

CINEMA FROM THE MARGINS

narratives, representations
and forms of subversion in
21st century Tamil cinema

International Conference

WEDNESDAY APRIL 1ST, 2026
INALCO AUDITORIUM, PARIS (13E)

Screenings - discussions "Cinema from the margins : perspectives of Independent Tamil cinema"

SATURDAY APRIL 11 & 18, 2026
CENTRE DES COLLOQUES -
CAMPUS CONDORCET, AUBERVILLIERS
CINEMA ALICE GUY, BOBIGNY

Organization

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CESSMA, INALCO
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CESAH, Université de Montpellier Paul Valéry
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Registration is required to join the conference,
in-person or online (first link) and
for the April 11 screenings (second link):
<https://forms.gle/ZmfFDsskPZYffcYa8>
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image : Maadathy, Leena Manimekalai, 2019

Our international conference is the first French academic event dedicated to Tamil cinema. To put a spotlight on Independent Tamil cinema, it will be followed by screenings of independent Tamil films, very little known or unreleased in France, accompanied by discussions with the filmmakers.

We would like to thank CESSMA, CESAH, GIS Asie and the INALCO Scientific Council for their financial support, and the teams at the Centre des colloques - Campus Condorcet and the Cinéma Alice Guy for their excellent collaboration.

ARGUMENT

Tamil cinema is one of the most dynamic film industries in India. Although historically marked by the figure of the mass hero, the codes of the masala movie, and the intertwining of cinema and politics, Tamil films reveal some profound transformations in form and substance over the past two decades, embracing new aesthetics, narratives and representations.

This new wave is less interested in showing the unity of the Tamil nation, as defined by 'Dravidian' ideology, than in revealing the realities of Tamil society, fragmented by patriarchal oppression, social inequality and the violence of casteism. These films give a voice to the voiceless, the oppressed, to characters marginalized by their caste, gender, religion, social status or sexual orientation. They shift the gaze and reveal perspectives that were previously invisibilized in Tamil cinema. These works, also defined by narrative and formal experimentations, are made by filmmakers who have earned widespread recognition as leading figures in 'anti-caste cinema' such as Pa. Ranjith, Mari Selvaraj and Vetrimaaran or filmmakers who are emerging through their independent films, such as P. S. Vinohraj, Leena Manimekalai and Arun Karthick. Beyond the films themselves, this new wave of Tamil cinema questions forms of censorship as well as it disrupts production and reception practices in Tamil Nadu and the diaspora.

This fourth Tamil conference of the 'Tamil worlds' conference series is meant to be a forum for multidisciplinary exchanges on the question of the marginalised in 21st century Tamil cinema. What alternative representations and discourses does this cinema create on the marginalised in a fragmented Tamil society? How could these films be a subversive and eminently political space of resistance? What are the production and reception issues behind this new wave of Tamil cinema?

PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS

Registration is required to join the conference, in-person or online (first link) and for the April 11 screenings (second link) :
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Contacts

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Locations

INALCO : 65, rue des Grands Moulins 75013
Paris. Métro line 14 or RER C. Station
Bibliothèque François Mitterrand

Centre des colloques - Campus Condorcet :
Place du Front populaire 93300 Aubervilliers.
Métro line 12. Station Front populaire

Cinéma Alice Guy : 24, rue Aretha Franklin
93000 Bobigny. Métro line 5. Station Bobigny
Pablo Picasso

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

**The conference will be held in English and French.
Speakers will present either in person or online.
Registration is required via the link (see previous page).**

9:00–9:30: opening and introduction
VELUPPILLAI Uthaya et ZAMBOULINGAME Shakila

Panel 1. Narratives and aesthetics of subversion

Discussant: ROBIN Françoise (IFRAE, INALCO)

9:30–10:00: ESWARAN Swarnavel (Michigan State University) « Redefining the Margins: Anti-Caste Narratives in the Cinema of Pa. Ranjith and Mari Selvaraj »

10:00–10:30: VELUPPILLAI Uthaya (CESSMA, INALCO) « À la recherche d'une esthétique subversive au pays tamoul : l'adaptation de la littérature au cinéma »

Coffee break

Discussant: HEADLEY Zoé (CESAH, CNRS)

11:10–11:40: LEONARD Dickens (Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi) « Caste Humiliation, Cinematic Experience and the Question of Genre in Tamil Cinema »

11:40–12:10: ZAMBOULINGAME Shakila (CESAH, Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry) « *Thangalaan* : formes de la subversion d'une épopée *paraiyar* postcoloniale »

12:30–13:00: Guest speaker, BASKARAN Theodore « The Emergence of Star Politician in Tamil Nadu »

Lunch break

Panel 2. (In)visibilized figures and emancipations

Discussant: GESTIN Martine (INALCO)

14:30–15:00: SAVERIMUTTU Meenaatchi (Cardiff University) « From New Wave to Netflix: Queer Representations in *Paava Kadhaigal* (2020) and *Sweet Kaaram Coffee* (2023) »

15:00–15:30: B. Geetha (Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Bengaluru) « The Comic Misfit in *Mandela: Between Caste and Comedy* in Tamil Cinema »

