



School of Journalism, Media and Performance

**EMBEDDING INDIAN TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN
INDIAN CINEMATIC PRACTICE**

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PhD Thesis

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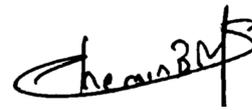
A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of Practice-led PhD
at the University of Central Lancashire, UK

JUNE 2020

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research for this Ph.D. thesis entitled “Embedding Indian Transcendental Philosophy in Indian Cinematic Practice”, University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom was carried out by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Media and performance under the guidance and supervision of Prof Erik Knudsen, University of Central Lancashire, UK. The interpretations put forth are based on my reading and understanding of the original texts and they are not published anywhere in the form of books, monographs or articles. The other books, articles and websites that I have used are acknowledged in the respective places in the text. For the present thesis, which I am submitting to the University, no degree or diploma or distinction has been conferred on me before, either in this or in any other University.

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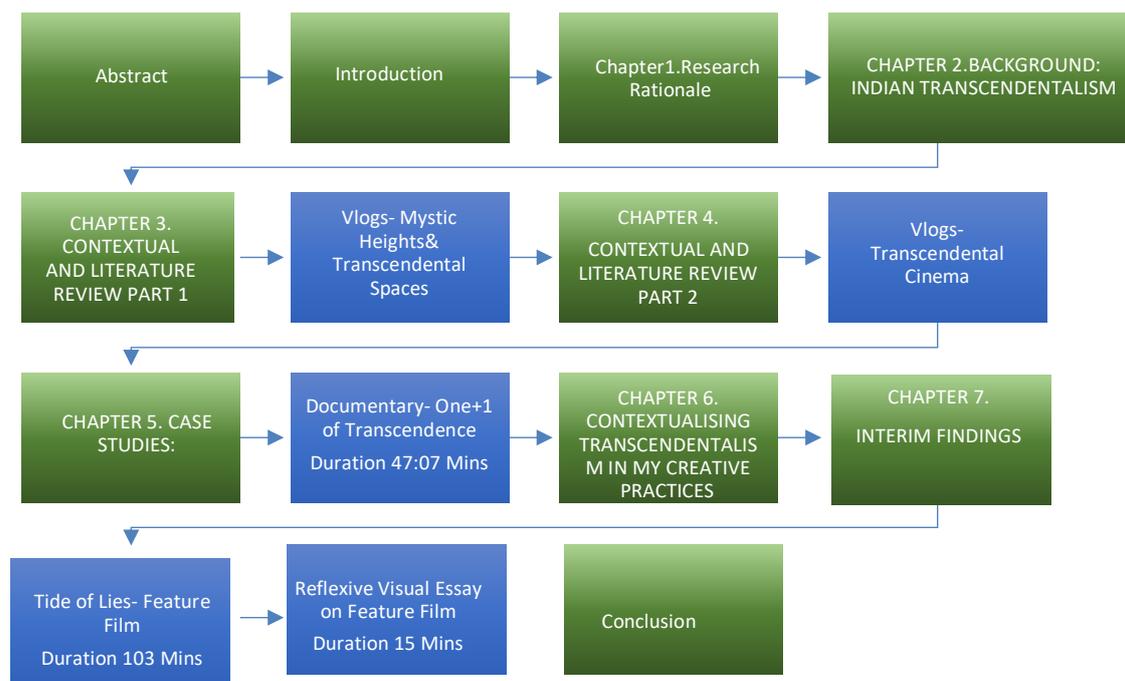
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ACCESSING THE PROJECT

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1. The written thesis
2. Videos and Vlogs classified under three sections.
 - a. The Mystic Heights
 - b. Transcendental Cinema
 - c. Transcendental Spaces
3. Documentary- One+1 of transcendence
4. Tide of Lies- Feature Film
5. Reflective essay- Transcending Tide of Lies

The pathway to travel through these materials will be clearly guided as you read through this document.



Written Material 

Visual Material 

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Indian Philosophy proclaims the concept of 'Sahavarthihva', 'Sahabhavana' and 'Sathsanga', (Co-existence, Collaboration, Sacred Association). This research wouldn't have been possible without these three states in many people, who could not all be listed on a single page.

