

Chapter 23

Auteurs and Transitions in Cinema: Discussing New Age Tamil Film Directors

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ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on the transition in Tamil cinema and its subtle yet eloquent approach given by the auteurs in the recent past (from 2000-2018). An auteur film involves subjective and personalised filmmaking, rather than the mechanical transposition of a script onto film. An auteur film is about the filmmaking practices engaged in filming a script. Despite having two different ideologies in this industry, each auteur has managed to achieve and prove a point to the audience and the critiques. These directors were exposed to world cinemas at film institutes and motivated to make similar films in their mother tongue. Expression through cinema was the new identity each of them was seeking identical to that of the audience of Tamil cinema. Some auteurs use formulas of box office success to find it whereas some use innovative ways in cinema to find it.

INTRODUCTION

Over 119 years of its existence, Tamil cinema has been an influencing force in the culture and politics of Tamil Nadu. The medium along with various movements in the State have had effects on each other vice versa. Filmmakers treated subjects in different situations with their films inevitably touching upon social and political issues. The diverse currents and cross-currents of thought that went into various social and political movements in Tamil Nadu can be traced through a study of Tamil cinema. It was the connection between Tamil cinema and these movements that gave rise to the phenomenon of the star-politician and the use of film for explicit political propaganda. Cinema is the only art form in Tamil Nadu, whose origin can be traced with some certainty (Baskaran, 2013). Describing the significance of cinema in Tamil society, Baskaran points out, “Over the seventy-nine years of its existence, Tamil cinema has grown to become the most domineering influence in the cultural and political life in Tamil

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Nadu. The role of films in the politics of Tamil Nadu has been significant, and the influence of ‘Stars’ on Tamil politics has made political astrologers of those who would seek to understand it. During the 1967 election campaign, the New York Times carried an article describing the film star’s involvement in the politics of Tamil Nadu as having “a touch of California.”

GENRE AND TRENDS IN TAMIL CINEMA

Today’s cinema is all about genre and Tamil cinema is also following this pattern. Understandably, the genre is a key factor in classification in Tamil cinema. However, other features are also playing an important role in defining the transition in Tamil cinema. This change also gave rise to independent producers and smaller banners. The cinema of the 1970s and 1980s gave Tamil cinema viewers a different understanding of a medium. This period saw the rise of many new directors like J Mahendran, Balu Mahendra, Singeetam Srinivasa Rao, Sundaram Balachandar (Aka Vennai Balachandar), K. Balachander, C. Rudhraiah, P Bharathiraja, K Bhagyaraj, S A Chandrashekar, Bharathi- Vasu (of *Paneer Pushpangal* fame) to name a few.

Director Bharathiraja’s *Muthal Mariyathai*, Balu Mahendra’s *Mundram Pirai*, K Balachander’s *Sindhu Bhairavi*, *Raja Paarvai* by Singeetam Srinivasa Rao and Suresh Krishna’s *Sathya* are a few films to mention which have given rise to a transition in Tamil film industry and have also been trendsetters for certain genres. These films broke the traditional rules of narration, music, background music (BGM), story, and acting; setting a new trend in the industry which is not completely falling into the category of parallel cinema. To give it a genre identity, one can say that it can be called cinemas of ‘middle path’ as they still have the features of a commercial cinema.

Giving it such a classification it would be justified to explain that these films have tried to break the shackles of the traditional way of film making in the Tamil film industry. Some films like *Payanangal Mudivathillai* directed by R Sundarrajan created a genre wherein there were a series of films with a protagonist as a singer/musician and performing on stages as part of a light music troop. Protagonists like Kokila Mohan (‘Mike’ Mohan) and Murali (*Idhayam* directed by Kathir) became iconic for such performances. Music and Melody (Songs and Lyrics) along with the background music became the key player in the popularity of these films. The music albums of these films are still considered as evergreen hits among Tamil film enthusiasts. Besides the strong story and narrative technique, these films had a good musical score.

Stories based on romantic tragedies became popular during the 1980s with TR Rajender and E Ibrahim’s *Oru Thalai Raagam* (1980) and it continued into the ‘90s as well. Debutant director Kadhir’s film *Idhayam* (1991) was another hit film that was based on a story that fell into the category of the ‘love saga’ genre. Tamil cinema has various genres under which experimentation in cinema has been carried out by many auteurs. But this was all in the changing scenario of the commercial blockbuster section of Koddambakam. Indeed there were many new faces, a lot of experiments and also a kind of energy from these young aspirants which was quite contagious.

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