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Kinematografie

MAGISTERKÁ PRÁCE

Kamera Santoshe Sivana: Analýza jeho práce s kamerou a pochopení jeho
přístupu

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Acknowledgement

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Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá dílem Santoshe Sivana, jednoho z nejznámějších indických kameramanů. Skrze analýzu vybraných děl z doby jeho čtyřicetileté kariéry lze rozeznat jak jeho vizuální styl, tak přístup, který k tvorbě zaujímá.

Abstract

This research looks at the work of Santosh Sivan, one of the most renowned Cinematographers from India. By analyzing some of his works we can identify his visual styles and understand his approach behind creating the images in his career spanning 40 years.

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I. Introduction

A. Intention of the Thesis

To analyze the works of Santosh Sivan to understand how he uses composition, colours, camera movements and lighting to establish his own unique aesthetic in his films.

Santosh Sivan is one of the most iconic cinematographers that India has produced. He started in the 80's with the world of filmmaking, and is the most awarded Director of Photography in India. He was a founding member of the Indian Society of Cinematographers (ISC), and is also the first cinematographer from the Asia-Pacific region to join the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC). He has also won the highest Indian civilian honour, the Padma Shri, and 12 National Awards and numerous other laurels from international film festivals. This research will help to bring out his unique thought process about cinema and bring an understanding to his visual style.

"I went to Pune Film Institute, which is one of the premier institutions in the country. There you met people from different backgrounds, economically and culturally, and so it became a hub of like-minded people. You were exposed to an archive full of fantastic movies from all over the world, and you found in all these different languages that the language of cinema is one. You also realized that cinematography is an art, since it's very universal; you are accepted everywhere if your film is interesting." - Santosh Sivan¹

In order to understand the decisions and the creative reasoning behind the images and the emotions that it conveys, It is imperative to understand the background of where Santosh Sivan comes from and how his environment influenced him.

As an environment, India is a complex place. India is an amalgamation of various languages, dialects, cultures, art forms, religion and beliefs. It is difficult to narrow down to identify and categorize India, more than any other country. Here, cinema is bigger than life; it is a vital part of the culture, where it is celebrated, and the silver screens, idolized. This makes cinema of India unique.

¹ 100 years of ARRI - Interactive Timeline and Interviews. (19 May 2019). Retrieved from <https://100.arri.com/interviews/event/5996c018f0c74b7d49b61f64>

“Camera is just a medium. Cinematography is not looking at the camera, it means looking through it. What makes our style distinct is the tradition and culture’s influence in the technology. That is where our originality lies. When someone says they are adapting the Hollywood style of cinematography, it plainly means it is copied.

The primary factor that makes our kind of cinematography distinct is the variety of cultural influences in the country. Even if it is the smallest art, we tend to make it very ornamental. Even Indian music is ornamental and so is our style of cinematography.” -

Santosh Sivan

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It is also particularly interesting to study the works of Santosh Sivan because not only is he a cinematographer, but he also directs his own films from time to time. Most of the films he has directed have also been critically acclaimed. So the approach of working as a Director and a Cinematographer can lead to a conundrum in the decision making process. However his approach to the visuals becomes an internal decision making process and he himself is the cinematographer.

“Cinematography is more like Zen art, purely creative. You get to interact with the visuals if you really want to. Direction needs a lot of creativity, but it also involves organizing skills. Being a director also gives me the liberty to tell a story that I want to.”

- Santosh Sivan

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Disclaimer: In this thesis we analyze selected Tamil films which are referred to as “Parallel cinema”, which is distinct from the traditional “mainstream Bollywood” that western audiences have come to perceive about the films made in the entire Indian subcontinent. Some of the films that are analyzed here like *Roja* and *Thalapathi* are in between parallel cinema and commercial cinema.

² CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (20 June 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-2.html>

³ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (20 June 2019.). Retrieved from <https://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-2.html>

B. A Short Biography on Santosh Sivan

Santosh was born in 1964 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India, into a family of artists. His father 'Sivan' known for making documentary films and both his brothers ended up as filmmakers as well.

When he was young, his grandmother used to bring picture calendars from the Trivandram palace that featured the artwork of Raja Ravi Varma, a nineteenth century Indian painter whose renowned works included themes from Hindu mythology, and scenes from everyday life during his time; and with a cluster of children at her feet, she would narrate tales that the paintings depicted. These images had a significant influence on his visual style as a cinematographer.



Ravi Verma's Paintings

" Motivation is a difficult word, you don't realise it at that time but cultural influence is always there. Ravi Varma's paintings inspire me a great deal – I've drawn a lot from those for my scenes." - Santosh Sivan⁴

He was also exposed to Kathakali, a dramatic dance form in South India that is based upon Hindu literature, and the theory of Navarasa - the essence of human experience and the nine different emotions - as he grew up.

⁴ Sindhuja Ramprasad On August 14, 2. (2014, August 14). Life, Love and Beyond: The Santosh Sivan Interview. Retrieved from <https://silverscreen.in/features/life-love-and-beyond-padmashri-santosh-sivan/>

Santosh Sivan studied in Film and Television Institute Pune, where he was exposed to a lot of talented people and films of all kinds. He was especially influenced by Indian cinematographers like Aloysius Vincent, Melli Irani, Subarata Mitra, VK Murthy, K K Mahajan etc and also by western cinematographers such as Nestor Almandros, Vittorio Storaro and many others. ⁵

As India has a lot of regional languages which have their own film industries independent of Bollywood contrary to the common perception. Santosh Sivan began his career making films mainly in South India in one of those regional industries, specifically in the Tamil and Malayalam film industries. He also did a few advertisement films.

Santosh Sivan's work in a Hindi film Raakh(1989) was noticed by a then up-and-coming director, Mani Rathnam. He was impressed with Santosh Sivan's camera language and technical prowess and collaborated with him on their first production together, Thalapathi (1991). This was a big break in Santosh Sivan's career, which gained him reputation as a talented cinematographer; and led to more fruitful collaborations between Mani Rathnam and Santosh Sivan over the next three decades through six projects, transitioning from the film to the digital era. These films are very renowned and both in India and in the international film festivals. The second film which they collaborated together Roja (1992) got Santosh Sivan noticed for its pure and refreshing visuals all throughout India. This thesis will delve deeper into the subject of this collaboration and a few films of this collaboration would be discussed in the next few sections.

Following his successful collaborations with Mani Rathnam, projects started pouring in for Santosh Sivan from all the regional film industries in India. He collaborated with other successful directors like Priyadarshan, A R Murugadoss, Kalpana Lajmi, Shaji N Karun, Sangeeth Sivan, Suhasini, Khalid Mohammed, and many others. He also started getting into a lot of mainstream commercial films which had higher budgets and provided a lot more freedom for him to explore his craft. He eventually got to a point where he could choose the projects that he wants to shoot. He is currently one of the most expensive cinematographers in India.

⁵ South, F. C. (2017, November 07). Santosh Sivan speaks on the 'Timeless' Quality of the Cinematography of Charulata | Santosh Sivan. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seQu5Om37Sc>

“There are a number of reasons I look into before taking up a film. If I like the directors or their previous works, I sign. If the film has scope for me to explore a new space, I take it.

Varieties are also very important. If the film has something I have never done before, I will bend towards it. I don't like to get bored. The variety is what keeps me going. Sometimes, I pick a film just for the sake of finding out what can it possibly offer me. But once I take up a project, no matter how brilliant or bad it is, I try to stick to it. “ - Santosh Sivan⁶

Santosh Sivan has started to work on his own passion projects with miniscule budgets. He shot and directed 13 films, many of which were either critically acclaimed or commercially successful. He shot 'The Terrorist' - 1998 - which was critically acclaimed and won in a few festivals worldwide. He used the money he was earning from commercial films, to fund his passion projects. With his own projects he has the freedom to explore and experiment.

⁶ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (20 June 2019.). Retrieved from <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-1.html>

II. Collaborations with Mani Rathnam

A. *Thalapathi*

Thalapathi (Chief) is the project which marks the beginning of an important collaboration with Director Mani Ratnam for Sivan's career. At this point, Sivan was still relatively a new cinematographer. At the beginning of their collaboration Mani Ratnam had a cult status with 9 commercially successful and critically acclaimed films under his belt. He was bringing a fresh voice and a fresh look to the films of Tamil cinema.

"I'd seen his film Raakh (under Aditya Battacharya's direction). It was dramatic, quite stunning visually. After Anjali (his previous film), we were looking at a film that had action, which had dramatic elements and I was keen to meet him and see if he'd be interested in working with me" - Ratnam Mani⁷

The duo decided to work together on this project in 1990. The script was a modern day adaptation of a small portion from the magnum opus of Indian mythology, the *Mahabharatha*. The film is based on the friendship between two characters, Karna and Duryodhan. In the myth, Karna (character name Surya in the film) is a character who inhabits the grey area in between good and evil. He is brave, generous and a person who would give his life for his friend. But the story of Karna is that of a man who was let down by destiny. Abandoned by his real mother Kunti, as a child, he grew up under the care of a charioteer. He refuses to part with Duryodhan (character name Devraj) even though he knew he was not on the right side, because of his friendship and gratitude.

