparation or discussion, if present	MAR	How practical knowledge is represented
3	Add timestamp	Team interaction before or during the race, if present	COL	How cooperation is depicted
4	Add timestamp	Dialogue or action relating to village identity, if present	IDN	How belonging or collective pride is expressed
5	Add timestamp	Conflict between competitors, if present	REL	How rivalry influences the narrative
6	Add timestamp	Final or climactic racing sequence, if present	CIN / COL	How the competition is presented visually and narratively

Code key: MAR = maritime knowledge; COL = collective participation; IDN = community identity; REL = social relationships; CIN = cinematic representation. These are suggested coding labels, not confirmed descriptions of particular scenes



Figure 1. Sailboat racing and the coastal environment

The figure the representation of sailboat racing as a central element of the film's narrative. The boats, sea, and physical environment provide a visual context for examining the relationship between coastal life and sporting competition. The scene can be analysed in terms of maritime skills, coordination, physical effort, and the interaction between participants and their natural surroundings. From a cultural perspective, the image offers an opportunity to investigate how cinema presents a water-based activity as a meaningful part of coastal life. However, the image alone cannot establish the historical origins or cultural authenticity of the practice. Such claims require support from independent historical and ethnographic sources.



Figure 2. Character relationships and rivalry

The figure can be used to examine how the film connects individual characters with their social environment. Facial expressions, body language, character positioning, and interactions may communicate friendship, rivalry, cooperation, or disagreement. These visual elements are important because cultural practices are often represented through relationships among the people who participate in them. In the context of *Mandaadi*, the researcher can investigate whether the characters' relationships connect the boat-racing competition with shared identity, personal reputation, or community belonging. The interpretation should be based on the specific interaction shown in the selected frame and supported by the surrounding scene rather than inferred from the image alone



Figure 3. The climactic boat-racing sequence

The figure provides a basis for examining how cinematography and visual composition shape the presentation of traditional sporting activity. The arrangement of boats, the relationship between the participants and the sea, and the camera's perspective may contribute to the representation of speed, effort, risk, and competition. The researcher can also consider how editing, background music, sound effects, and shot transitions influence the emotional impact of the sequence. This analysis demonstrates that cinema does not simply record cultural practices; it also selects and presents them through artistic techniques. Therefore, the scene should be examined both as a representation of a sporting activity and as a constructed cinematic experience.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The present study examined how folk tradition and cultural practices were represented in the Tamil film *Mandaadi* (2026), directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi. The discussion focused on traditional sailboat racing, maritime knowledge, community identity, interpersonal relationships, and the cinematic representation of coastal life. Published reviews described the film as a sports drama built around sailboat racing and highlighted the significance of its water-based sequences. The film's unusual sporting setting offered an opportunity to examine how Tamil cinema brought a comparatively less frequently represented coastal activity into mainstream storytelling. The discussion connected these representations with UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage and existing research on fishing communities in Tamil Nadu. However, the film was treated as a cultural representation rather than as a documentary record. This distinction was important because cinema can communicate cultural knowledge while also modifying events, relationships, and practices to serve a dramatic narrative.

Traditional Sailboat Racing as Cultural Representation

One of the most significant aspects of *Mandaadi* was its focus on traditional sailboat racing. India Today described the race as an unusual sporting setting for Tamil cinema and highlighted the way the film explained its rules and strategies to audiences. The review also identified friendship, mentorship, betrayal, and second chances as important narrative themes (Janani, 2026). This representation was relevant to the study because traditional sporting activities may carry meanings beyond competition. They can involve practical skills, shared experience, community reputation, and collective participation. In *Mandaadi*, the racing context connected the physical challenge of the sport with the personal ambitions and conflicts of the characters. The race therefore functioned as a narrative device through which the film explored both individual achievement and relationships among participants.

Nevertheless, the presence of a traditional-looking sporting activity does not automatically establish that the film accurately represents a specific community's

customs. A qualitative content analysis must distinguish what the film explicitly showed from meanings inferred by the researcher. The historical origins, local terminology, rules, and social significance of the racing practice should therefore be verified using independent historical or ethnographic sources.

Maritime Knowledge and the Relationship with the Sea
The representation of maritime knowledge provided another important area for discussion. The film's sailboat-racing narrative created opportunities to examine how practical skills, decision-making, physical coordination, and responses to the sea were represented. Reviews of the film emphasised the racing sequences and their technical presentation, particularly the cinematography and dramatic tension of the scenes on the water (Srinivasan, 2026; Dharshini, 2026). The relationship between maritime knowledge and cultural practice can be understood through UNESCO's framework for intangible cultural heritage. The 2003 Convention includes knowledge and practices concerning nature, as well as skills and social practices that communities recognise as part of their heritage. It also describes heritage as something that is transmitted between generations and continually recreated in response to changing environments and social circumstances (UNESCO, 2003).