I should convey my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Prof Erik Knudsen, without whose guidance and contributions this research could not have achieved quality. His prolonged experience as both an academic and a filmmaker made significant contributions to the research. His guidance was consistent throughout the journey and his recommendations and corrections ensured that my work followed the right direction.

I dedicate this research to my Grandfather, the late Chandrasekaran Nair, poet and philosopher. It is his legacy that influenced me to pursue research based on Indian transcendentalism.

No words could convey sufficient thanks to my father, C. Balachandran Nair. There are instances where emotions can never be transcribed. His financial, moral and emotional support alone enabled me to travel abroad and pursue such an expensive academic process. No doubt I will always sense the odour of his hard work on my PhD certificate.

I take this opportunity to thank my mother, O Ambika, brother Dr Sabarish B Nair, sister-in-law Dr Bhavya Sabarish, and all my family members for all the support they have offered.

I attribute my slight knowledge of cinema to my teachers, Prof John Sankaramangalam, Prof Kaviyoor Shivaprasad, Mr Sajan Kalathil, and all others who spread the light of cinematic wisdom on to the path I walked.

I cannot name all the many friends who gave me their unconditional support, but I must in particular mention Mr Noble Peter, Mr Smirin Sebastian and Mr Jaison Chako Mathew.

Luminance from the blessings of my Spiritual Gurus always inspires a feeling of bliss.
Humble Prayers.

- Shemin Balachandran Nair

ABSTRACT

India's cultural heritage is rich in Transcendental philosophies, yet unlike many other Indian cultural forms, such as theatre and music, very few Indian filmmakers consciously explore the Transcendent in their films. The aim of this research project is to discover in what ways cinematic forms can be developed and embedded in narrative film to engage more consciously with Indian Transcendental concepts. Most Indian mainstream cinema still practises Aristotle's five-act dramatic structure. The research investigates the conscious efforts of some filmmakers who have attempted experimental narrative structures.

The primary research addresses how Transcendental Indian philosophies can be embedded in cinematic practice as an alternative paradigm to the dominant cinematic mainstream, in a manner that can effectively articulate Indian Transcendentalism through style and life in Indian cinema. How can the process of making a feature film be used to help the filmmaker consciously engage with Indian Transcendental philosophies? Various traditional Indian art forms aim at engaging the community on a spiritual plane to experience the essence of Transcendence. However, few Indian films aim to effect this elevation. This is addressed as a key research problem.

The primary research also includes an in-depth study of sociological issues. It would seem that the contemporary Indian psyche has distanced itself from Transcendental philosophy. Nevertheless, there are contemporary sociocultural and art practices that try to reconnect the practice of Transcendental philosophy to this psyche. This project includes some short videos that have been shot and edited with text descriptions in an attempt to explore the reasons for the disconnection and to reinitiate and re-establish the connection.

The first part of the research is a comprehensive study of how Transcendental philosophies manifest themselves in the other art forms of India. This is done primarily through filmmaking practice; the findings are summarized in the form of video blogs that will be supported by contextual reading of the key texts. I have used a transdisciplinary research method, adopting various research methodologies including autoethnography, critical analysis, and engaging filmmaking practice as a tool of investigation and articulation of the results.

There are a few Indian filmmakers who work on Transcendental philosophy instinctively and naturally, without conscious effort. To identify who those filmmakers are and to what extent they have used Indian Transcendental elements in their works, I have interviewed subject experts in different disciplines of cinema and published them as separate video blogs. These data are analysed and edited to produce a research documentary to narrate the compilation of the ideas formulated through the research.

Understanding the absence of conscious efforts of Indian filmmakers to embed a Transcendental narrative in cinema, I have investigated how Transcendental philosophy is manifested in both the form and content of various "Theyyams"; "Pottan Theyyam" in particular. Through this contextual analysis of visual materials using filmmaking practices, the key elements of the Indian Transcendental philosophy are identified and can be integrated with cinematic Transcendental narrative structure: 'Normality, Disparity, Formality/Transcendence' (Knudsen, 2018) and made into a practical outcome in the narrative feature film format.

