

ANALYSIS ON DIRECTOR RAM'S FILMS

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ABSTRACT

This case study aims to explore the expertise of a budding, yet prolific director—Director Ram. The paper goes through the work of Director Ram in the Tamil film Industry (Kattradhu Tamizh, ThangaMeengal, Taramani) and aims to focus on the content of the films directed by him. The researcher, in his paper analyzes the types and kind of movies that the director has been a part of and the different types of techniques that he adopted and executed in his films. The researcher also analyses in detail, the type of character and highlighted the multifaceted role of women as portrayed in his films.

KEYWORDS: *Direction, Cinematography, Protagonist, Women, Characters, Film Industry, Globalization*

INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema has been a standout amongst the most continually developing film ventures everywhere throughout the world. The wide variety and the number of dialects that are used in the nation, make the Indian film industry stand out as the leading film producing unit. Indian film is a plethora of numerous dialects, classifications, and social orders. In any case, in a multilingual nation like our own, the significant focal point of the movies is on Bollywood. It is not valid if critiques and reviewers point out that the industry is notwithstanding the pressure or competition from Hollywood. A basic investigation of the general pattern in scholarly Indian film exploration shows a restricted progress on Tamil silver screen or rather any regional silver screen. The researcher, therefore, has tried to analyze the growth of Tamil industry in the past few years and to understand the subjects that are of chief focus in these films. To substantiate the research, the researcher has taken into account, a contemporary director of the Tamil film industry—Ram.

The researcher, therefore, has analyzed the movies directed by Ram in detail and depth to comprehend the reasons for Ram's critical acclaim in the Tamil silver screen.

OVERVIEW OF TAMIL FILM INDUSTRY

Tamil films depended on the Indian folktales (Keith 1942, 2015) and mythology for an exceptionally long time until the 90's. Tamil silver screen was introduced to another time in the 1990s with better movies. Town-based movies dominated the industry with less emphasis on authenticity. With the advent of quick changing media scene in the 1990s, films turned out to be progressively popularized and this brought about the blurring of the social content in Tamil film; supplanted by music and dance moves. Tamil cinema also came across a huge shift with the involvement of mastermind filmmakers like

Balachander, Balu Mahendra, Bharathiraja, Mahendran and so on. The emergence of ‘parallel cinema’ and the adaptation of it into the Tamil industry marked yet another shift in the timeline of the Tamil silver screen. The presence of Mani Ratnam and the emergence of Shankar gave star power to the Tamil cinema. In the early 2000 Tamil cinema had had a whole new look out and makeover. Bala’s tragic ‘Sethu’, Anbe sivam by Sundar C, Kannathil Mutthamital by Mani Ratnam, Goutham Menon and his stylish characters in ‘Minnale’ made a significant impact on the profile of Tamil cinema. Directors like Lingusaamy and AR Murugadoos also hit the industry with fresh and dynamic plots that not just entertained, but also conveyed a valuable societal message to the audience through commercial as well as non-commercial films. ‘Polladhavan’ and its unique plot by Vettrimaaran gave a new twist to commercial cinema. These types of films and genres slowly led to the emergence of new directors in the field who were ready to experiment with noncommercial or parallel film. One such change was seen with the release of ‘Katrathu Tamizh’ by Ram. Ram then went on to make noncommercial content films that were more focused on the critical perspectives rather than commercial marketing.

RAM AS A DIRECTOR

Director Ram started his career in the year 2000 in the Bollywood industry as a scriptwriter with Rajkumar Santhoshi. His career marked off as a Bollywood scriptwriter who worked on films like, Pukar(2000) and Lajja (2001). Ram considers Balu Mahendra as his educator, who, he refers as, ‘changed over’ him ‘from being a film enthusiastic to a film understudy’ as he likewise explored on realistic strategies from him, especially about cinematography (Channel, 2018). In a profession spreading over ten years, 42-year-old Ram has coordinated three movies and is taking a shot at two others – Savarakatthi and Peranbu – that have a place with a lighter class. Taramani, featuring Andrea and Vasanth Ravi, is the last film in his Globalization Trilogy. His fourth movie Peranbu, as indicated by the executive, is the essential one in his vocation.