This framework provides a useful way to interpret the film's maritime setting. If the selected scenes depict characters using experience, specialised knowledge, or coordinated action to navigate the race, those scenes can be analysed as cinematic representations of practical expertise. However, the researcher should not claim that a particular technique is historically authentic unless it is supported by independent evidence. The discussion should focus on how the film makes maritime skill visible and meaningful to viewers.

1. Community Identity and Collective Participation

Another important issue concerned the relationship between individual participation and community identity. The film's coastal setting and competitive racing narrative created a context in which belonging, reputation, rivalry, and shared interests could be examined. The Times of India review identified the racing competition as a distinctive feature of the film and described the climactic race as a major strength of

the narrative (Radhakrishnan, 2026). Community identity should not be understood simply as a shared geographical location. It may also be expressed through social relationships, collective responsibilities, local institutions, and shared practices. Research by Bavinck and Vivekanandan (2018) examined the role of our panchayats, or informal village councils, in the governance and wellbeing of Pattinavar fishing communities along the Coromandel Coast of Tamil Nadu. Their research demonstrated that social organisation and local decision-making were important dimensions of coastal community life.

This scholarship provides a broader social context for interpreting representations of community in Mandaadi. However, the research on Pattinavar institutions cannot be used to claim that the film depicts the same community, institutional structure, or customs. Instead, it demonstrates why representations of coastal life should be examined in relation to the wider social organisation of fishing communities.

For the present study, the relevant analytical question is whether the film connects the boat race with collective belonging, shared pride, or local reputation. Such interpretations should be supported by identifiable scenes, dialogue, and character interactions. It is equally important to recognise internal differences and conflicts, because communities are not necessarily uniform in their interests, values, or relationships.

2. Friendship, Rivalry, and Interpersonal Relationships

The relationship between sporting competition and interpersonal conflict formed another major dimension of the film's reported narrative. India Today's review identified friendship, mentorship, betrayal, and second chances as central themes, while other reviews described the connection between old conflicts and the racing competition (Janani, 2026; Cinema Trace, 2026). These themes suggested that the race was not presented only as a physical contest. It also served as a setting for the development and resolution of personal conflicts. From a narrative perspective, the competition connected past experiences with present decisions and gave characters an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities, confront rivals, or seek a new beginning. This relationship was significant for cultural analysis because

a cultural activity may acquire meaning through the relationships and memories associated with it. Nevertheless, friendship, betrayal, and rivalry are common features of sports dramas across different cultures. They should not be interpreted as unique characteristics of coastal communities. The analysis should instead examine how the film connected these familiar dramatic elements to its particular sporting environment.

3. Cinematography and the Visual Construction of Coastal Life

The film's visual representation of the sea was another significant topic. Reviews highlighted the strength of the water-based sequences and the contribution of cinematography to the racing scenes. The Indian Express, for example, praised the performances and visual impact of the scenes on the water while noting that the film was less consistent in its land-based narrative (The Indian Express, 2026).

This critical response raised an important issue for the present research: cinematic representation is shaped not only by the cultural activity being shown but also by the techniques used to present it. Wide shots, close-ups, editing, camera movement, music, and sound effects may make the race appear dangerous, exciting, emotional, or heroic. These techniques influence how viewers understand the relationship between the characters, their boats, and the sea. The analysis of movie stills can support this discussion. A frame showing several boats, for example, may help the researcher examine composition and the visual presentation of collective participation.

A close-up of a character may reveal how the film communicates concentration, anxiety, or determination. However, a still image cannot establish the full meaning of a sequence independently of its surrounding action, dialogue, and sound. The visual analysis should therefore combine selected movie stills with scene descriptions and timestamps. This would allow the researcher to explain not only what appeared on screen but also how cinematic techniques shaped the representation of coastal sporting practice.

4. Cultural Continuity and the Limits of Cinematic Representation

The relationship between cinema and cultural continuity requires careful consideration. Films can increase public visibility of practices that receive limited representation in mainstream media. By centring a story on sailboat racing, Mandaadi drew attention to a sporting environment associated with coastal life. Its potential contribution lies in making that environment accessible to audiences who may not have direct experience of it. UNESCO's 2003 Convention, however, defines intangible cultural heritage in relation to practices, knowledge, skills, and expressions recognised by the communities concerned. It also emphasises the role of transmission and continued recreation across generations (UNESCO, 2003). This means that cultural continuity cannot be established solely through a film's depiction of a traditional-looking activity.

To investigate continuity in Mandaadi, the researcher should examine whether the film explicitly portrays the sharing of knowledge, intergenerational learning, the preservation of established practices, or changes in participation. If such elements are absent or unclear, the discussion should not claim that the film demonstrates cultural transmission. Further research involving community interviews and independent historical evidence would be necessary to establish the relationship between the cinematic representation and living cultural practice.