In the prologue of the film, a 15 year old unmarried girl called Kalyani gives birth to a baby boy, wraps him up in a yellow cloth, and leaves him in a goods train coach which contains bags of rice. This child is transported in this manner, until the train comes to a stop; some other children enter this coach to steal the rice, and on being challenged by a police man, the children flee together with the baby they discover there, and leave him alongside a nearby river. The river transports the child to a slum in a small town, where he is picked up and looked after by the community in general, and is named Surya.

⁷ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin.(page 113)

Thirty years later, Surya has grown up and is affectionately regarded as a kind-hearted man, who will help anyone in distress and trouble. One day, Surya defends a woman's honour, and gravely wounds a man molesting her. This man is hospitalized, and subsequently dies. As a result, Surya is arrested by the police. It is then Devraj, a much feared gangster comes to Surya's rescue, and gets him out of custody. Surya discovers that the man he killed worked for Devraj, and seeing that Devraj helped him get out in spite of the fact, he becomes indebted to him for life, and both become close friends. Their friendship is tested when a new police commissioner, Arjun, comes to this community, and is bent upon arresting Devraj, who instructs Surya to kill him immediately. Surya agrees to do so, not knowing that Arjun is none other than Kalyani's other son, his own brother. And events unfold.

At that point of time Tamil cinema did not have any of the financial prowess that Bollywood possessed. So, in order to make the films look like it was well-funded, they decided to go with heavy stylization in visuals. This brought a very unique look which was not seen at any other period: the lighting was very expressionistic, with blown out highlights and pitch black shadows in the same image. There was no intention of having naturalistic lighting at all. Mani Ratnam preferred this gritty approach to the lighting which he had for a few of his previous films as well.

Simplicity in Execution: A Distant Camera

At the beginning of the film, Surya (played by Rajinikanth) is abandoned by his unmarried mother as a newborn baby, but circumstances lead the baby to be brought up by a woman in a small town. This was a prologue for the film, which was done in black and white. This was executed with simplicity.

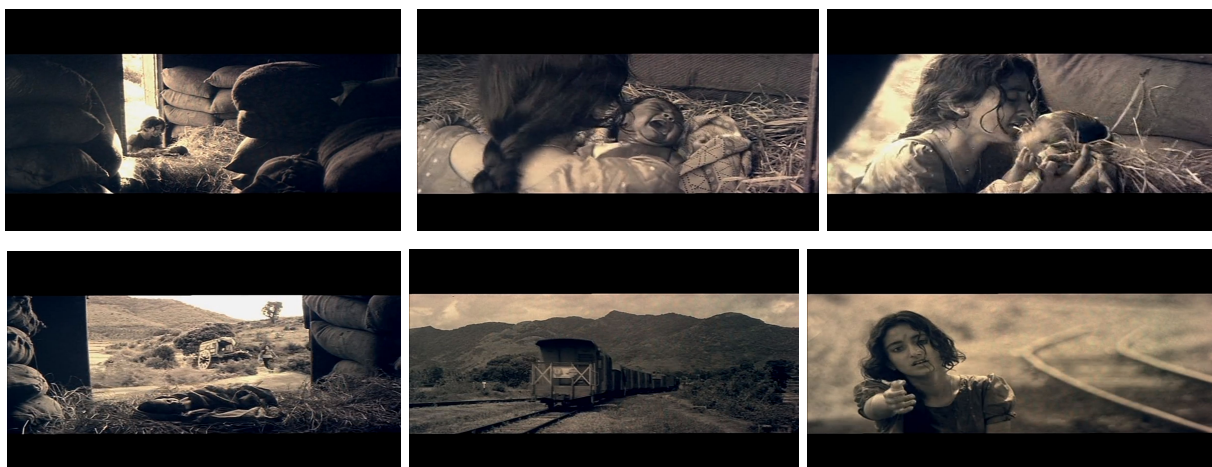


The bullock cart which comes from the far horizon, seemingly idyllic. Its coming into a village which is celebrating *Boghi* (an Indian festival where old belongings are put on bonfires) This is connected to a wide shot of a midwife inside the house. Then the camera goes closer to the characters in terms of shot sizes, using long lenses retaining a distance, when the situation is revealed. There is a woman on the verge of delivery, but the midwife sees that she doesn't have the *Mangalsutra* (the Hindu equivalent of a wedding ring), so she closes the door refusing to deliver the baby. This is established by a simple tilt down of the camera.



Then the pregnant girl delivers the baby inside the bullock cart by herself. The camera doesn't see the place where she is delivering the child, the delivery is just cued in sound. The camera shows rays of sun penetrating through the leaves as symbolism of the birth being blessed by the sun. But we don't see the sun itself.

After the delivery, the young mother leaves the child in the train wrapped in a cloth. But as she sees the train leave, she changes her mind to get her baby back and runs after the train; however, she is too late and the train goes away.



The camera physically comes close when he uses a wider lens when we see the child for the first time. But the camera is always stays further away from the mother. The

compositions used are very simple, but the images are quite powerful at conveying that mother's distress and creating a concern for the baby which is now abandoned. This entire sequence just uses a camera on a tripod, with a zoom lens. The only place there the camera moves on a dolly is to reveal the rays of the sun coming through the leaves of the tree. Minimalism in camera techniques are seen throughout the film, and just by changing the distance between the subject and the camera, the film makers are able to hit the right emotional notes.

The western audience are usually not acquainted to the Indian acting styles and they consider it too melodramatic. But the school of acting and the ethos are different, and more theatrical. So the camera being static here empowers the actors' performances. Just the distance between the subject and the camera provides the right emotional cues.

The Son of God: Divine Light

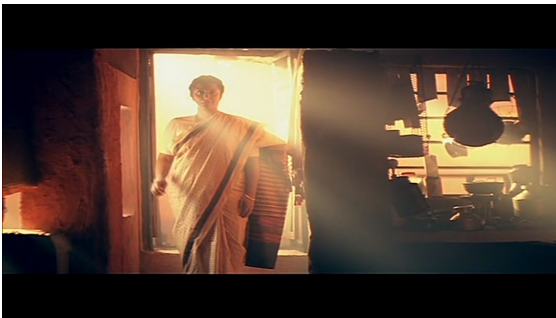
As mentioned above in the mythology, since Karna (Surya) was the son of God, the film makers decided to have the sun or the influence of sun as an aesthetic element in the scenes. This was characterized by the major use of low key lighting, very stark highlights and long shadows and silhouettes, to make the image visually pleasing and audience could connect to the presence of the sun in a subconscious level.

*"The first time colour seeps into the film is when the child is held up against the sun, and that becomes a motif throughout the film. It's a very strong reference to where he came from and it links this story to the epic" - Mani Ratnam*⁸

⁸ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 105)



The presence of the sun is felt and seen all through the positive events that happen in Surya's life and when he interacts with good people, and fights for justice. It is as though the sun is there protecting him, as a blessing of the divine.



To aid in executing this idea the crew had even planned and built the set in a direction in a way that when the sun rises in the morning, it enters in through the front door of the house. This was especially used when the Mother (played by Srividya) enters the doorstep, and the sun dramatically rises behind her and the rays of the sun touches Surya's face. This is the moment that the mother sees Surya for the first time as her long lost son. He begins to cry in anguish and he moves into the shadows as the mother stands in the door, the light becomes stronger and stronger - as though she brings the light and protects Surya from darkness. Now he cannot be separated from his mother, this emotion and poetry is communicated just with light.

Planning any shoot just based on the direction of the sun makes the production difficult. There were logistical and scheduling difficulties on a very stretched out budget. They had to shoot a lot of shots in a day and they couldn't afford extra days. This proved to be a challenge for Santosh Sivan and he had to come up with cheap creative solutions which fitted the visual aesthetic that he was hoping to achieve.

"We decided to try and bring the sun into his life visually too. Now we couldn't always shoot in the early morning or the late evening sun. So, we used mirrors and old tungsten lights to create that effect."- Santosh Sivan

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Generally, American and European films look very different just because of the sunlight. As India is located closer to the equator, film makers face situations where the sunlight between 10.00 AM and 3.00 PM is quite harsh, with the overhead sun casting shadows over the eyes and directly below any object. This is one important reason why Indian films look different in comparison to the western films. Europe and America enjoy a more angular sun as it is positioned significantly to the north of the Tropic of Cancer; as a result, getting an image with contrast is easier.