Ram has shown exceptional skills in his direction in the three films(Katradhu Tamizh, Thangameengal, Taramani). It is called his globalization trilogy. All the three films were based on the changing scenarios of the country. Ram said in an interview, ‘Katradhu Thamizh was about arts and humanities. Thanga Meengal was about primary school education and Taramani portrayed relationships. I live in a time of globalization. It’s natural my stories are about it.’ Due to the themes that are chosen by Ram in his films, all of them are relatable to the audience who find it extremely easy to connect with his characters, leading to the success of the films. He has also been influenced by famous novels and novellas from where he has chiseled out his characters and their features. ‘Katradhu Thamizh was inspired by Albert Camus’ The Stranger. When a man has no family, no home, no identity, he’s free to do anything. Taramani has influences of Kubrick’s Eyes Wide Shut, Polanski’s Knife in the Water... Also, when I say that I’m inspired, it doesn’t mean I’ve taken dialogues or scenes from these works. I try to analyze those concepts within the framework of our society. I wish I had the caliber of my heroes, Polanski and Kubrick. I’m jealous of their ability. But what I have the unshakeable belief in is that there’s no such thing as politically correct art. The art I create is my philosophy drawn from the truths I’ve observed around me’. This further suggests Ram’s love for portraying reality in his films, leading to its recognition and success.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tamil cinema has had major revolutions in the past. The cinema that we see now has passed the tests of time (S.Aishwarya, 2010) and changing audiences. S Aishwarya in her article says that the evolution of cinema as a mass culture was not a sudden phenomenon, she says. When cinema was at its nascent stage, it was seen as the best platform to spread and share intellectual thoughts. In the 1930s, the industry was a melting-pot of literary and music activities. Leading poets, Tamil scholars, and Carnatic musicians took to the cinema and made the medium popular. But progressively, films earned a stigma that made many dissociate themselves from the medium. The article further talks about the evolution of cinema as a mass culture and that it was not a sudden phenomenon.

Majority of the films that are analyzed in the paper focuses on globalization and its spillovers and impact on the society. The paper titled, 'Globalization and representation of women in Indian Cinema' by Sangeet Dutta deal with the changing roles of women in the different branches of Indian filmmaking, especially in the case of Bollywood. The journal emphasizes that women (Dutta, 2000) have played a prominent yet subtle role in the film industry throughout the growth of films. The content clearly brings out how women were treated and how their existence was viewed in the films. The framework used in this paper brings in concepts like the nation-state, the public sphere, and theories investigating the dynamics between the global and local. It talks about the evolution of the film industry and the roles played by the women in terms of action, production, communication. The author shows the travel of female existence in the film industry especially Bollywood over the course of time until the year 2000. The author establishes a connection between the nation-state, the changes the country undergo and the changes that women characters and roles have undergone. The concept of globalization is also brought into the journal and it evens out the context at which films were being taken. The paper also looks at the stereotype in which women are viewed and claims that the representation of women eventually became the same in all the genres and the male role dominated could the industry. The journal and its inputs are important as the researcher's work contain a major section of understanding based on films and globalization. This article has helped to understand and study the different trends in which films were made and simultaneously traces the importance of women characters in the films.

The Tamil film industry and the then Madras recently renamed Chennai, has been the center for all film developments from the past. The central location of the city made it accessible to a lot of people, quickly modifying it to a film-centric. The research paper titled, 'Film culture in Chennai—Reports on screenings and cinema institutions in Tamil Nadu capital' (Gopalan, 2008) points out that, in the state capital of Tamil Nadu, scriptwriters, lyricists, and film stars have moved back and forth between the glitz of film and the showmanship of politics with an ease that should have long ago had the heirs of the Frankfurt School established a permanent school of critical theory on the Marina. The author, Lalitha Gopalan points out the significant growth of film and film-related industries in the area. She takes into account, Paruthiveeran and explained the nuances of the film shot. She states, 'Paruthiveeran has little patience with the compositional still-ness of panoramic shots or the rapid pace of editing in analog predicated on sequencing. Rather, it deploys digital effects to expand the frame both vertically and horizontally so as to spatialize violence; this is the cruel cinema in its essence, its brutality unmitigated by viewing a morning show in a theatre with a diminutive name'. Another film that she takes into her notice is Shivaji: The boss, and says that the exception and global reception was instantly attributed to Shankar's directorial abilities, Rajinikanth's fan