This research not only makes a significant contribution by identifying original ideas to engage Transcendental narrative in Indian cinema but has also yielded a practice-based output: a feature film, which initiates a solution for the issue the research addresses. Based on the interim findings, a screenplay is developed and “Tide of Lies”, a feature-length fiction film, is produced as a research outcome. There is also a visual essay on how the research findings and the research methods have shaped the feature film, which is the practice-led outcome as a solution to the original research questions.

The digital revolution and democratisation of filmmaking technology offers feasible methods for innovation in narratives and alternatives to mainstream films. This scenario in the technological environment is what helped me in integrating filmmaking practices into various stages of the research and helped to address the problem and context effectively and efficiently in a feasible manner.

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INTRODUCTION

I am Shemin Balachandran Nair, grandson of the poet Thumbacode Chandrasekharan Nair and son of Balachandran Nair, a planter and a business person, from the southern tip of India, Kanyakumari, Cape Comerin, at the confluence of the Arabian sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. This is the landscape and the family background that inspired me to become what I am today. Kanyakumari district is associated with many transcendental myths and beliefs; the very name of place suggests the Virgin goddess, who overcame evil while waiting to marry Lord Shiva. My acquaintance and familiarity with transcendence began on the one hand in the bedtime stories narrated by my grandmother with great enthusiasm and histrionics, and on the other in slyly overhearing the philosophical and religious discussions between my grandfather and his friends and the interest they encouraged. Right from my childhood, images held tremendous fascination for me. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. I started my creative endeavours by writing abstract poetry, but I soon realized films were the best way to express my imagination. I did my Masters in film-making, which gave me opportunities to meet and work with some great film-makers and technicians in India. It was during a serious discussion with Prof John Sankaramangalam, a senior film academic, that I heard the term 'transcendental cinema' for the first time. A desire to understand more about it made me realize that these are the kinds of films I always longed for. I started working as an associate to a cinematographer when I was doing my Masters. This developed my understanding of the technical facets of transforming the thoughts within me to cinematic images. Now I am an independent film-maker and a cinematographer and a freelance film academic.

My research focuses on developing a narrative structure for film that engages with the Indian perception of transcendentalism. This is done through an auto-ethnographic method of understanding and realizing the soul of transcendental ideas and practice in Indian socio-cultural premises, involving my own practice as a film-maker to understand and manifest these ideas and develop a narrative.

This research project involves an amalgamation of visual and written contents.

Chapter 1 Research Rationale

This chapter describes and indicates the significance of the research and the structuring of data and content. It also describes the various research methodologies used and where and why various portions of the research are organized as they are.

The philosophical notion of Indian transcendentalism is discussed in the first chapter whereas the artistic and cinematic notions are discussed in chapters 2 and 4.

CHAPTER 2

Background: INDIAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

This chapter discusses in depth and detail the various concepts and ideas framing the notion of transcendentalism in India. This is significant for the religious pluralism of India, where Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life. These differences and contrasts exist even within transcendental philosophy. Institutional Bhramanical notions arose partly from the Aryan invasion, but much older and traditional folk-based perspectives on transcendence still exist in India. The current philosophy is a blend of both these traditions, and it has spread to the day to day lives of people in the form of practices, beliefs and rituals.

The diversity in the country as a whole can also be seen within Hinduism. There are many contrasting philosophies within the single umbrella term "Hinduism". This dialectic of ideas is evident between philosophies such as Advaita and Dvaita (Non-Duality and Duality), Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shakthiyism, etc. There are even agnostic views within the philosophies of religion that celebrate millions of gods.

Reading the existing literature and identifying the themes that frame the content of my research enabled me to understand and focus on what is significant.

This unlimited range of thoughts is both an advantage and a disadvantage. To identify the themes best suited to the argument of my work was a challenge because of the scarcity of previous research. I found Shaivism and the concept of Advaita to engage most closely to transcendental philosophy; on the basis of the references, art forms connected to this were identified.

This chapter is my reflection on the contextual readings, which led me to make further progress.