Conclusion

The stylization in this film, with harsh highlights and black shadows, while retaining the softness in lighting faces, is hard to achieve. Especially when the budget is constrained you need to come up with creative solutions to solve problems. Yet Sivan persisted, creating stunning images and built a relationship with Mani Ratnam. Even though this film possesses a very unique visual signature, this visual style is going to evolve as we continue to discuss about their future collaborations. He truly pushed the limits of the dynamic range in this film, at a time where only prints were distributed to cinemas and only prints were screened.

⁹ Nathan, A. (2018, April 04). Santosh Sivan on his lengthy collaboration with Mani Ratnam: 'Every film is different'. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/reel/873987/santosh-sivan-on-his-lengthy-collaboration-with-mani-ratnam-every-film-is-different>

B. Roja

“Santosh is a terrific DOP. He makes shooting so effortless.” -Mani Ratnam ¹⁰
After *Thalapathi*, Sivan had earned a good reputation in the Tamil film industry, More importantly he developed a good working relationship with Mani Ratnam. Mani Ratnam had been working on another idea which he wanted to go into production in 1992, immediately after *Thalapathi*. This time it was a Romantic-Thriller film that dealt with the controversial Kashmir issue and had a patriotic leanings. Santosh Sivan happily accepted the project and the entire camera team which had worked on *Thalapathi*, joined him on *Roja (Rose)* as well.

The film opens with a Kashmiri terrorist, Waseem Khan ([Shiva Rindani](#)), is captured by a team led by Colonel Rayappa ([Nassar](#)) in an Indian army operation. Meanwhile an 18-year old Roja ([Madhoo](#)) is a simple village girl born and brought up in Tirunelveli district in southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Roja fervently wishes that her sister Shenbagam's ([Vaishnavi](#)) marriage proposal with Rishi Kumar ([Arvind Swamy](#)), a cryptologist working with the Indian defence forces, goes smoothly. Unknown to her, Shenbagam is in love with someone else. When Rishi wishes to speak to Shenbagam alone, she confesses this and requests him to reject her in front of her parents, to which he obliges. To everyone's surprise Rishi requests Roja's hand in marriage instead. Being unaware of Shenbagam's love affair, the powerless Roja marries Rishi on her family's compulsion, and the couple goes to live in Madras. Initially Roja is angry at Rishi, but once she learns of Shenbagam's love affair and consequent rejection of Rishi, she apologises and starts seeing him in a new light. Life is blissful for the couple for a short while.

Meanwhile, Rishi is assigned to a project in Kashmir to intercept military intelligence. The couple find themselves in a beautiful yet an alien land. Roja's world turns upside down when Rishi gets abducted by terrorists who want their leader Wasim Khan, to be freed from judicial custody. Faced with the daunting task of trying to convince the Indian government to exchange Wasim Khan for the safe return of her husband, Roja runs from pillar to post, pleading with police, politicians and the military for help trying to keep him alive.

At that point this plot did not have any commercial value as it did not appeal to all the Tamil audience as a commercial cinema. It did not have the factor of hero worship as

¹⁰ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin.(page 132)

the regular Tamil films. The producers had no faith in this project making any money so they were conservative in funding.

“So it was a bit of an experiment. The film was made on a shoestring budget. The technicians worked for less money with the understanding that the film would be sold for less money, to make sure that we have the chance to make a film like this again. It was not thought of as something that would work on a big scale” - Mani Ratnam ¹¹

This was the unfortunate situation, which is never a good place for a cinematographer that wants to perform what is necessary. The film was shot in 60 days, in difficult locations, and it was not an easy task for Santosh Sivan. When expectations are sky high, one can only deliver what is practically possible.



“I vividly recall the shoot for Rukmani Rukmani, the song from Roja. We picked the Hogenekkal falls in Karnataka, which was often featured in films. We decided that we would shoot at night. The practical ramifications were crazy. We didn’t have the infrastructure back then to light a waterfall. So we had to work with very few lights. Then we also had dancers, most of whom were elderly women. It was quite a challenge.” Santosh Sivan¹²

Shooting in Kashmir was an additional problem. The Kashmir valley, during this period, was very violent and prone to terrorist attacks; furthermore, the state was under military control so the crew could not shoot everything there. However, that exact state of politics in Kashmir was critically relevant to the film’s plot; as a result, for some Kashmir portions, the crew had to scout other hill stations in India that resembled Kashmir for safety reasons.

¹¹ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 131)

¹² Nathan, A. (2018, April 04). Santosh Sivan on his lengthy collaboration with Mani Ratnam: 'Every film is different'. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/reel/873987/santosh-sivan-on-his-lengthy-collaboration-with-mani-ratnam-every-film-is-different>

There was a lack of technology in the film industry in the 1990s, India was quite behind its western counterparts. So cinematographers had to be adventurous, inventive and break norms not just for the sake of exposure but also for decent images.

Emoting with Landscapes: An Exploration of Diversity

As opposed to the time that we live in today, in 1990, there were no 24x7 news channels or access to Internet for the spread of information. Furthermore, India is a big country where events happening in various parts are unbeknownst to another, and have no relevance to the people elsewhere in the country in a way that it affected their everyday lives. As a result, there is a split in identity among North and South Indians; in the words of Mani Ratnam:

“You are not to sure that deep down in Tamilnadu, people are aware of the Kashmir problem and if they will identify with it” - Mani Ratnam¹³

Similarly, the Kashmiri issue way up in the north of India resting nestled within the snow clad Himalayas, the very subject of the Kashmir story is not aware or relevant to people of Tamilnadu in the extreme south of India. The two places are 3000 kilometers apart from each other. There is a difference in language, culture, religion, weather, flora, fauna, cuisines, architecture, traditions etc. It feels a foreign land for the Tamil audience, a foreign land which exists in their own country.

The filmmakers decided to bring the relevance for the audience visually by using landscapes and bringing forth emotions from the landscapes and tie the landscapes with the protagonist, Roja.

“Landscapes are characters in the film” - Santosh Sivan¹⁴



¹³ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 131)

¹⁴ Asianetnews. (2012, January 18). "Interview With Santosh Sivan"-India Gate Jan 18 Part 3. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc1MvvJQfio>

At the opening scene of the film we see the army trucks arriving in the woods with tall trees, with a misty cold atmosphere, among tall trees, providing an eerie feeling when the military operation goes on to capture the terrorists. In a subconscious way, when people think about the Kashmir conflict, people imagine it as a cold place where atrocities happen.

*“Mani wanted the fields to look greener than in a Bharathiraja film. It was impossible to get that colour because we were shooting in the wrong season. So I just painted my reflectors green and pointed them towards the fields.” - Santosh Sivan*¹⁵



Immediately, the film moves to a warm tone. Jumps to Tirunelveli in South India. Where the sun is rising, we move to the song “Chinna Chinna Asai” introducing the protagonist of the film. There are green paddy fields, flat landscapes, running water, a charming village. They were even shooting aerial shots from hot air balloons for the first time in Tamil cinema. They used a series of mirrors to bounce the sunlight for interior scenes, these techniques were unconventional.

The lush green paddy fields of Tirunelveli is seen as a positive happy place until the moment Roja gets married to Rishi and she leaves for Madras. There is a certain sense of innocence and light-heartedness emanating from these images. The Tamil tradition, village architecture and culture is captured among these rural landscapes before the story takes the character to the city like Madras.

¹⁵ Menon, V. (2017, August 19). Greener than the greenest grass: Santosh Sivan and 'Roja'. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/greener-than-the-greenest-grass/article19523450.ece>

The very intention of beginning the film in a dark, gloomy forest in a hilly area, and then immediately jumping to a bright, open fields and villages serves to show that the film is set in two different worlds, and foreshadows that both worlds are going to tie together at some point.

“Here you are linking by contrasting. It is still a link which says that this is Kashmir and this is Tirunelveli - that is troubled and this is serene.” - Mani Ratnam¹⁶



Madras is just shown as a dull place with not much going on, hinting at Roja’s ambivalence towards Rishi. There is an establishment shot to the city and a monochromatic scene where Roja confronts Rishi on the beach. This still explores the diversity of landscape within the same state of Tamilnadu. The architecture of the house is very contemporary, as opposed to the place where Roja had lived all her life. The audience discovers Madras as Roja does. Roja is not comfortable here, and she is home sick.



¹⁶ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin.(Page 127)

As the couple land at Kashmir, Roja quickly learns about the problems and curfews in the state, as do the audience. When we get into the song “Pudu Vellai Mazhai”, Roja’s eyes are covered and she sees snow for the first time in her life. Audience sees snow for the first time in the film, and put into context that this violence and separatist issues are happening in such a beautiful land.

“During Roja, we were shooting in Kashmir. AR Rahman had recorded some tunes for what was his first film. Mani Ratnam, Rahman and me went on location and played those tunes to see if the music would suit the place, and vice versa. We purposely showed snow in the film for the first time only through Madhubala’s (actor Madhoo) eyes, as we thought it made sense for a film like that.” - Santosh Sivan¹⁷

But in this beautiful land, Roja has difficulties communicating to people, she just knows Tamil, she doesn’t know English very well and she doesn’t speak Hindi. She becomes alienated in a foreign land as she loses her husband to the terrorists. Her life changes along with the landscapes, her joyful wandering in the landscapes of Tamilnadu morphs into her desperation on an unfamiliar land.