15:30–16:00: EDACHIRA Manju (Brandeis University) : « Intermedial Interventions: Emancipatory Mediations in Pa. Ranjith's Films »

Coffee break

Panel 3. Documenting and contesting: cinema through the prism of social and political realities

Discussants: VARREL Aurélie (CESAH, CNRS) and ARABINDOO Pushpa (University College London)

16:30–17:00: DEVADAS Vijay (Auckland University of Technology) et VELAYUTHAM Selvaraj (Macquarie University) « Contested Infrastructures: Aesthetic of Assertion in Contemporary Tamil Dalit Cinema »

17:00–17:30: KUMAR A. Deivendra (University of Hyderabad) : « Contemporary Tamil Cinema and 'Casteed' Reception in Southern Tamil Nadu »

17:30–18:00: GORRINGE Hugo (The University of Edinburgh) et DAMODARAN Karthikeyan (National Law School of India University, Bengaluru) « Caste, Cinema and the Civil Sphere: Scripting Social Change in South India »

18:15: Round table discussion with film professionals. 'Independent Tamil cinema: overview and perspectives' (subject to change)

SCREENINGS-DISCUSSIONS 'CINEMA FROM THE MARGINS: PERSPECTIVES OF INDEPENDENT TAMIL CINEMA'

The conference will be followed on Saturday April 11 & 18, by screenings that will put the spotlight on independent Tamil cinema, one of the striking features of which is its focus on the margins and the marginalised. The three feature films selected, quite unknown or unreleased in France, will be followed by discussions with the filmmakers. Short films made by filmmakers from the Tamil diaspora will be discussed with in the round table discussion on Tamil diasporic cinema.

Saturday April 11, 2026

Auditorium 250 – Centre des colloques, Aubervilliers

Screenings are free, registration is required (see the link page 1 & 2).
Auditorium 250 can accommodate a maximum of 250 people.

13:00 : *Bhaavi* / கிணறு, Balaji Maheshwar (2025)
India, 62 minutes, Tamil and Kannada, with English subtitles

Screening followed by a discussion with director Balaji Maheshwar (videoconference) moderated by Martine Gestin

15:00 : *Maadathy: an unfairy tale* / மாடத்தி, Leena Manimekalai (2019)
India, 90 minutes, Tamil, with English subtitles

Screening followed by a discussion with director Leena Manimekalai (in-person or videoconference) moderated by Uthaya Veluppillai and Shakila Zamboulingame

18:00 : 'Diasporic Tamil cinema, here and there'

- ***Bleat ! / கத்து!*, Ananth Subramaniam (2025)**
Malaysia, 15 minutes, Tamil, with English subtitles
- ***Anushan / அனுஷன்*, Vibirson Gnanatheepan (2023)**
France, 24 minutes, Tamil and French

Screenings followed by a roundtable discussion moderated by Shakila Zamboulingame with directors Ananth Subramaniam and Vibirson Gnanatheepan (in-person or videoconference)

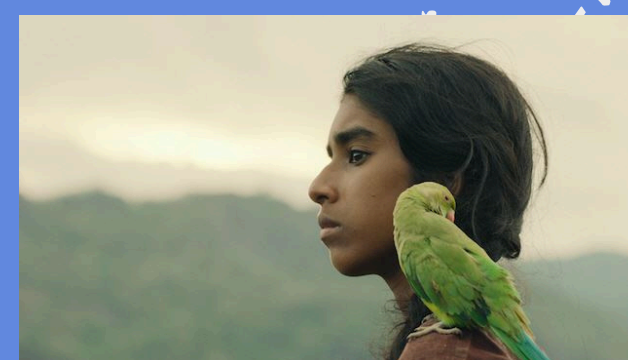
Saturday April 18, 2026
Cinema Alice Guy, Bobigny

The screening is at cinema prices.
Buy your tickets at Cinema Alice Guy (online or in the cinema)

Screening is part of the city of Bobigny's 'DESI Week', in collaboration with Cinema Alice Guy.

18:00 : *Nasir* / நசீர், Arun Karthick (2020)
India, 75 minutes, Tamil, with French subtitles

Screening followed by a discussion with director Arun Karthick and producer Mathivanan Rajendran (in-person or videoconference), moderated by Shakila Zamboulingame



SCREENINGS-DISCUSSIONS 'CINEMA FROM THE MARGINS: PERSPECTIVES OF INDEPENDENT TAMIL CINEMA'



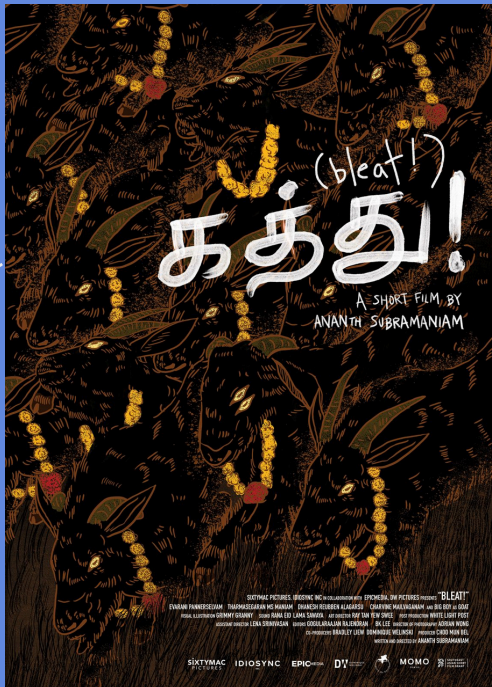
***Bhaavi* / கிணறு, Balaji Maheshwar (2025)**
India, 62 minutes, Tamil and Kannada, with English subtitles

