

A Comparative Content Analysis of the Lyrics of Na. Muthukumar and Super Subu: Themes, Denotation, Connotation and Visual Context in Eight Tamil Film Songs

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Abstract

Tamil film songs communicate emotions, relationships and character identities through words shaped by music and visual storytelling. This study compares eight selected songs associated with Na. Muthukumar and Super Subu using qualitative lyrical content analysis. The Na. Muthukumar sample comprises "Ninaithu Ninaithu Parthen," "Suttum Vizhi," "Anandha Yazhai," and "Devathaiyai Kanden." The Super Subu sample comprises "Hukum – Thalaivar Alappara," "Jujubee," "Manasilaayo," and "Othapada Veriyattam." Each song is examined through its central theme, a short lyric excerpt, denotation, connotation, emotional tone and narrative/visual function. The analysis suggests that the selected Na. Muthukumar songs foreground personal attachment, memory, admiration and family affection, while the selected Super Subu songs foreground character elevation, catchy phrasing, rhythmic energy and dramatic attitude. These are observations about the selected songs only; they are not generalisations about the complete works of either lyricist. "Manasilaayo" is treated as a jointly credited song with Vishnu Edavan.

Keywords: Tamil film songs; lyrical content analysis; Na. Muthukumar; Super Subu; denotation; connotation; visual communication

1 Introduction

Film songs are an important part of Tamil cinema because they can communicate feelings and character relationships beyond dialogue. Lyrics may express private thoughts, describe a loved person, present family affection or establish a character's public image. Meaning is produced not only by the literal words but also by imagery, repetition, sound and the situation in which a song appears. Visuals, performance and music contribute to the overall effect; however, a content analysis must identify what is supported by the lyrics themselves.

1.1 Significance of lyrical analysis

Studying lyrics as texts helps explain how words create meaning in popular media. Denotation refers to the direct or literal meaning of an expression, whereas connotation refers to the feelings, associations or cultural meanings suggested by it. Applying these categories consistently allows the researcher to compare songs without relying only on popularity or personal preference. The visual context is considered as supporting evidence, not as a substitute for analysing the lyrics.

1.2 Focus of the study

The study compares four songs associated with Na. Muthukumar and four songs credited to Super Subu. The selection includes romantic expression, memory, family affection, hero elevation and high-energy performance. The comparison is limited to these eight songs because the purpose is close reading rather than a complete assessment of either lyricist's career.

2 Review of related writing

Writing about Na. Muthukumar commonly recognises his contribution to Tamil film lyrics and highlights songs such as "Anandha Yazhai" and "Suttum Vizhi" ([India Today, 2016](#); [The Indian Express, 2016](#)). Such coverage provides biographical and cultural context, although journalistic appreciation is not a substitute for line-by-line textual analysis. An academic abstract on Na. Muthukumar's lyrics identifies content analysis and comparative study as relevant approaches to examining themes and cultural features ([Subitharan & Lareena Abdul Haq, n.d.](#)). Music-platform credits identify Super Subu as lyricist for "Jujubee" and credit both Super Subu and Vishnu Edavan on "Manasilaayo" ([Apple Music, 2023, 2024](#)). StudioFlicks also lists Super Subu in the credits for "Othapada Veriyattam" ([StudioFlicks, 2024](#)).

Together, these sources support the selection and credit details. The present study focuses more narrowly on comparing lyrical meaning, literal sense and implied meaning across the eight songs.

3 Objectives

1. To identify the central themes in the selected songs associated with Na. Muthukumar and Super Subu.
2. To examine the denotative and connotative meanings of selected lyric phrases.
3. To analyse how imagery, repetition, word choice and emotional tone contribute to each song's meaning.
4. To compare how the selected lyrics support personal expression, family feeling, character image and film context.

4 Methodology

This study uses qualitative lyrical content analysis. Eight songs were selected purposively: four associated with Na. Muthukumar and four credited to Super Subu. The unit of analysis is a short meaningful lyric phrase considered in the context of the song. The same analytical categories are applied to each song: (i) evidence, represented by a brief lyric excerpt; (ii) denotation, or the direct meaning; (iii) connotation, or the implied emotional/cultural meaning; and (iv) film/visual function. The analysis is interpretive and limited to the selected material. "Manasilaayo" has shared lyric credit with Vishnu Edavan and is therefore discussed as a jointly credited song.

Only short lyric excerpts are included. The images accompanying the analysis are illustrative visuals created for this document, not official film stills. They indicate the broad emotional or dramatic context and should not be treated as documentary evidence from the films.