For a western viewer, this kind of treatment of landscape might appear strange because of the cultural context. Landscapes in western cinema are widely used generally as a subjective wide shot or an establishment shot. But here the landscapes and the birds flying are put into montages just for the audience to feel the same emotion that the character does. For an average Tamil audience snow is alien, they would have never seen snow in their lives, the only way they can experience it is through cinema.

But when compared to a western film like “Into the Wild” , the treatment is similar where there are shots of landscapes inserted as the character travels to different parts of America and lives free. Landscape serves to establish the visual character. But in *Roja*, landscape is itself a visual character but in a more subliminal fashion.

Experiments with Camera Language: Subjective, Objective, Point of View

Santosh Sivan and Mani Rathnam had the space to explore the camera language in this film, and not stick to the traditional sense of approach followed by the contemporary Tamil films of that time. They do have shots on cranes, dollies and

¹⁷ Parande, S. (2011, September 13). Santosh Sivan talks about 'Urumi' and his passion for cinema. Retrieved from <https://www.bollywoodlife.com/editors-pick/santosh-sivan-talks-about-urumi-and-his-passion-for-cinema>

tripods as it was traditional in Tamil cinemas; however, this was the first time they also had an opportunity to explore with the steadicam - a relatively new medium. In addition, Sivan also used long handheld shots. These were not new to Western cinemas but these were relatively new for the Tamil film industry.



Santosh Sivan is careful when he uses handheld, since he is very aware of the power of the medium and the kind of emotional impact it creates. The only place where handheld is used is where Roja is in the police station, running inside and screaming and crying, disrupting the activities of the station. She goes to every desk and asks for help to every policeman until she reaches the inspector of the station. She doesn't speak the language and she is not able to explain her predicament. This is a tense situation for the protagonist and it is translated perfectly through the camera movement.



Sivan and Ratnam used steadicam at other critical points of the film. For example, they use it when revealing the terrorist hideout with the point-of-view perspective. This shot establishes the location as a tribal village in the Himalayas, and also reinforces the danger as gunmen show up and look straight into the camera. As the camera enters into a dark house, and starts to climb the stairs, it cuts to the opening of the hatch and the girl coming out bringing food for the hostage. The very camera movement builds suspense and fear, as it establishes the scenario in a clever way. This also works as an establishment for the scene to come later, becoming an interesting use of point of view.

Similarly, when Rishi tries to escape the terrorist hideout at a later point in the film, he knocks out the armed guard and runs out of the house with his arms tied, not knowing that there are other terrorists stationed outside, as established by the prior shot. Another steadicam sequence begins in the same location, and the reaction of the guards lets the audience immediately know that Rishi has made a mistake by attempting to escape. The camera follows Rishi and runs in front of it, zig-zagging across terrain until he gets caught. Although this sequence had cuts and it was not a long take, the edit helps to heighten the thrill of escape.

For a Western observer, the situations where the steadicam and the handheld are used might appear overly dramatic. But this is a cultural difference where over-the-top camera effects are often appreciated and can be relatable to the Indian audience, yet at the same time it serves a storytelling purpose.

Conclusion

*“(Roja) recorded how light behaves across the entire length of the country. It is a film that could accommodate the tenderness of a young girl’s eyelashes as well as the ferocity of a machine gun. It’s a yin yang thing.” - Santosh Sivan*¹⁸

In stark contrast with the mood of his previous project with Mani Ratham, *Roja* required Santosh Sivan to bring to screen a soulful romance blooming amidst the astounding beauty of nature. *Roja* as a film turned out to be a national sensation for its patriotic theme. The film was dubbed in Telugu and Hindi, won 3 national awards, was screened and nominated in a few festivals globally, and was a commercial success.

*“But cameramen from the South never had that option, having worked with smaller budgets and its many constraints, our survival was linked to developing our own aesthetic sense and style.” - Varman(DOP)*¹⁹

At the time the film was released, India was going through economic liberalization. As a result, Indian audience were exposed to a lot of advertising films which had very clean high-key images to images, and the cine industry till that point did not meet the levels of quality in image that was demanded due to low budgets. This is evident even in *Roja*: there is a sense of pristine freshness and a timeless quality to the images created in the film which, in hindsight, actually comes from the lack of access to technology rather than a significant intentionality.

“Cinematography, until then, was considered an invisible art form; the less noticeable, the better the cinematography. But Mani Ratnam was a mainstream filmmaker who believed in the craft of filmmaking. And he wanted his craft to be noticed, even by the lay man. It wasn’t just the storytelling that mattered to him, the aesthetics did too.”

- K. Hariharan, national award-winning Film Director and Professor of Film Studies.²⁰

¹⁸ Menon, V. (2017, August 19). Greener than the greenest grass: Santosh Sivan and 'Roja'. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/greener-than-the-greenest-grass/article19523450.ece>

¹⁹ Menon, V. (2017, August 19). Greener than the greenest grass: Santosh Sivan and 'Roja'. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/greener-than-the-greenest-grass/article19523450.ece>

²⁰ Menon, V. (2017, August 19). Greener than the greenest grass: Santosh Sivan and 'Roja'. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/greener-than-the-greenest-grass/article19523450.ece>

C. *Iruvar*

In 1995, Mani Ratnam had finished shooting his 13th film, *Bombay*, 3 years after his previous collaboration with Santosh Sivan in *Roja*. Santosh Sivan at this point had worked on 10 different feature films in Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi, and had also directed his first feature, *Halo*, which had won a few national awards. Both were much-sought-after filmmakers when they decided to collaborate on a project called *Iruvar*.

Iruvar (Two Men) is one of the most iconic films of Indian cinema, and is considered as Mani Ratnam's magnum opus. A political drama, loosely based on the relationship between two real-life regional political leaders in India named MG Ramachandran and Karunanidhi, the story spans the period from the early 1930's to the late 1980's, and showcases the intersection between the soaring rhetoric of regional politics and the glitz and glamour of the Tamil film industry. This was an ambitious project the likes of which even veterans such as Santosh Sivan and Mani Ratnam had not dealt with so far.

Iruvar tells the story of two protagonists, Anandan (Mohanlal) and Tamizhselvan (Prakash Raj), who start as extremely close friends and end up as bitter political enemies that still share an underlying kinship. Anandan, a struggling actor, meets Tamizhselvan, an upcoming writer, during a film shoot, where they hit it off. Tamizhselvan introduces Anandan to his mentor and the leader of his political party, Ayya Veluthambi (Nasser); Anandan is attracted to the party's ideology, but doesn't commit himself entirely to the party. Unfortunate events involving cancelled projects and his wife's death lead Anandan to be depressed, while Tamizhselvan triumphantly focuses on the party's growing success; ultimately, Anandan earns his big break in a film where he has an opportunity with his close friend, which catapults him to stardom.

Tamizhselvan, initially seeing an opportunity, encourages Anandan to use his new-found popularity to help promote the party's ideology; but eventually becomes jealous when he realizes that Anandan has more sway over the public than himself. His jealousy is stoked even further when Ayya Veluthambi gives Anandan a seat to contest during the general elections, in spite of having been in the party for a very short time. An unfortunate mishap during a film shoot where Anandan gets injured drives further public sympathy towards him, resulting in him getting elected, along with Tamizhselvan, in their respective constituencies. Ayya Veluthambi refuses the post of Chief Minister, as a result of which Tamizhselvan becomes the CM, with the full support of Anandan. Tamizhselvan starts to see Anandan as a threat to his power; as

a result, he keeps Anandan only as a party spokesperson, and gives him an ultimatum to renounce his career as an actor if he wanted a cabinet seat.

Ayya Veluthambi's death acts as a catalyzing event that deepens their ideological split, and Tamizhselvan fires Anandan from the party after he creates a controversy, forcing Anandan to form his own party to contest in the upcoming elections. Anandan's star power helps him win the elections, resulting in political cat-and-mouse between them, trying to outdo each other, each winning some and losing some, and revealing that both of their reigns are equally corrupt. Eventually, misfortune and age catch up with them, and they slow down their attacks on each other.

On the day after the wedding of Ayya Veluthambi's granddaughter, Anandan dies. When Tamizhselvan receives the news, he tries to go see the body of his dear departed friend; however, he is not allowed to do so by Anandan's loyalists. Realizing his loss, Tamizhselvan goes back to the place they first met, and in an emotional monologue, recites a poem mourning his friend's death, depicting the depth of their friendship. The film ends as Anandan's body is taken in a parade through the streets of Madras to be cremated, mourned along the way by a legion of film fans and politicians alike.