following, state-of-art computer graphics, and so on, but it is worth noting that the real superstar here was AVM's publicity blitz, which propelled the reception of every other film, flooding the market and theaters with its film and attendant movie accessories. She also observes that cinematic technologies exist well beyond the Kodambakkam row of studios; recording and mixing studios flourish atop grocery stores, and cybercafés offer every casual user of the computer the possibility of dabbling in filmmaking. The paper, therefore, provides an insight into filmmaking overtime in Chennai. It is very helpful as it focuses on the growth of the Tamil silver screen over the passing time.

Cinematography and direction play a major role in shaping the structure of the film. It adds meaning and value to the final edit and the type of shot adds depth to the final product. The paper titled, 'Cinematography Techniques: The Different Types of Shots in Film' By Timothy Heiderich explains cinematography as the art of visual storytelling. The author conveys that the artistry of cinematography (Heiderich, 2012) comes in controlling what the viewer sees (or doesn't see) and how the image is presented. The film is a visual medium, and the best-shot films as are one could gauge and follow the movie storyline without dialogue delivery.. The author further elaborates on The Rule of Thirds as a technique of dividing the frame up into a 3x3 grid, splitting the frame into nine boxes. The paper also provides with a detailed understanding of how the shots in the film are, and explains various kinds of shots that were reused in the films, which includes the long shot, the extra long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, close up, extreme close up, Dutch angles and birds eye shot. The paper further explains the kind of camera and camera character to meet the objective and sub viewpoint of the scene. Is it a passive observer or is it close to the action? These help in creating a better understanding of the film in a holistic sense and has played an important role in shaping the understanding of this research paper.

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is a research method for studying documents and communication artifacts, which can be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video. Content analysis is generally used to quantify patterns in communication, in a replicable and systematic manner.

The methodology the researcher has used to construct this research paper is the use of content analysis for qualitative research. The researcher will be analyzing various films (Kattradhu Tamizh, Thangameengal, Taramani) that have been directed by Ram in order to gain understanding about the various methods and the techniques the director has used in the process of direction. The researcher aims at analyzing the cinematic elements that have been used by the director and also the themes that the director has touched upon in his films. The researcher will be using content analysis as the base for his research paper which is a case study on director Ram's work.

The researcher will be relying on the films itself as a reference for the paper.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework adopted by the researcher in this research paper is a guideline/demonstration of a research paper named K Balachander: an Innovative filmmaker(based on a case study on Director Balachander). The methods and techni-

calities from the work done by Satyavati Chinnaiiah will be used by the researcher in the course of his case study.

The research paper titled, K Balachander: an innovative Filmmaker draws attention to the Director's journey and progress in the Tamil film industry (Chinniah, 2009). The paper adds valuable insights into the director's unique style of filmmaking, breaking all the stereotypes prevalent in the society, especially challenging the patriarchal way of the society, the prevalent caste system and the suppression of the poor. The research paper is based on a case study that is formed through the content analysis of 3 films that were directed by K Balachander.

The parameters used by the researcher for his paper will be used as guideline and way forward to analyze the work of director Ram in this paper.

ANALYSIS AND INFERENCES DRAWN

Analysis of the films by Dir Ram – will be based on the following main parameters.

- Cinematography
- Social or complex issues that his film focuses on
- Characterization of the protagonist
- Editing pattern
- Music elements and its importance
- Role of women characters

The researcher has analyzed three films directed by Ram in terms of globalization trilogy ie Kattradhu Tamil(2007), Thanga Meengal(2013) Taramani(2017).