5. The Contribution of the Film to Tamil Cinema

The available reviews positioned Mandaadi as a sports drama with a distinctive coastal setting. India Today emphasised its relatively unusual sailboat-racing premise, while NDTV highlighted the film's exploration of a sporting world that has received limited attention on screen (Janani, 2026; Srinivasan, 2026). This suggests that the film may contribute to the representation of a wider range of social and cultural environments within Tamil cinema. Rather than relying exclusively on familiar sporting settings, the film placed a sea-based competition at the centre of its story. Such representation can broaden the range of places, occupations, skills, and community experiences visible in popular cinema.

At the same time, representation should not be equated with comprehensive cultural documentation. A feature

film selects certain experiences and characters while leaving others outside the narrative. Its dramatic priorities may emphasise conflict, heroism, rivalry, or spectacle more strongly than everyday work and social organisation. Therefore, the cultural value of Mandaadi should be assessed through both its visibility for coastal practices and the limits of the story it tells.

6. Implications for the Present Study

The discussion demonstrates the value of combining qualitative film analysis with cultural heritage scholarship. The film's reported emphasis on sailboat racing provides a clear starting point for investigating maritime knowledge, collective participation, community identity, interpersonal relationships, and visual storytelling. UNESCO's framework helps explain why skills and practices may have cultural significance, while research on Tamil Nadu's fishing communities provides broader context for understanding coastal social organisation. The main methodological implication is that every interpretation must be connected to observable evidence. The researcher should record scene timestamps, describe relevant actions and dialogue, and explain how each scene relates to the coding framework. Published reviews can provide contextual support, but they should not replace direct analysis of the film. Similarly, scholarly studies of fishing communities should be used to establish context rather than to assume that every documented custom appears in the film.

IX. CONCLUSION

The study examined the representation of folk tradition and cultural practice in the Tamil film Mandaadi (2026), focusing on traditional sailboat racing, maritime knowledge, community identity, interpersonal relationships, and cinematic representation. The analysis highlighted how cinema could bring coastal sporting practices and community experiences to public attention through storytelling and visual techniques. However, cinematic representation should not be treated as a complete record of actual cultural traditions. The study therefore emphasised the importance of direct scene analysis and independent cultural sources to verify the authenticity and historical significance of the practices depicted. Overall, Mandaadi provided a useful context for exploring the

relationship between Tamil cinema and coastal cultural representation.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future studies could examine the representation of folk traditions and coastal cultural practices in other Tamil films through comparative content analysis. Researchers could also conduct interviews with coastal community members, boat racers, and cultural practitioners to compare cinematic representations with lived experiences.

Further research could investigate how traditional knowledge is transmitted across generations and how cinema influences public awareness of local cultural practices. Additionally, studies could analyse audience responses to Mandaadi to understand how viewers interpret its portrayal of maritime life, community identity, and sporting traditions. These approaches could provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between Tamil cinema, cultural representation, and the preservation of living heritage.

REFERENCES

1. Bavinck, M., & Vivekanandan, V. (2018). Qualities of self-governance and wellbeing in the fishing communities of northern Tamil Nadu, India: The role of Pattinavar ur panchayats. *Maritime Studies*.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40152-017-0070-8>
2. Rao, N., & Sophia, J. D. (2023). Identity, sociality and mobility: Understanding internal fisher migration along India's east coast. *Maritime Studies*, 22, Article 42.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-023-00333-1>
3. Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications.
<https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/qualitative-content-analysis-in-practice/book234633>
4. UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*.
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>
5. UNESCO. (n.d.). What is intangible cultural heritage?
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

6. UNESCO. (2024). Basic texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2024 edition). <https://ich.unesco.org/en/basic-texts-00503>
7. Dharshini. (2026, September 10). Mandaadi review: Soori rules the waves. DT Next. <https://www.dtnext.in/entertainment/cinema/m-andaadi-review-soori-rules-the-waves>
8. Janani, K. (2026, September 10). Mandaadi review: Soori brings the fire, the sailboat race brings the thrill. India Today. <https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/movies/reviews/story/mandaadi-review-soori-leads-rooted-sailboat-racing-sports-drama-2991702-2026-09-10>
9. Radhakrishnan, R. (2026, September 10). Mandaadi review: Mandaadi charts an uneven course to a strong finish. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/tamil/movie-reviews/mandaadi/etmoviereview/134001460.cms>
10. Srinivasan, L. (2026, September 10). Mandaadi review: Soori shines in Mathimaran Pugazhendhi's engaging coastal sports drama. NDTV. <https://www.ndtv.com/entertainment/mandaadi-review-soori-shines-in-mathimaran-pugazhendhis-engaging-coastal-sports-drama-3-5-stars-12028873>
11. Sri, Y. (2026, September 10). Mandaadi movie review: Soori, Suhas are extraordinary on water, the film drifts when on land. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/movie-review/mandaadi-movie-review-soori-suhas-are-extraordinary-on-water-the-film-is-not-on-land-10871944/>
12. Mandaadi. (2026). Directed by Mathimaran Pugazhendhi. Tamil feature film.
Official trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_0Z-xn93DI
13. Khaleel Khan Mohammed. "A Survey on Digital Health Care Data Analysis Techniques for Developing Machine Learning Models"