To put the film into historical context, India was still under the British rule when this film starts. This was an interesting time because India was a young country, which was developing different political ideologies and a unique self-identity. Simultaneously the cinema industry was also developing, creating its own path feeding the consumerist demand for entertainment and evolving with the political climate that ensued. Politics was leaning on cinema and cinema was leaning on politics. This is a trend which exists still in the current day in Tamil Nadu.

“Dravidar Kazhagam (a regional party) had dramatists, orators, and writers. It had all kinds of literary people - those who were part of stage plays, street plays - and they used the written word and the spoken word to forge themselves into the party. Cinema was one of the new mediums that were emerging, and these two grew each other and used each other to grow” - Mani Ratnam²¹

Since the film was based on real events, the filmmakers wanted to shoot it in a naturalistic manner. Mani Ratnam wanted to give it a different treatment in comparison to the traditional films that he had done before. They decided to have documentary-style camera language to adapt to it. Also, since the story was about the

²¹ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 162)

relationship between two characters, the camera was treated in such a way to play a role in establishing a power dynamic between the characters by the way of compositions and blocking.

“ We tried to make the format into the old format of 1:1.33 so it would also convey a feeling of a period film, not just through sets and costumes. Also that kind of format makes interesting opportunities for different kinds of framing.”

“ Also the film had lots of people, thousands of people at all times” - Santosh Sivan²²

The film was composed for a 1.33 ratio just to bring the nostalgic feel of the old films, and this was a bold move as the trend at that point of time was doing cinemascope and wide formats. The lighting had to be realistic as well, there was no scope for any stylization in the lighting - except when showing the film sets and shooting films inside the film, where the scope on breaking naturalism was warranted.

Fleeting Vignettes: Camera as an observer of natural time

Since this was based on real life Mani Ratnam wanted to cover the film in a documentary kind of approach, where *mise-en-scene* doesn't appear to be staged. The acting was also realistic, unlike his previous films, but the script was very dramatic. As a result, the cinematography had to cater to this demand. The film did not have many shot/reverse shots, and the editing was not used to establish the continuum of time and space; instead, they were made of fleeting vignettes which progressed the story.

The story follows the characters from one point of life to the other, through the decades, The camera had to follow the flow of life, with no separation whatsoever with the screenplay, going together in a cohesive manner. This dictated both the scene conception and the shot conception. The narration and the emotion within the scenes of the film are far less dramatic in comparison to any other Mani Ratnam film, although the entire story as a whole is very dramatic. As a result, they ended up with scenes as a sort of fleeting vignettes with fragments of emotions what the characters were going through, akin to small brush strokes. Yet, the vignettes, as they progressed, transformed to make sense, just as brush strokes combine to develop and complete the picture.

²² South, F. C. (2017, August 30). The Mani Ratnam Interview (Part 2) | FC South. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpXhbQK4qp0>

“For the first time , the scenes were not cut into several pieces of shots. I had these sweeping set ups, lengthier shots, with one fluid camera movement covering the entire action. The idea was to give a sense of flow. It was like glimpses of their lives, and we tried to stage the story in such a way that it looked like the camera happened to be there and that the events were not necessarily staged for the static cameras, with several cuts and close ups. It was far fewer shots than earlier forms. It was not just the construction of the scene but also the way it was shot, the way it was edited...” - Mani Ratnam²³

Even the songs are documentary, running parallel to the film - capturing the film industry itself, but shot in the nostalgia-inducing style of Tamil films from a bygone era. Traditionally, songs are used in Indian films to portray the character's emotions or to progress the story with montages through the songs, and the choice of using songs as a parallel meta-narrative, is novel in this regard.

The Static Observer: Santosh Sivan had lensed the static shots with wide angle lenses to create foreshortening, and added depth to his compositions by adding foreground and background placements. The *mise-en-scene* blends into these static compositions; In a way, they were dictating these compositions. Entire scenes, and all the actions and punctuations are completely covered in this simple camera placement.

For instance, Tamizhselvan gets thrashed by the goons of the opposition party, and the leader of his party, Ayya Veluthambi, comes to visit an injured Tamizhselvan when Anandan is nursing him. The shot begins with Anandan is nursing him and Ayya Veluthambi (Nasser) along with his comrades enters into the frame, offers him and encouraging speech and leaves. Anandan continues to speak to Tamizhselvan and teases him. This is a simple but powerful scene.

²³ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 167)



“The drama comes out of the scale. The drama comes out of several faces with the dark glasses crammed into one frame, these dark men in white clothes forming a new party and being passionate about it. This romantic notion of political party to change lives and to change the way people think - to see it blossom and grow in front of you and become big and powerful is the drama” - Mani Ratnam²⁴

This tool of static observation has been used in powerful places throughout the film to accentuate certain emotions and to punctuate precise moments in the screenplay. The observer can gather from the scene visually, not just rely on the dialogs which are spoken. In the scene where Tamizhselvan gets elected as the Chief Minister, there is a shot of the chair in the foreground, as he takes the Chief Minister’s seat for the first time. It is a relationship with the chair, as though the chair beckons him. The camera in a way dictates the character here.



This technique is employed at points where Tamizhselvan receives a good turns and bad in his political career. This is repeated again later in the film, when Anandan contests in the next election and wins, becomes the Chief Minister. Tamizhselvan is helping his daughter with her schoolwork. His comrades bring him the news that their party had lost in the elections. Tamizhselvan goes from disappointment to satisfaction that he is going to be the one who is going to be opposition to Anandan as he

²⁴ Baradwaj, R., & Maniratnam. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin. (Page 178)

interacts with his wife. It's a very simple shot where statistics are very powerful and allows the audience to observe the staging.



The Fluid Observer: Santosh Sivan had lensed the fluid shots with wide angle lenses to add dynamism to the movement. The physical movement of the camera was in all three axis, and added depth by having movement in all parts of the frame.

“The camera constantly keeps finding different compositions and frames through which to look at characters, As a cinematographer, you need a particular kind of sensibility to know how to compose and how to keep changing them. It is a film about people, and we needed people to dominate the frame. I actually thought I could pay my tribute to Subrata Mitra, Melli Irani, Wilson Master and VK Murthy. I remember having this insatiable urge to do things differently. Every day, I came to the shoot like someone who was possessed. Mani Ratnam was shooting the film like it was a documentary. If you notice, real time is used very interestingly in Iruvar.” - Santosh Sivan²⁵

At the point, When Anandan’s first film was a success, Tamizhselvan brings him to the party leader Ayya Veluthambi so he can join the party. As Anandan enters the frame we can see a huge crowd in the background cheering. As he comes close to the camera, it pans and tracks along with him and the party leaders sitting on the chairs as they get up to greet him. The chairs create leading lines to direct the viewer’s attention and the camera ends up in the profile position at a low angle favouring Anandan; and then slowly rises to reveal the crowd in the background. Tamizhselvan moves to cover Anandan, establishing his intentions occupy his space in the frame in a subtle, subconscious way. This a very dynamic movement with a lot of energy.

²⁵ Nathan, A. (2018, April 04). Santosh Sivan on his lengthy collaboration with Mani Ratnam: 'Every film is different'. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/reel/873987/santosh-sivan-on-his-lengthy-collaboration-with-mani-ratnam-every-film-is-different>



“Camera is always moving and attempting to discover something” - Santosh Sivan²⁶

This is repeated again in the instance where Tamizhselvan is mounted with pressure from Anandan’s accusations in the press. He is facing pressure to remove Anandan from the party and consequently sever his friendship forever. This is the scene where he makes the decision. The shot starts with a top angle tilting down looking at the group of party members walking and complaining about Anandan’s behaviour to Tamizhselvan. As they stop and turn around as a group, the camera starts to lower the height. They continue to discuss about the problem as they walk close to the camera as a mid shot until they come into a profile group shot which comes from the other side of the frame. The camera dances effortlessly as the movement of the characters reveal more and more to the audience.



²⁶ South, F. C. (2017, August 30). The Mani Ratnam Interview (Part 2) | FC South. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpXhbQK4qp0>

Yet in some places when the camera moves, the camera emotes as employed as a standard cinematic technique. There are places where movement is not motivated by the actors, but done for dramatic reasons.

In the scene when Tamizhselvan is smitten with Senthamarai (Tabu) the camera moves without motivation of elements in the frame. The scene reflects the complicated emotions of the two, as they succumb to their physical desire. Tamizhselvan and Senthamarai are lying on the floor, having consummated their relationship, her hair tangled and their clothing in a mess. The camera slowly zooms in to capture their eyes, permeating through layers of guilt and fear. As the audience look upon the couple from above, from a judgemental position, the camera starts rotating, starting off in a gentle gyration. Tamizhselvan's face caught in a reflective sense of calm reciting his poetry, while Senthamarai looks more disturbed at the recent events. The camera heightens the intensity emotional turmoil of the lovers.