5 Theoretical framework

This study is based on Semiotic Theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and further explored by Roland Barthes. Saussure's Course in General Linguistics (1916) explains how signs convey meaning through the signifier and signified. Barthes' Elements of Semiology (1964) discusses denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (implied or symbolic meaning). These concepts are applied to compare the lyrics of Na. Muthukumar and Super Subu, focusing on word choices, metaphors, emotions, cultural references, and thematic meanings in Tamil film songs.

6 Analysis

6.1 Ninaithu Ninaithu Parthen – 7G Rainbow Colony

Key lyric excerpt: "Ninaithu ninaithu paarthen"

Context: The song centres on memory, longing and the pain of separation. The first-person perspective presents love as an inward experience that continues even when the loved person is absent (Figure 1).

Denotation: The repeated act of remembering is the direct idea conveyed by the key phrase. The speaker is mentally returning to a person or experience.

Connotation: Recollection becomes a sign of emotional attachment. Repetition suggests that the past remains active in the present, making memory both comforting and painful.

Film/visual function: The film context of youthful love supports the reading of the song as an expression of personal vulnerability. The visual mood should be read alongside, but not in place of, the lyric.



Figure 1. Visual accompanying "Ninaithu Ninaithu Parthen".

6.2 Suttum Vizhi – Ghajini

Key lyric excerpt: "Suttum vizhi chudare"

Context: "Suttum Vizhi" expresses romantic admiration. The speaker's attention is directed towards the beloved, and description becomes a way of communicating the intensity of attraction (Figure 2).

Denotation: The phrase refers directly to the beloved's shining or radiant eyes. The wording foregrounds a visible feature of the person being addressed.

Connotation: The eyes become a symbol of beauty and emotional influence. The beloved is presented as someone who changes the speaker's perception and draws the speaker's attention.

Film/visual function: The romantic presentation reinforces admiration and intimacy. The song differs from "Ninaithu Ninaithu Parthen" because its main emphasis is fascination rather than separation.



Figure 2. Visual accompanying "Suttum Vizhi".

6.3 Anandha Yazhai – Thanga Meenkal

Key lyric excerpt: "Anandha yaazhai meetugirai"

Context: This song focuses on a father's affection for his daughter. Its emotional centre is family attachment, presented through tenderness rather than conflict or romantic attraction (Figure 3).

Denotation: The phrase compares the child's presence or effect to the playing of a yaazh, a traditional string instrument, and connects that image with happiness.

Connotation: The musical image suggests that the child brings harmony, beauty and joy into the parent's life. The metaphor turns an everyday family bond into an emotionally rich experience.

Film/visual function: The family-centred context supports a reading of the song as an expression of care and gratitude. The song broadens the sample beyond romantic themes.



Figure 3. Visual accompanying "Anandha Yazhai".

6.4 Devathaiyai Kanden – Kaadhal Kondein

Key lyric excerpt: “Devathaiyai kanden”

Context: The song presents attraction through idealisation. The speaker describes the beloved as extraordinary, revealing the intensity of the speaker’s own feelings (Figure 4).

Denotation: The key phrase literally states that the speaker has seen an angel or a divine-like being.

Connotation: Calling the beloved an angel elevates the person beyond ordinary experience. The phrase communicates wonder and idealised love, while also showing that the description reflects the speaker’s perspective.

Film/visual function: The song supports the character’s emotional viewpoint. Compared with “Suttum Vizhi,” its key image is more explicitly idealising and symbolic.



Figure 4. Visual accompanying “Devathaiyai Kanden”.

6.5 Hukum – Thalaivar Alappara – Jailer

Key lyric excerpt: “Hukum, Tiger ka hukum”

Context: “Hukum” is associated with authority, confidence and the elevation of the central character. The language is direct and designed to establish presence quickly (Figure 5).

Denotation: The phrase invokes a command or authority associated with “Tiger,” linking the character to power and control.

Connotation: The repeated, declarative wording constructs a larger-than-life screen image. Rather than expressing a private feeling, the lyric performs confidence and invites an audience response.

Film/visual function: The grand entrance and performance context help explain the song's character-building function. This differs from the intimate emotional focus of several songs in the Na. Muthukumar group.



Figure 5. Visual accompanying "Hukum".

6.6 Jujubee – Jailer

Key lyric excerpt: "Jujubee"

Context: "Jujubee" uses a distinctive, memorable hook and a contemporary, playful verbal identity. The title phrase itself draws attention to sound and repetition (Figure 6).

Denotation: At the level of the selected phrase, the word functions primarily as a repeated hook rather than a complete statement or narrative description.