CHAPTER 3

Contextual and Literature Review Part 1: INDIAN TRANSCENDENTAL ART FORMS

Combining the ideas obtained from the readings with perceptions identifying the aesthetic manifestation of transcendental philosophy, art forms associated with the selected themes were identified. The presence of transcendental ideas can be found in various art forms spread across different part of the country. Transcendental philosophies are manifested and presented right from the Hymns of Sadhus and Sanyasis in the Himalayas in the North to the 'Villu Pattu', a story-telling form where narration is interspersed with the music of Kanyakumari, in the South.

As the aim of my research was to develop cinematic narratives, I decided to focus my investigation more on visual and performance art forms, which could help me to understand the visual narrative that currently exists.

As most folk practice and knowledge exists in oral traditions, I visited India to film video interviews with performers, academics and philosophers. The results are published as series of vlogs. The performances were also documented.

The research includes not only traditional and folk-art forms but also an attempt to understand how contemporary interpretations are made and new art forms derived from the inspiration of existing arts and philosophies.

As transcendental philosophy is a centuries-old tradition, I asked myself: is it still of any relevance to the contemporary society and does it do anything for the sake of humanity? Three short videos were made to address these questions.

CHAPTER 4

Contextual and Literature Review Part 2: TRANSCENDENTALISM IN INDIAN FILMS

This chapter addresses one of the major problems on which the research focuses. Indian art is rich in transcendental philosophy, but this engagement is not evident in Indian films. To investigate the reasons, it is essential to understand the 100 years of history of Indian cinema. Film production is one of the largest industries of the country. Indian films just mean “Bollywood” to the outside world. However, there are some 25 small and large industries based on regional languages. They produce an average of 1600-1900 films a year. Bollywood, the major industry, is based in Mumbai and its films are made in Hindi. These films are now distributed across the globe. There are also significant productions in such languages as Tamil, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, etc. Most of the classical examples of Indian film, which gained international acclaim for their aesthetic quality, are from West Bengal and Kerala, the Bengali and Malayalam films.

Whether any of these film-makers tried to engage with Indian transcendental philosophy was investigated. The lack of literature relevant to this question was a major issue. A second research trip to India focused on interviewing film personalities and academics. Their experiences and insights made significant contributions. The spiritual elements reflected in some of the Indian film-makers’ work were discussed. Some interviewees also shared their personal experiences of working with similar themes. These interviews are published as series of vlogs.

CHAPTER 5

Case Studies: TRANSCENDENTAL FILMS ACROSS THE GLOBE AND FILM-MAKERS IN FOCUS

Various film-makers in different part of the world have engaged with transcendental philosophies in their films. These show significant influence from the philosophies of their own regions. Having been a delegate at many film festivals has helped me to understand the kind of films that have been and are being made in different parts of the world. Relevant publications were reviewed, providing an understanding of the transcendental films of some master film-makers.

My research, based on the Dharmic views of transcendence, has focused on Asian film-makers who have contributed to the niche, and their cinematic practices and narratives have been investigated in detail.

The interviews with film-makers discussed in the previous chapter and some cut-always to films were edited to make a 48-minute documentary entitled ‘**One + 1 of transcendence**’. This is a critical reflection on, and a practical output from, the research findings.

CHAPTER 6

CONTEXTUALIZING TRANSCENDENTALISM IN MY CREATIVE PRACTICES

My personal interest in Indian spirituality and film-making made me opt for a PhD in “Embedding Indian Transcendental Philosophy in Indian Cinematic Practice”. I was born in a joint family of the Nair caste. Being brought up in a house where my grandfather was a poet and a philosopher, I imbibed and assimilated interests in spirituality and philosophy. When I chose to be a film-maker and a cinematographer, these ideas grew with me; this is what I wish to express through my films. But I found that none of the existing narratives in Indian film have engaged with transcendental ideas.

I was inspired by many international film-makers and this has had a significant influence on my short films, triggering me to pursue a PhD in this context.

This chapter investigates my own creative practices and their engagement with a transcendental narrative.