“That particular scene would perhaps not be very difficult to shoot in today’s times with all the technology that we have, But it would have also been too neat and not as organic as it was back then. It was a small room and I was sitting on top of a crane with my camera and the actors were lying down. I was literally just seeing the first and the last frame and can’t even pull focus on it. It was akin to grinding gram. I remember telling Mani that the shot is jerky but he was like no, let’s go ahead. So I actually used a lot of light, shot it on high aperture so that the focus would not be in trouble and the depth of field would take care of it. It took us all a couple of takes and I was sweating by the end of it.” - Santosh Sivan²⁷

²⁷ Nathan, A. (2018, April 04). Santosh Sivan on his lengthy collaboration with Mani Ratnam: 'Every film is different'. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/reel/873987/santosh-sivan-on-his-lengthy-collaboration-with-mani-ratnam-every-film-is-different>

This film has a heavy Western influence in its cinematography. The kind of camera movement and static shots with huge depths are seen in Citizen Kane. There are similarities in compositions and camera movements between the two films.

Conclusion

The film follows the trajectory of a life of two people in a very realistic sort of a way. The entire piece is presented as fragments of events, where even though only glimpses are seen, they nonetheless provide new meaning when put together.

The film was not received very well by the domestic audience and it did not do well economically. In addition, the film created a lot of tension in Tamilnadu and there were death threats against the film makers since it dealt with a controversial topic of active politicians. However, Santosh Sivan won a national award for Best Cinematography for this film. This film is considered as one of the cult classics of Indian cinema, it was screened in a few festivals around the world.

“No film is easy. But, how you handle the difficulties is what matters. I will have to say Iruvar was the most difficult movie I have done. The film required the visuals to be very raw and authentic. It also demanded a lot of mise-en-scene, which aren’t easy to compose. Iruvar needed me to stick to the grammar of cinematography. Mani wanted old-school framing, but with current technologies.” - Santosh Sivan ²⁸

The filmmakers were pushing the envelope to create something different, bring out a unique grammar through the camera language of the film. This created timeless classic compositions which were similar to Subrata Mitra's work on Sathyajith Ray's films not following the modern trends in composition and camera movements. It also looks like an homage to the works of Kurosawa by the way the camera was moved, it was similar to Seven Samurai. Mani Ratnam is known to be an ardent follower of Kurosawa's way of films. The usage of depth is very much inspired by the works of Orson Welles of whom Mani Ratnam was an ardent fan.

²⁸ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-1.html>

III. Self Directed Films

A. *Malli*

Santosh Sivan had embarked on Independent projects where he started directing his own films. After the success of his first film *Halo* (1996) that won him a National Award he started making more children's films. *Malli (Jasmine)* was released in 1998. It is a children's film which was met with positive criticism in India and won in a few festivals internationally. This was Santosh Sivan's second film was funded by the Children's Film Society of India.

Malli is the story of a young tribal girl, Malli (P. Shwetha), and her efforts to cure her friend, Cuckoo (Vanitha) of her muteness, by finding a magical blue bead. Malli's father works in the city, while she lives with her pregnant mother; Cuckoo's father, Raja, is a forest ranger, and she's in the village for her school holidays. Malli enjoys playing with Cuckoo, but also feels sorry for her disability. She also has a long-time wish to wear a colorful silk dress that she dreams about constantly; she pesters the local postman to write a letter to her father asking him to send her the dress.

Malli encounters an old storyteller who tells her about a magical blue bead that can cure her best friend; all she had to do was to ask the Peacock God, who appears near the *Mayil* (Peacock) tree. She and Cuckoo spend the night under the tree, unsuccessfully trying to meet the Peacock God; however, they discover that poachers were cutting the tree down, and stop it with the help of Cuckoo's father.

Censured by her father to not play with Malli any more, Cuckoo visits her to say goodbye, but is unable to meet her. Hearing the news, a dejected Malli goes back to the storyteller, who tells her that she should pray near the pond; after doing so, Malli gives Cuckoo a necklace made of other rare stones (without the blue bead) but Cuckoo refuses, upsetting Malli. While sitting in the forest, talking to herself about how Cuckoo had misunderstood her, she hears a gunshot and sees someone washing a bloodstained knife in the pond; she rushes to the storyteller, who advises her to collect dewdrops and pour them into the pond to purify it.

In the meantime, Malli receives a package in the mail from the postman, who had been recently transferred out of the village; he's sent her the dress that she had always wanted. Excited, she puts it on, and runs to meet Cuckoo, but is disappointed

when she's not allowed to meet her friend. On her way through the forest, she meets a deer and starts chatting with it, when a poacher shoots it down. She tears off a piece of her precious dress to save the deer, and takes it to the local veterinarian after a long struggle. The following morning, when she tries to take the deer back to the forest, she's chased away by the veterinarian's assistant. Disappointed and hurt, she runs away.

She then goes to the pond, unhappily reflecting on how everyone misunderstood her intentions. While sitting on the bank of the pond, she notices the blue bead inside the water, which she excitedly adds to the necklace. She runs to Cuckoo to give it to her, only to find that she had already left for the city. With a great deal of effort, Malli runs across the forest to catch up with her friend and give her the necklace; Cuckoo is finally happy to see her friend for one last time.

The film is intended to be about the environment and ecological conservation, and deals with the concepts of purity and innocence, through a seemingly simple script. The camera language is executed in an extraordinary manner, where there is non linear narrative, breaking the fourth wall and many interesting cinematic techniques involved. This film was executed with a minimalistic crew with a micro budget. This factor does not constrain Santosh Sivan as a cinematographer; rather it allows him to explore with techniques and camera language. In this thesis, we specifically discuss the dream sequence was executed and the way colours were used in the film.

State of Altered Consciousness: A Floating Camera, A Violent Camera

"Dreams serve as a balance, compensating for under-represented parts of the personality in waking life. Dreams give information about the secrets of the inner life and reveal to the dreamer hidden factors of his personality. As long as these are undiscovered, they disturb his waking life and betray themselves only in the form of symptoms" (Jung, 1933, 16) ²⁹

Cinema has long used dreams in the plot, or as a vehicle to understand the thought process of a character for a long time. This also helps in establishing the intentions and the mental state of the character and from time to time, it also helps to drive the plot forward. To help the audience to comprehend the difference between dreams and reality, certain techniques in sound, editing and camera may be involved.

²⁹ Halpern, L. (2003). *Dreams on film: The cinematic struggle between art and science*. McFarland. (Page 17)

"No medium could capture the fleeting, dis-jointed, visual imagery of dreams nearly as closely as cinema could."³⁰

But here we discuss only about the camera techniques. These camera tools employed need to create a physically distinct visual to establish a psychologically distancing portal for the audiences to differentiate the effect instantly.

At the beginning of the scene when Malli is sitting down, wears her self made crown from the grass on the forest floor, closes her eyes and starts to imagine, she starts rising up, floating in the air along with the camera.



She begins to narrate the thing she desires - "the red shirt, the green spotted skirt and a blue shawl" - as she begins to imagine herself in the dress running around in the forest.



The camera cuts into the dream and follows her as a participant, hand held, close to her, interacting or playing with her, heightening the audience's connection to Malli. Then it goes wide in a disengaging manner, cuts back to Malli with the closed eyes again, and comes back once more to the dream. She notices something, we cut to a low angle point of view shot where she interacts with the camera and breaks the fourth wall. As she interacts with the camera, the deer is revealed.

³⁰ Packer, S. (2002). *Dreams in myth, medicine, and movies*. Praeger (Page 29)



So far, with the shots, we cut back and forth between Malli's narration and the dream. The audience can realize the stark difference between the two, just because the camera is static and moving in a floating manner in the reality and the camera is hand held in the dream. But since it's an uplifting dream, the movement is not jerky, and slow motion is used to enhance the joyful feeling, as if the camera is dancing with her.

"Movies were a place to perfect dreamlike photographic techniques, such as cuts," "zooms," layers, "dissolves," "double exposures," and "pans. Movies also allowed editors to improve upon these camera tricks by cutting and pasting and making montages from film clips, just as our minds do when they manufacture dreams"³¹

But now there is a violent camera movement, and cuts suddenly become faster, cutting between her in the dream and reality. She smells fire, notices a deer trapped in it, and rescues the deer from the fire. The camera becomes very unstable, moves with a lot of motion blur, to rely on the state of mind of the character to give further tension and enhance the gravity of the situation.



She saves deer as she narrates and then interacts with herself in reality from within the dream. She then finally decides to wake up in reality, and the camera is correspondingly in a different angle as she gets back into reality.

³¹ Packer, S. (2002). *Dreams in myth, medicine, and movies*. Praeger (Page 31)



In this sequence, The environment where the dream and the reality is happening is the same; only through camera movement and the costume is the difference is established.