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematography, according to Marriam Webster is 'the art or science of motion-picture photography' (Marriam-Webster, 2018). The director, in all his 3 films has tried to experiment with the aspects of cinematography and displays a lot of common methods to convey his perspective to his audience. The director has used various camera angles and methods, displaying a wide variety of motion picture photography in all the films directed by him. The Researcher observed that the director has made use of a lot of 'handheld' (with the camera not fixed to tripods, stands or supports) (Walsh, 2012) shots in his films, time and again to display uncertainty tension and a personal point of view of the characters when there is an indecision involved. The blurring and instability of the shot convey to the audience about the obvious tension and trouble of the characters just by the way of framing and movement. In his debut film, Kattrathu Tamil that was released in 2007, there is extensive use of the handheld shots to display the ever-fluctuating mind of the protagonist. His constant mood swings, varying opinions, and misery is significantly and frequently portrayed by the uneven movement that a handheld camera movement produces (Butler, 2012). In the other two films, the handheld shots are used to observe the tension of a certain situation or to establish the character's perspective to the audience. Another prominent method used by the director is the use of canted shots (EWANSIHA, 2015) and blurring out of the frame to establish the characters mentality. The director has also vividly

used a lot of shots to symbolically portray the emotions of his characters. In the film, *Thangameengal*(2013)the director has symbolically made use of a lock(without the key) to establish the mood and the thought of the protagonist (a little girl)who feels locked up and jammed due to the pressure exerted by the society that she grows up in, a shot framed with the windows in focus and the girl behind them makes it look like the girl is trapped in the cage,conveyed the ‘cornered’ feeling that is felt by the protagonist-Chellama (Nerdwriter1, 2015). The director has also used the high angle shots (a photograph or film sequence taken from above the subject) (MOURA, 2014) to establish sheer contrast and weakness of the protagonists in various situations and also to show the helplessness of the characters involved. Another evident cinematography method that is used by the director involves the use of ‘long shots’ (Heiderich, 2012) with a low key light setting deliberately in order to add the effect of misery and helplessness, pathetic and vulnerable lifestyle. Wide angle shots have also been used to establish certain factors and situations especially for the setting of the scene and also to add emphasis to the conflict faced by the protagonists.

EDITING

Editing plays a very important role in a way a film is conveyed to the audience. Editing is important in order to put together all the relatable sequences and ensure that the message intended is conveyed through the film (TrendyCrunch, 2017). Director Ram has extensively used the technique of ‘match cuts’ in all the three films that have been directed by him. Match cut is a cut from one shot to another where the two shots are matched by the action or subject and subject matter (Tindell, 2016). Match cuts are used in order to add the element of ‘drama’ and also to convey a lot of similarities between the past and the present of the protagonist’s life and the sequence of events that have taken place over time in his life. These ‘match cuts’ unconventionally act as the link by drawing parallels or contrasts between two different time-space locations (ROBERTSONOCTOBER, 2012). These match cuts immediately transfer the audience’s perspective to another time without having another set of introduction or reference. Another editing technique that has been constantly used in his films is the method of ‘non-linear’ projection of the story. i.e the story or the narrative is not in succession (Aronson, 2018). The sequence of the screenplay is not followed and the progression takes place in random but meaningful sequences. The use of voice-overs is also very predominantly spotted in his films, as the voiceovers are used to either convey something about the characters past or give insights to the audience with the help of an external narration. The voiceovers, like the match cuts, adds to the understanding of the audience and gives them a window to understanding the context of a particular scene or sequence.

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PROTAGONISTS

There are a lot of similarities that have been observed in the case of the characters of the protagonists of the films directed by Ram. Director Ram said in an interview, ‘I think this interest in analyzing a hero itself is slightly chauvinistic. (laughs) But yes, I realize what people say about my heroes. They say he is a loser, he has a long beard, he doesn’t get the life, he is pessimistic. But I want to tell people that I treat my films as theses. They shouldn’t try to understand my film through its hero. The lead male character is simply there to illustrate my thesis.’ (Srinivasan, 2017)

