



# "From Amy to Duraamma: How AL Vijay's 2010 Movie, "Madrasapattinam" narrates the tale of a British woman's adoption of a new culture and identity"

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## ABSTRACT

*AL Vijay's 2010 movie, Madrasapattinam unfolds the love story of a British Women with a Tamil guy in the backdrop of pre-independent era. This paper tends to delineate the character of Amy Wilkinson (played by Amy Jackson) in the movie where she narrates her experience in India where she gains a new identity as, "Duraamma" and she narrates how she got attracted by the innocence of a Tamil guy named Elamparithi (played by Arya) and how she learns the Tamil language and the Culture during the time of political turmoil. Amy's narration in the film will talk about the new and old Madras and both the past and present combines together when she makes the trip from London to India. Her memory lies more in the past with accuracy where she narrates every incident where she seeks to reconnect her emotions. That is why through her character, my paper will show how the British woman found a new identity as an Indian woman.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

AL Vijay's Tamil movie *Madrasapattinam* (2010), set in the pre-independent era, where the film shows the love story of a British Women and a Tamil village guy played by Amy Jackson and Arya. This movie not only shows the unrequited love of both the characters but also brings a contrast between the old and new Madras and it is where the audience can see the difference between the beauties of the city especially during the early 50s through Amy's narration. The movie starts with a scene where the female protagonist Amy Wilkinson (Amy Jackson) who is aged now suffering from a blot clot in the brain, suddenly decides to visit India. She wants to see the man Parithi (Arya), the man who loved her and it has been nearly sixty years that she has not seen him.

## II. SHIFT BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT IN THE FILM

The movie gradually shifts between past and present experiences of Amy's experience. From the

beginning of the movie some hints of past has been shown like for example, when Amy and her family came to know about her brain injury where her doctor says it is caused due to any accident that happened earlier, then she recollects the incident where a scene was shown that she got injured when she was young. This short scene from the flashback brings a curiosity among the audience about what happened to her and where and when this incident took place. The scene moves forward found and old picture of a young guy and a 'Thali' which is a wedding sacred thread and then she recollects her past when she landed to India. The curiosity appears among the audience regarding the photo and the sacred thread and here the flashback sequence appears which shows the young Amy who visits India to meet her father who was the governor of the city Madrasapattinam and she gets attracted by the beauty of the city and its culture especially there was a scene where a group of people with an elephant procession are going to a temple for a ritual and this makes her fascinated a lot and she clicked a picture. Emi has got a photo of Parithi and flashback reveals how Parithi who is a washer man and fights against the British

officials. She is the silent spectator who found that Parithi is very brave and she witness the conflict between the British officer Robert Ellis and the Dhobi community. She got attracted by this young guy and she started falling in love and Parithi also started reciprocated his feelings for her.

She realized that the city has changed a lot after 60 years where she recollects her memories after seeing the Buckingham Canal, The Spencer's Club and she remembers how the government officials welcomed her earlier and in present how the travel agent received her. But the difference is earlier she was the daughter of the governor wearing silk taken care by her father's men whereas at present, she arrives India where she is taken care by the travel agent who tried to make money by fooling them, unaware of the fact that she can speak and understand Tamil. The staff member of the Indian Embassy in London and her family members were quite shocked to learn that she can speak Tamil fluently. Her memories defines about her past where she remembers the other characters like Nambi, who worked as a Translator for her, Selvi, who was Parithi's sister who liked Amy a lot.

The transition for the present scenario to the past has been shown in a brilliant manner where seeing the Cooum River now, is dirty whereas earlier it was beautiful and clean and how she enjoyed the boat ride and at the end how she saved Parithi by casting him with a lift raft. Both of their love bloomed until the news of the Independence was declared where Amy and her family will have to leave this country. Now the couples need to decide between country and love. The movie will take the viewers to the period of 1947 and ingrain the feeling of patriotism among them. Most of the viewers have no idea about the Old Madras before the independence but through Amy's character the viewers can visualize the old Madras city. Amy was shocked seeing the filthy and dirty condition of the Cooum River in present whereas the flashback reveals how it was clean and beautiful.