“Freud hypothesized that this dream work process translates abstract thoughts into visual images and dramatic narratives. Dreamwork uses techniques as "dramatization," and "secondary revision" to produce the enigmatic dream images and ideas that defy time, space, and logical sequence”³²

Furthermore, the violent part of the sequence works as an establishment for the film, as the film comes close to its climax, poachers hunt the baby deer and she saves the baby deer by taking it to the doctor. The violent camera established helps as repetition in reality.



The violence or the gore is actually never show, every emotion is brought forth with just a juxtaposition of images.

Duality of Colour: An expression of Dread and Desires

³² Packer, S. (2002). *Dreams in myth, medicine, and movies*. Praeger (Page 35)

“Colours are the mother tongue of the subconscious,” - Carl Jung (1875-1961)

Color is a form of non verbal communication. No matter what medium of art, be it paintings, sculpture, books colours have a personal meaning on a subconscious level. In films colours are added to complement your stories there by adding visual layers to the film. Color is a meaningful and powerful psychological tool employed by filmmakers to capture attention subconsciously .

In Malli a very simple colour triadic scheme comprising of red, blue and green has been employed by Santosh Sivan. Green is the dominant colour of the environment that the entire story takes place. Red appears as very strong accents in the film. Initially we notice that malli has a red nose ring and a blue hair band, when she is wearing a white robe. But once she starts dreaming she is wearing a red dress with a blue scarf, the amount of the colours drastically increase in the frame.



“Colours represent an insidious kind of communication. Carefully chosen, they can help get the message across that would otherwise be difficult to express-and perhaps appear less credible in words alone”³³

Red is not just shown to reveal her desire, but red is also shown to reveal danger, when the poachers come to shoot the animals and when they pollute the pond with the blood. Red is shown especially to cue in impurity and violence as well. The duality of the colour is explored, the same thing that she desires is hurting the nature that she loves.

³³ FRASER, T., & BANKS, A. (2004). *The Complete Guide To Colour: The Ultimate Book for the Colour Conscious*. ILEX.



In India it is common that simple expressions of color hold together the multitudes of outlooks, lifestyles, and traditions. The symbolism of color stands out and controls every aspect of life in India, be it religion, politics, festivals, or celebrations. The meaning of colour is different from the Western values: for example red symbolises birth, purity, and fertility in the Indian culture, whereas in Western society, it represents passion, love, and danger. Western audience always find Indian films to be very colourful; this is the case because culturally, wearing blacks or greys is looked down upon and considered gloomy. Indians psychologically feel uplifted when the colours they use are bright and saturated. This is too colourful for the tastes of Western film makers who like a desaturated palette in general.

Conclusion:

Despite the lack of available resources, Santosh Sivan uses the minimalist approach to his advantage, and utilizes his prowess over the camera language to be very effective within a budget. Also, since Santosh Sivan was the director of the film as well, as the entire process of bringing out the visuals is an internal one which definitely helps him to explore with abstractions. Additionally there was no necessity for Sivan to make this into a commercially viable venture so he could be honest with the craft as it seldom happens in the commercial films which he frequently works on which requires financial remuneration. This truly liberated him to experiment.

This film was very well received critically as it won 2 national awards and multiple awards in international festivals.

B. Terrorist

“The film is made on a very low budget, in fact, nothing at all. And it is all acted by purely non-professionals. I want to make films that are very real. I make my bread and butter shooting commercial musical films. When I make a film, I want to make it as real and as interesting as possible. So I have to make it without those entertainment elements like fights, songs and all that. I only get the freedom to make the sort of films I want on a small budget.” - Santosh Sivan³⁴

Santosh Sivan continued back to back with his directorial ventures in the mid 1990's. After *Halo* he started working on the micro budget project with \$50,000 called *The Terrorist* which was released in 1998. He shot this film in 17 days in Kerala and Chennai. This film was based on the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a Sri Lankan militant group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This was very politically sensitive and continues to be a controversial subject to this day. But in the movie, the country was nondescript, no name is attached to her target, and no ideology is shown at all.

Malli is a 19 year old woman who has spent all of her life as a ferocious fighter in the movement. Her entire life is enclosed in the world of this movement. She blindly agrees its values. Her brother is a famous comrade who had died in battlefield for the cause. She kills for the cause, is comfortable with weapons, and she keeps moving through the jungle where her guerrilla command operates.

One day her group is summoned to the base camp with the leader of the cause for a meeting. They are recruiting a volunteer for an extremely important mission for the cause; a suicide bombing to kill a VIP. Malli gets chosen among her friends. Her girlfriends cluster around in excitement, as if she has won a beauty contest because there is no greater honor than to die for the cause.

She keeps thinking about the recent past, where she had saved a young fighter that had been wounded in battlefield and both of them hide from the enemy. He knows that he is going to die and tells her he has never been so close to a woman before. She feels her sexual feelings rise to the surface, and her cold killer instinct and her loyalty to the cause disappears. They consummate in the ditch when they are hiding from the

³⁴ (n.d.) Interview by Welsh, D. Retrieved from <http://cinema.com/articles/373/terrorist-the-interview-with-santosh-sivan.phtml>

enemy, and the next day morning when Malli wakes up, she finds the guy is no longer alive, having succumbed to his injuries.

After she volunteers for the mission, she leaves the base camp to travel to the sea through the forest. There she is helped by a young boy called Lotus who knows the territory; they walk along a river to avoid land mines, and he knows the terrain and where all the booby traps are. He tells her that everyone he has guided has eventually been killed. They successfully reach the sea and Malli gets on the boat. Immediately the enemy troops reach the beach and they kill Lotus as she watches from the boat.

Once she crossed the sea by boat, there are operatives waiting on the other side to receive her take her to a hideout in a farm, where she will wait for four more days before the mission. Malli's trainers fit her for clothing that will conceal the explosives and show her how to detonate them. As she goes through this training, she is an obedient student, is awed by the seriousness of her mission, and is pleased to be treated as such an important person. When the trainers leave, she joins the life of the farm, until the day of her mission. During this time, Malli discovers that she is pregnant, and she starts to feel responsible for the life inside her. The day of her destiny arrives, and she sets off on her mission.

The VIP comes to the venue, she gets the opportunity to place a garland of flowers around his neck to get close to him and she picks out the trigger in her hand and will she detonate explosives that will kill them both or not? The film ends without resolving this question.

Camera empathy: Mindspace with Close-ups

“Her wide, full mouth and enormous dark eyes, appears in nearly every frame, often filling most of the screen, as if we might be able to find our way into Malli's mind through her pores.” - A.O Scott³⁵

The film did not have a lot of money and the script was taking place in an active war zone, where there are armies, machinery, special effects and extras, which were not possible on a shoestring budget. Instead Santosh Sivan opted to use a shallow depth of field, by using long lenses consistently and going for close-ups instead of showing wide shots with higher depth of field as per standard norms of war films. He heavily

³⁵ Scott, A. O. (2000, January 14). A Guerrilla Grows Up During A Mission. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/14/movies/film-review-a-guerrilla-grows-up-during-a-mission.html>

relied on the faces of the characters for the audience to empathize with and get into the characters' psychology.

“Santosh Sivan studied Kieślowski because of his methods would work, and be effective, for a cash-strapped production with only a small cast and crew. The inner life is cheap to film. What can be seen? Small elements can represent environments and events, and if the director is also a highly skilled cameraman, that at least provides a visual context in which to build a film out of purely sensory elements. The art of film is, after all, the art of putting synecdoches into motion in time.”³⁶

“Her days are numbered. She is mentally prepared to give up her life. It will be a difficult period for any human being. So, I want to creep into her mind and see what she thinks. It is more a psychological film than anything else.” - Santosh Sivan ³⁷



In the above scene, her group is being attacked by the enemy army, so Malli aggressively enters the firefight alongside her comrades. And as the enemy forces are withdrawing, Malli leaps forward to run and hunt them down without fear. Close-ups successfully portray the psychological state of the battle hardened terrorist that has

³⁶ Kieślowski, K., & Woodward, S. (2009). *After Kieślowski: The legacy of Krzysztof Kieślowski*. Wayne State Univ. Press (Page 160).

³⁷ (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rediff.com/movies/dec/05ter.htm>

undergone training to develop a resolve where they do not even fear death; her face portrays a blind patriotism to her cause that leads her to execute any of her leaders' commands with blind loyalty and without moral compunctions. Sivan shows this mindset without explicitly showing any violence - just the suggestion of violence is sufficient to produce the impact.

"I am looking at terrorism through the mind of a 19-year-old girl who is a committed person like all terrorists are. She is brainwashed to such an extent that she believes there is violence in birth, violence in death and violence in between birth and death, that is in life itself." Santosh Sivan³⁸



In this scene, Malli meets the leader of the organization who meets her and talks to her about her purpose in the organization, and inspires her to be a martyr. He tells her who the target is and what she is supposed to do. Here, the camera sees the face of Malli only in 6 different angles and every shot size is tighter than a mid shot. The camera attempts to capture the emotion from Malli's eyes, rather than focus on the leader or the other photographer in the room. The depth of field is consistently shallow not focusing on anything else except Malli.