CHAPTER 7

INTERIM FINDINGS - MAKING A FEATURE FILM; REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research focused on understanding the essence of Indian transcendental philosophy at a deeper level than just its peripheral appearance. The rituals and performances reveal a philosophy that is communicated in fictional form. The key themes with which many of these traditional art forms try to engage are identified and discussed in this chapter. The identified ideas are interpreted in fictional form. The pre-production written part of the film has the following sections:

1. Idea
2. Synopsis
3. Step outline
4. Master Scene treatment
5. Screenplay
6. Shooting Script

Please click the hyperlinks below the poster to watch the film.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The digitization of various stages of film-making has opened up more possibilities for experimenting with film narratives. Using this as an advantage, I developed a practice-based engagement in film-making in my research.

A visual essay explains how the feature film reflects the research findings and the journey towards identifying the visual and narrative elements that truly make the film, and the ways it manifests Indian Transcendentalism. It explains how various aspects of film-making are used to engage the findings of the research.

Problem and Context

The Indian film industry produces the largest number of films in the world. People from various countries enjoy Indian cinema, assuming 'Bollywood' is the whole of it. But as in every other aspect of India, we also have the concept of 'Unity in diversity' in our film industries. India has various regional industries that produce films in their regional languages. Apart from the mainstream industry, parallel or independent movements are happening regionally in different parts of the country.

Financially, India has the second largest film Industry in the world, contributing \$8.1 billion to the Indian economy in 2013, which was 0.5% of the total GDP of the country (Bhushan, 2013). There is consistent growth in the revenue generated and also in the number of films produced every year. In 1986 it was 840 films requiring no censorship certificate (Dhyaksha, 1988). Indian cinemas have made an average of 1600 to 1900 films an year since 2010. Examining the various other art forms of India, all share a common virtue: art as a medium to uplift a person spiritually. But despite its wide and vibrant reach, does the Indian film industry reflect this Indian virtue of art?

Films from different parts of the world reveal some film-makers who use transcendental narrative effectively in their cinematic work. However, there is a gap between the virtues of Indian arts and Indian film because so many social, political and economic factors are involved. The capital money invested, ruling the industry, is one significant factor that prevents the country's films from innovating and advancing. Independent films offer the only solution to this problem.

The research described in this thesis identifies this and other existing problems and aims to comprehend how other art forms in India use transcendental philosophies. It also investigates Indian film-makers who have attempted to generate transcendental narratives and how film-makers from other cultures use transcendental narratives in their work.

Examining the themes and content of films that have become box-office hits, it is clear that they are spiced with the "masala", which are the regular ingredients of mainstream Indian films. 'Sholay', an action adventure film, is always considered the best example of this formula. It amassed a box office collection of Rs. 350 million INR, which was considered a very big achievement for the Indian film Industry in the year 1975. Romance has become yet another success formula, as best proved by the success of 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge', which grossed 1,230 million INR in 1995. It is not just the themes but also the actor, co-actor and actress combinations, often repeated after a success, tht account for these profits. Unrealistic romantic song sequences and action sequences are essential ingredients of these masala. Even after all these years, popular films have not changed much, as shown by Dhoom (2004), Krish (2006) and others. This information was collected from Wikipedia; the actual figures could differ slightly.

Even if film-makers are willing to experiment, the conventional distribution and exhibition network doesn't entertain it.

However, there are always attempts by serious film-makers in the parallel world to attribute artistic values to film, though very few of them have achieved popular acceptance. After 2010 some changes started to appear as multiplexes became more popular. The conventional methods of distribution changed when digital theatre distribution systems such as CUBE and UFO came into existence. This made it possible to release a regional film to a country-wide market. Ship of Theseus (2012) and Lunch Box (2013) are two films that achieved marked success during this period.

India understands transcendence as a spiritual dimension that elevates human consciousness to a state where it experiences oneness and unconditionality as the essence of one's life. Indian traditional arts made deliberate attempts to portray this as experience and realization. Unlike those arts, Indian cinema mostly aims at satisfying a commercial entertainment market.

Once the issues and methods were identified, the objective of the research was to bridge this gap in virtue between Indian traditional arts and film by developing an alternative cinematic narrative that could convincingly express the nuances and notions of Indian transcendentalism. This is discussed in detail in later chapters.