Connotation: Its catchiness and rhythmic placement can make it memorable even before the listener fully interprets the surrounding lines. A careful analysis should not infer the entire song's meaning from the title alone.

Film/visual function: The energetic performance context supports the hook's function as part of the song's mood and audience appeal. Further claims about the song's themes should be checked against its full lyrics.

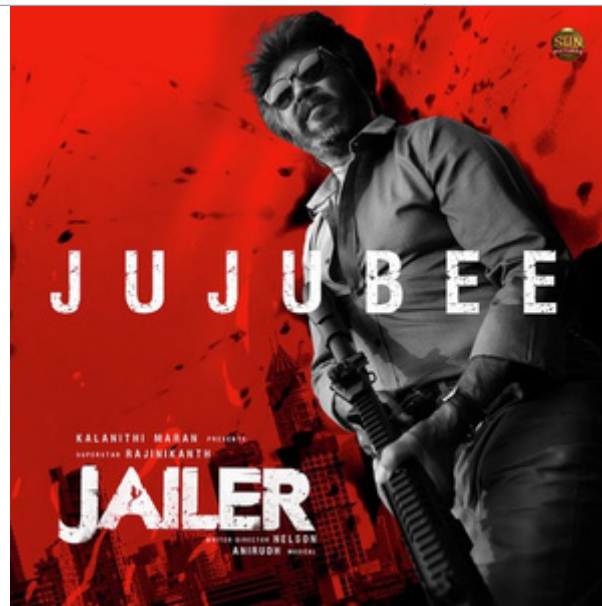


Figure 6. Visual accompanying "Jujubee".

6.7 Manasilaayo – Vettaiyan

Key lyric excerpt: "Manasilaayo"

Context: The song provides a case for studying contemporary phrasing and a repeated verbal hook. Its meaning is shaped by the lyric, vocal delivery, rhythm and scene together (Figure 7).

Denotation: The phrase is conversational in feel and works as a direct, memorable expression within the song.

Connotation: Its repetition creates immediacy and audience familiarity. Because the song is jointly credited to Super Subu and Vishnu Edavan, the analysis describes the song's features without assigning every technique to Super Subu alone.

Film/visual function: The performance-led context illustrates how a short phrase can become central to a song's identity. The shared lyric credit is retained as an important qualification.



Figure 7. Visual accompanying "Manasilaayo".

6.8 Othapada Veriyattam – Garudan

Key lyric excerpt: "Othapada veriyattam"

Context: The song has a forceful title and a dramatic film context. It offers a useful example for examining intense wording, rhythmic phrasing and a sense of confrontation (Figure 8).

Denotation: The title phrase identifies the song and signals a vigorous or forceful action, but the title alone does not establish every theme in the complete lyrics.

Connotation: The phrase's sound and dramatic association can suggest intensity and movement. Claims about anger, conflict or aggression should be supported by additional lyric evidence rather than inferred only from the title.

Film/visual function: The dramatic setting helps situate the song within the film's action-oriented mood. The analysis remains limited to the meaning supported by the selected phrase and available context.



Figure 8. Visual accompanying "Othapada Veriyattam".

7 Comparative observations

The selected songs by Na. Muthukumar foreground memory, romantic admiration, family affection and idealised attraction. The selected Super Subu songs more often function as hooks, character elevation or dramatic performance within the chosen sample. These are not absolute categories: film genre and scene requirements influence the lyric, and both lyricists' wider work may contain other styles. Across the sample, literal meaning and implied meaning work together. Imagery can turn a person into a symbol of beauty or joy, while repetition and direct phrasing can make a character's attitude immediately recognisable. The comparison therefore describes tendencies within these eight songs rather than ranking the lyricists.

8 Conclusion

This qualitative content analysis examined eight Tamil film songs associated with Na. Muthukumar and Super Subu. The analysis used short lyric excerpts to identify denotation, connotation, emotional tone and film function. "Ninaithu Ninaithu Parthen" foregrounds memory and separation; "Suttum Vizhi" expresses admiration; "Anandha Yazhai" uses musical imagery to convey parental affection; and "Devathaiyai Kanden" idealises the beloved. In the selected Super Subu group, "Hukum" establishes authority, "Jujubee" centres on a catchy hook, "Manasilaayo" illustrates contemporary phrasing and shared authorship, and "Othapada Veriyattam" offers a dramatic verbal identity. The findings show that lyrics can express intimate relationships or build a public character image according to the needs of a film. Because the sample is limited to eight songs and the interpretations are qualitative, further research should analyse a larger set of songs using verified lyric transcripts and a consistent coding sheet.

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