### **III. HER IDENTITY AS AKKA AND DURAIAMMA IN THE MOVIE**

All the people of the Dhobi community liked her as lot and they never felt her as a British woman, rather she became, "Akka" for the children and "Duraiamma" for Parithi and others also. Nobody knew her original name but for everyone she was Duraiamma (the term means Chief Lady). When the children asked her what was her ambition she said she wants to a Governor like her father and will construct big schools and hospitals for the poor.

It was not Amy, but it was Duraiamma who was trying to protect the Dhobi community from the tyranny of Officer Ellis. It was Duraiamma who encouraged Parithi to have a fight with Ellis in order to defeat him and to get back their land which was taken in order to build a golf course. Everyone forgot that she is a British women rather she became a family member. She wore Sari and Bindi during their celebration which defines the adoption of her new identity as an Indian. The "Thali" given by Parithi symbolizes their relation as a husband and wife. The "Thali" is a marker for a married Indian woman and while giving this sacred thread, Parithi assures her that she belongs here in this place in Madras and no one can be able to take her from here. Through this scene and the dialogues this proves that she is Parithi's wife and no one else's wife. This movie also proves that she is a true Indian by heart where in one scene; she was wearing the badge of the independent Indian flag. When Ellis was trying to remove her badge saying that she should be ashamed of herself of wearing the badge, then she replies she feels proud of it. When she met Parithi's friend Kabir on his deathbed in the hospital, his last word was, 'Duraiamma'.

The film also showcases the life of Amy during her younger days where she was forced to marry Officer Ellis and how her step-mother detests her. She was not happy with this alliance and she felt dominated. But on the other hand she felt happy and safe among the Indians. She shares her dream with the kids instead of sharing it with her family members who are getting her married against her will. She loved Parithi's way of treating her with respect comparing to Ellis who always tries to show his power among these people. She learned Tamil and this made the tourist guide shocked seeing that a foreigner can speak so fluent Tamil. This shows that though she got married in London, but her love for Parithi and the Tamil culture remained till her last breath. Though both Parithi and Amy got separated, she still came back to India with a hope to meet him and to return the "Thali" since it belongs to his wife. But at the end she came to know that Parithi fulfilled her dreams by founding a charitable trust, "Duraiamma Charitable Trust" where hospitals, schools, and colleges were built in the name of Duraiamma. Though she was not there in person, but her name was there and each and everyone who was associated with that organization were aware of the identity of Duraiamma as an inspiring figure for their founder but not as Amy. Her dreams came true not as a British governor which she wanted to be, but as a Tamil woman through Parithi. At the end, seeing the tomb of Parithi, she realized that this sacred thread belongs only to her and nobody else and she took her last breath on his tomb. She took her last breath

in India, in Chennai, where everything ended 60 years ago. Though their love was unrequited but the respect they had for each other was real. Both of their life was changed after the day of the independence but their love never died.

Amy was very happy when she was with the people of the dhobi community. She was fascinated by viewing the new culture and she loved its beauty, which she felt a shock after seeing the present situation. It is through her character where the time shift between both past and present has been shown which is commendable and this shows how she connects her feelings and emotion and how she narrates her past to her granddaughter and the tourist agent.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Overall, this movie has its own originality and beauty of the old Madras, apart from that, the movie tried to focus on the events and the incidents of the freedom struggle through Amy's narration. The declaration of the date of the Independence played an important role in terms of narrating the truth and reality of the past. The names of the legendary figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya and Netaji was mentioned while on the other side showing the struggle of both Parithi and Amy like how they are trying to run away from the British officers. It is Amy's character which takes the script forward and it was her character which shows how being a new to this place was able to understand the culture and its people and how it gained her a new identity as Duraiamma. This film will take back the viewers and will show the Madras city which exist in Amy's memory and her clicked pictures.

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