The protagonists (especially the men) are shown as weak, struggling to figure out life and trying their best to cope up with the changing patterns of the world around them. They are generally seen with the long beard and unkempt hair and with varying mood swings and temper that flares up just too often (Melissa, Warcholak, & Mercurio, 2015). The beard that is a part of each of these characters personality resonates the streak of violence and anger that these characters carry themselves with. These protagonists have very little regard for the society or the people around them as they rebel against the world and questions the conduct in which the world functions. These characters are also shown to be extremely passionate about what they do and love. These men are hardcore lovers who have immense space and respect in their life for the women they love. It can be well said that these characters are 'ideal' when it comes to respecting their life partners. The trust and love of their partners are unshakable and mostly constant and unflinching throughout the course of the films. The kids that are a part of the film are portrayed as extremely naive and innocent with not much idea about the worldly and materialistic functions. They play a major portion of the film and adds on to a different viewpoint. In the film, *Kattrathu Tamil*, the kids are featured in the form of flashbacks of the protagonists. The presence of these childhood versions adds to the depth of the relationships that they share and emphasizes what these protagonists might feel for each other. In the case of the other 2 films, the concept is much simpler as the children (Chellama and Adrian) emotionally binds both the protagonists together and ensures that the stories are kept going even through the conflict (that is constantly a part of these films). The children in these two films, very evidently display the factor of Freudian Oedipus complex which refers to a child's unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent, the complex of emotions aroused in a young child, typically around the age of four, by an unconscious sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex and wish to exclude the parent of the same sex as both the protagonists are extremely affectionate to the parents of the opposite sex while they do not care too much about the other parent (Cherry, 2018). This is personified in the example of 'ThangaMeengal' where the entire movie revolves around the father-daughter relationship. The affection between the duo is clearly portrayed in all the scenes with the little daughter taking drastic measures thinking that her dad got scolded because of her.

MUSIC

The composer of music in all the three films has remained constant- YUVAN SHANKAR RAJA. Ram has maintained the same music director in all his films and says, 'He's the true hero of my film. He's at a stage right now, where he's bored with doing the regular stuff. I would love to hear the music he will compose a few years later. As a man changes, so do his music. His music isn't just for today. In a sense, my films aren't too'. Ram's liking towards Yuvan's music is justified by the content that is a part of these songs.

ROLE OF WOMEN

The role of women has constant rephrasing in all the films. In his first film, *Kattrathu Tamil*, the protagonist is a simple, innocent naive girl who is extremely understanding but gullible and she plays the character of eternal love of the male protagonist (Prabhakar) she is the major reason for his sustenance even amidst the existential crisis that he is going through in

his life. She is the typical example of a 'perfect' girl or women for his life and his sustenance and living is just in the hope that he will meet her again, someday. Presence of same, but yet convincing innocent dialogues in the film mark her character as an ingenious soul who can easily get exploited by the gruel, cruel world. In the second film by Director Ram, the characterization of women is slightly evolved to be on par with the changing scenarios of the world. The women protagonist is portrayed as innocent, dedicated to her family and her concerns for her family is of prime importance. However, she is capable of making her own decisions in her life in order to protect her daughter (Susan Snow Wadley, 1991). She is a calculative woman and her actions are driven by her love and emotions. The other woman in the film is also dependent on the men for her livelihood, but they do hold a say in the society and the daily operation and running of the house. In this case, the mother in law of the house is presented as a tainting character that questions all the actions and incidents in and around her especially with respect to K Balachander: an Innovative filmmaker based on a case study on Director Balachander the son's life (Craig, 2017). But when the need arises, she does convince everybody around her for the welfare of her daughter in law and her grandchild and acts as a totally pragmatic woman. In the last film, released in 2017 the representation has undergone a complete shift (i.e.) the woman is portrayed as a full feminist, broad-minded woman who lives in her own contemporary terms and has her own definitions and morals to the way she has to lead her life. She is a completely independent woman who does not bother or conscious of society. She is instrumental in rearing her son in complete comfort. She doesn't understand the need of a man in her life as she is capable enough to take care of herself and her son. But however, the societal views related to an singlewoman is not very viable and she is critiqued by numerous male characters around. Even these challenges do not pose a threat to her as she continues with her life, confident and head held high. The character that Andrea plays in the film is a sheer contrast to the women characters as, 'A significant change was that women became more self-reliant, says Ram.' Globalization created a liberal space for women to express themselves. It gave them an identity, beyond the usual tags of a mother, sister, wife, and daughter.' (GOPALAKRISHNAN, 2017) In the other two films, women are part of the traditional society following traditional values and morality.