This documentary, by filmmaker, photographer and visual artist Balaji Maheshwar takes us to Solaganai, a village where the *Solagar*, a mountain community, are trying to revive a 300-year-old water source in their village. Selected for the Dharamshala International Film Festival, *Bhaavi* is a striking portrait of resilience, ancestral knowledge and the fragile balance between humanity and ecology.



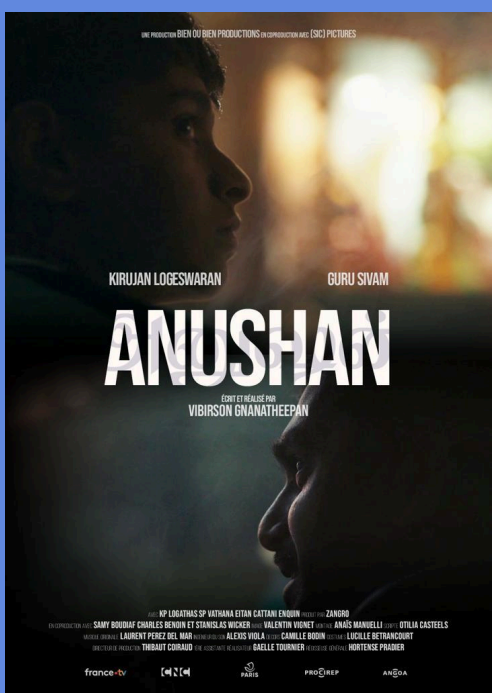
***Maadathy: an unfairy tale* / மாடத்தி, Leena Manimekalai (2019)**
India, 90 minutes, Tamil, with English subtitles

In southern India, the Puthirai Vannaar form an 'invisible' Dalit caste. Their forced occupation consists of washing the clothes of other Dalits, the deceased and menstruating women. *Maadhathy* recounts the trials and resistance of a young girl from this community who becomes a deity. Leena Manimekalai, filmmaker, poet and actress, has created a powerful work that has been recognised at numerous international festivals.



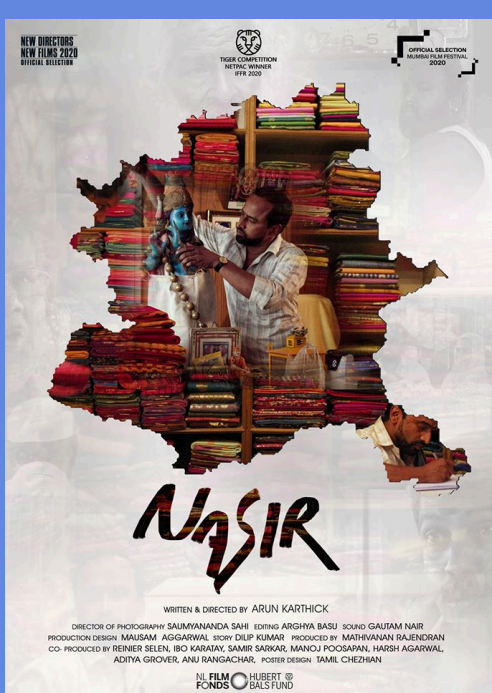
***Bleat!* / கத்து!, Ananth Subramaniam (2025)**
Malaysia, 15 minutes, Tamil, with English subtitles

An elderly Tamil-Malaysian couple discovers that their goat, intended for a ritual offering, is pregnant. Torn between their faith and the expectations of their community, they hesitate between performing the sacrifice or facing the wrath of the gods. Malaysian filmmaker Ananth Subramaniam's short film was selected for Critics' Week at Cannes in 2025, where it received the Queer Palm for Best Short Film.



***Anushan* / அனுஷன், Vibirson Gnanatheepan (2023)**
France, 24 minutes, Tamil and French

Anushan is a 13-year-old teenager, the only son of a Tamil family. As he distances himself from his family's culture and ignores the history of his country of origin, he finds himself sharing his room for a few days with his uncle who has arrived from Sri Lanka... Filmmaker Vibirson Gnanatheepan draws on his family history and diasporic experience for this short film, which has been screened at festivals and on French television.



***Nasir* / நசீர், Arun Karthick (2020)**
India, 75 minutes, Tamil, with French subtitles

Nasir is a sensitive, well-read man who loves to write love letters to his wife, but as a Muslim in an India marked by rising Hindu nationalism, his daily life is shattered by growing intolerance. Arun Karthick has created a powerful and heart-wrenching political film, acclaimed by critics, which won the Netpac Award for Best Asian Film at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2020.