³⁸ (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.rediff.com/movies/dec/05ter.htm>

“The terrorist leaders consider the girl a “thinking bomb” and an invaluable weapon (tellingly, they have lost all feeling for her as a human being). Thus, she is told that her action will generate the fear and bloodshed the world needs in order to generate respect for the terrorist movement, a process in which media exposure is essential. The adult terrorists feel that children are ready to be indoctrinated into doing their bidding: there is little attention here to individuality or choice. Thus, the terrorist leaders here are faceless and unknowable in their remove from all humanity, the film instead trying to humanize the indoctrinated rather than those who do the indoctrinating- the real enemy. Once the film explores this context regarding the recruitment of the suicide bomber, it seeks to explore just what the terrorists would deny- the humanity left in the girl chosen to be a martyr.”³⁹



Another illustration of the power of close-ups happens in the above scene: the conflict occurs here in the story, when her ideology about the organization comes into question, her faith begins to waver and she begins to understand the significance of the life beyond the struggle torn home that she comes from, she begins to lose her identity. She questions whether the organization is worth sacrificing her life for.

In this scene, the entire assassination crew is there at the location prepared for VIP to arrive. Malli is ready with the bomb. But the fact that she is pregnant is there in her

³⁹ Cettl, R. (2009). *Terrorism in American cinema: An analytical filmography, 1960-2008*. McFarland &. (Page 258)

mind, she is questioning the reason behind doing this. But it is too late to question as the VIP, the person whom she is supposed to assassinate is in front of her and time for contemplation is over. Yet this moment is stretched out. Yet the camera just brings clear attention to only the things which it needs to.

"The closer the protagonist gets to the moment of her death, the more she is, remembering and analyzing the details of her life that have led her to this position. Her journey to death ironically becomes one of self-discovery, albeit perhaps too late to make a difference, a question the film leaves ambiguous. She is in many ways still a child with a child's fears and views of interpersonal interaction, reacting to the death of her loved ones and merely a project handed on to professional killers where she is considered open to extremist recruitment, controlling her life through fear, hatred and regret. The film follows the child's point of view throughout, exploring the gradual perception of a world far greater in scope than she initially realizes, capturing the sense of discovery she makes as she proceeds. She is manipulated throughout, her only on which the film ambiguously ends. introspective on her mission of terror. In a world of seeming moral rela- moment of control being the hesitation"⁴⁰

Traditionally in Western cinema, if the genre is a war film, the depth of field is never shallow. You see a lot of violence with special effects and interaction with the other characters, camera is never so involved in an intimate portrait of the protagonist. For example in *Saving Private Ryan*, the Normandy Beach landing sequence: the camera does go into the mind space of Tom Hanks, but it shows an overload of information all around, with the violence, rather than his emotion at the moment.

Conclusion

The film won a number of awards at international film festivals in 1998 – and praise from celebrated American actor John Malkovich for being shot in actual locations despite the heavy rains. "It was a challenging film," says Santosh Sivan. This was one of the most successful films that Santosh Sivan has made till date as a Cinematographer and as a Director. This was a very powerful film; and so important that renowned critic Roger Ebert has included the film in his series of "Great Movies" reviews.

⁴⁰ Cettl, R. (2009). *Terrorism in American cinema: An analytical filmography, 1960-2008*. McFarland &. (Page 258)

IV. Conclusion

*“Even the small imperfections can make a splendid visual” - Santosh Sivan*⁴¹

Santosh Sivan over the years of working as a cinematographer evolved, refining his camera work further and further, he strives for creative satisfaction. Yet he had a consistent reasoning for his usage of the cinematographic tools, making aesthetic choices with the resources at his disposal to fit appropriately to the script or the project. He doesn't strive for the perfect looking pristine images, he looks for the right images for the script. Every script demands a different feel for Santosh Sivan.

With Thalpathi he uses lighting to que in sun god in the visuals and in Roja he uses Landscapes to further bind the audience to the character. In Iruvar the camera just stays with the actors, as the *mise-en-scene* dictates where the camera moves. Santosh Sivan's objectives with Mani Ratnam films is to augment the character with visual elements of light, colours and movement but exclusively stick to the character, binding the audience.

*“Through several rounds of discussions with the director and writer, a cinematographer decides the style of shots and colour tones, which elevate the visual appeal of a film. It is not about making someone or something look good but giving the film a suitable tone and maintaining it till the end.” - Santosh Sivan*⁴²

Santosh Sivan as a cinematographer has worked with very well reputed directors of India and he has created lasting relationships and a work understanding with the directors, which is essential for cinematographer's careers.

*“when you understand what the director has in mind and interpret it in your own way, the process becomes easier. That comes over a period of time. The mutual understanding works as a synergy that makes the journey of filmmaking enjoyable,” - Santosh Sivan*⁴³

⁴¹ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-1.html>

⁴² Santosh Sivan: 'My Best Is Yet To Come'. (2018, October 03). Retrieved from <https://www.filmcompanion.in/santosh-sivan-interview-chekka-chivantha-vaanam-mani-ratnam>

⁴³ Santosh Sivan: 'My Best Is Yet To Come'. (2018, October 03). Retrieved from <https://www.filmcompanion.in/santosh-sivan-interview-chekka-chivantha-vaanam-mani-ratnam>

To achieve the director's vision, it is essential that the cinematographer also has to be production friendly. Santosh Sivan has been production friendly and always come up with creative solutions to circumvent problems. That has garnered him a reputation of being dependable and production friendly. After shifting into the Digital era he has become much more flexible with his cameras

“Cameras are like cars. If the roads are smooth and less congested, we might take Mercs or other high-end cars. To navigate faster through the heavy city traffic, we prefer smaller cars. Sometimes, scooters or even a bicycle would prove much more useful. Similarly, the kinds of cameras we use depend on various factors like locations, permissions, budget, etc...” - Santosh Sivan⁴⁴

Whereas in his own films like Malli and Terrorist, the camera plays a very experimental role where it can suddenly shift from a subjective camera to an objective camera. He had to resort to very experimental minimalistic style because of the small budgets that he was given.

He makes big budget films commercial films as a Cinematographer to finance his passion projects. This flexibility to change and adapt with new medium helps him with his independent projects. He is resourceful and always works with the situation and augments the situations with simplistic ideas.

“I always keep thinking my best work is yet to come, Being a cinematographer is a 24/7 job – one tends to observe everything around one, like how all the clouds gather before it starts to rain or after the rain, suddenly there is a streak of light and immediately everything looks so beautiful.” - Santosh Sivan⁴⁵

Santosh travels a lot and observes nature for inspiration in his work. Yet he stays rooted to the Indian cultures and traditions from which stems to the philosophy of his work. This is persistent across all his works.

“The primary factor that makes our kind of cinematography distinct is the variety of cultural influences in the country. Even if it is the smallest art, we tend to make it very

⁴⁴ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-1.html>

⁴⁵ Santosh Sivan: 'My Best Is Yet To Come'. (2018, October 03). Retrieved from <https://www.filmcompanion.in/santosh-sivan-interview-cheekka-chivantha-vaanam-mani-ratnam>

*ornamental. Even Indian music is ornamental and so is our style of cinematography.” -
Santosh Sivan⁴⁶*

Necessity is the mother of Innovation. Likewise every cinematographer is put into different situations, where they need to solve problems. Not all problems are the same, every situation is unique. The ability of a cinematographer to solve problems and achieve what the director wants, is the ability which separates the good from the great. Santosh Sivan had been constantly been put into tough situations on set, but despite the adversity he produced stunning results. He is one of the greatest cinematographers that India has produced.

Santosh Sivan was once teaching tribal children in Arunachal Pradesh to print black-and-white photos that Sivan says he had a life-altering experience.

“One day the kid’s dog died and we took him to the forest to bury him,It became pretty late after we finished and on our way back, the kids became very quiet. They said that there were chances of finding tigers and even pointed me to some paw prints. I asked them what they would do if they saw a tiger. One of them said, ‘I’ll run very, very fast and climb a tree very, very fast.’ When I said I didn’t know if I could run that fast, one of the others said, ‘When you see a tiger, you’ll automatically learn how to run and climb fast.’ I think that was quite profound. The key is to keep the tiger alive within you to keep pushing you to learn new things.” Santosh Sivan⁴⁷

⁴⁶ CINEMATOGRAPHER SANTOSH SIVAN INTERVIEW. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.behindwoods.com/tamil-cinematographer/santosh-sivan/an-exclusive-interview-with-padma-shri-santosh-sivan-part-1.html>

⁴⁷ Nathan, A. (2018, April 04). Santosh Sivan on his lengthy collaboration with Mani Ratnam: 'Every film is different'. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/reel/873987/santosh-sivan-on-his-lengthy-collaboration-with-mani-ratnam-every-film-is-different>

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