CONTEMPORARY AND SOCIAL ISSUES

In all the three films, there have been a plethora of contemporary and social issues that have been addressed by the director. All these issues have been subtly delivered to the audience intertwined with the story and not an exaggeration. Chronologically, in *Katradhu Tamizh* one of the main problems faced by the protagonist (Prabhakar) is the way a Tamil graduate is treated in Tamil Nadu (his native itself). It talks about the growth of call centers and IT industries in Tamil Nadu and how the economy has had a major shift. A Tamil graduate is looked down whilst a software graduate who talks and understands English is treated in a better way by the society. The protagonist here highlights the confusion as he fails to understand why his own mother tongue is looked down in his own native region when he should have been rewarded for the same (BehindWoods, 2007). The second film '*Thangameengal*' mainly highlights the current issue that the country faces, with respect to children who are growing up and the kind of education system that the country follows and adopts. The film draws special attention to Indian society and its view of education as well as the typical notion of private schools being better than Government schools for providing education to children. The 'rat race', and the race to secure admissions in the private

school that the entire society is a part of is significantly highlighted in the film from the perspective of a little girl, Chellama who cannot understand why she is so blatantly turned down and undermined by her teachers and her friends in spite of her father telling her that she is a bright girl and the best student in the world. The focus of the film is laid on how 'education' as a system has the potential to create and also destroy a small innocent mind also destroy and demean (Times of India, 2016). The film perceptibly visualizes and shows the education system prevalent in the country that is based on the rote memory and capacity of the child and not on the creative aspect and dimension. The film, also beautifully portrays an intricate delicate relationship that the young minds share with their loved ones.

His latest film, released in 2017 brings in another contemporary issue that the world has been facing off late and recently. Stereotyping women and defining their roles in society has been followed for a very long time. Taramani addresses this issue and the aspect in which the people, especially the men view a single mother. The 'Adult' rated film peeks into various aspects of the current, changing scenario of the society where it is completely acceptable for a woman to smoke, drink and have a social life. The film subtly mocks at the power and changes that the so-called modernization and globalization trend has brought about to a traditional cum conservative society such as ours and the cultural shock and the conflict that is associated with such an induced change. The growth of Informative Technology in the country is another aspect that Taramani has focused on, as Ram himself says, 'I stay in an apartment here in Chennai and I'm inspired by what I see around. I feel a lot has changed around me since the time I made *Kattradhu Thamizh* (2007). I have too.' (Menon, 2017). The film lays its focus on the growth of these industries in and around Chennai, even on the areas that were accounted as wetlands. The film shows the development of these IT industries in eco-sensitive areas and the type of environmental problems that are associated with it as the city grows. 'Right from millionaires to the construction workers who live here like modern refugees. From a place of several water bodies, seagulls, and farming to a dump yard of sorts. It is multi-cultural, multi-layered and multi-dimensional.' says Ram about his films and their themes related to contemporary issues.

LIMITATIONS

An extensive study could not be conducted due to limited time, to do a comparative study across directors. The director has just completed three films only, which are under the category of non-commercial films. And also there was a lack of available research and content for secondary data.

CONCLUSIONS

Ram and his filmmaking have helped him achieve a specialty and a domain for himself in the extensive Tamil film industry. The audience who favor equation based and idealist motion pictures are not positive of his movies as they represent the true reality of the current era. The films by Ram are true scenarios and depictions that are reflected in the society. The director has only got critical acclaim for his films until in the recent past where his film, *Taramani* took over the theatres with the soulful direction and brilliant casting. Since then, there has been a lot of anticipation for his new releases and the strong content messages that it rendered to the society. Director Ram did not just limit himself to direct, he also acted in his second

film, making an evident mark of his versatility and the confidence that he has in the film industry and with his audience and stakeholders. Ram's films bagged three prizes at the 61st National Film Awards including 'Best Tamil film' award for his second film, Thanga Meengal. It was the only Tamil film to be screened at Indian Panorama in International Film Festival of India, IFFI, Goa, 2013 (MovieCrow, 2013). The films that are directed by him so far have always had a theme and the way of narration, depiction, and portrayal of the society. There are great expectations and curiosity among the audience in terms of his upcoming, future films- for enhanced reality and pragmatism.

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