Research Questions

The research primarily investigates two questions:

- 1. How can a filmmaker develop a cinematic form that consciously engages with Indian transcendental philosophy?**
- 2. How could the process of film-making help the film-maker to engage consciously with Indian transcendental philosophy?**

Some subsidiary questions are also addressed:

- What is the influence of traditional transcendental practices and arts on Indian life?
- How do films from other parts of world engage with the transcendental philosophies of their cultures?
- Have any Indian film-makers attempted to engage with the native transcendental philosophy in their films?

These questions need to be addressed in a socio-ethnographic context and to be resolved empirically using film-making practices.

Research Methodology

The initial phase of the research was primarily aimed at understanding: what exactly is the Indian notion of transcendence, what are the different forms by which it is manifested, and

how is this done? An idea was established on the basis of reading various scholarly books, articles, journals and other publications.

There is very little literature that addresses the relationship between Indian transcendental philosophy and film, so I decided to gather information by travelling and conducting semi-structured interviews with the subject experts. 'Homage to the Departed' by Manjula Poyil, Videos by Dr Sarada Sreenivasan, and talks by OSHO and Jiddu Krishnamoorthy served as points of departure for this inquiry. I chose to conduct auto-ethnographic research led by film-making practices, selected case studies and contextual research.

Visual documentation and the process of editing it worked as contextual analysis. It was not just a matter of interviewing subject experts; editing the results to documentary form was used to analyze and synthesize the data. "The analysis of documentary sources is a major method of social research, and one which many qualitative researchers see as meaningful and appropriate in the context of their research strategy. The idea of documentary research used to conjure up a mental image of a researcher digging around in a dusty archive among historical documents, but in fact there are many different ways of generating data through documents, including using the Internet, and there are many different types of documents". (Silverman, n.d.)

"One of the first documented academic anthropological uses of film is Alfred Cort Haddon's 1898 British expedition to the Torres Straits Islands, a large multidisciplinary expedition to study scientifically the Islands' people, 'comprehensively equipped with the very latest scientific recording instruments'. This included 'equipment for taking [photographic] stills, movies and even experimental colour photographs' forming a multimedia project that Anna Grimshaw characterizes as 'a mixture of Victorian ideas with modern innovative practices" (Pink, 2006).

During a research trip to India I filmed 17 vlogs. Most of them were video documentations and interviews concerning a transcendental ritual folk-art form called 'Theyyam'. Interviews with film-makers, cinematographers, performers, philosophers, dancers, etc. were also recorded during that trip and clearly reflected their understanding of transcendence in their own media.

"Visual anthropologists have argued that the way forward would be both to integrate the visual into mainstream anthropology and to incorporate anthropological objectives into ethnographic film-making. This would give the visual a critical role in revising the categories through which anthropological knowledge is produced by introducing it as an alternative way of understanding of, and route to knowledge about, social phenomena. Moreover, a new agenda for digital ethnographic video-making has suggested the production of films according to anthropological rather than broadcast television agendas" (Pink, 2006).

I have chosen to use videomaking as a tool to document and reflect on my auto ethnographic findings, thus incorporating practice of film-making to auto ethnographic research method.

The details of the vlogs and links to them are discussed in chapter one.

The contextual study of the connection of transcendence to Indian folk-arts raised certain questions and themes. To find the answers to those questions I had to locate practitioners and academics in the fields of folklore and performance. Some of them were identified on the basis of my relationship with many of these cultural icons, since I have been a cinematographer and filmmaker for the past few years, having cultural documentations as niche.

“They are grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation. Observation and participation (according to circumstance and the analytic purpose at hand) remain the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach. In many cases, of course, fieldwork entails the use of other research methods too.” (Silverman, n.d.)

The choice of the participants was made by, taking this into account that is both by observation and participation. Once subject experts for each aspect had been identified, I had direct meetings with them and recorded semi-structured interviews. These interviews were mostly scheduled at their workplaces, which gave me opportunities to capture visuals of the local terrain and natural premises. These are significant as the regional culture and landscape are major factors influencing the context they are discussing.

Both the filming and the editing of these vlogs framed a method of practice of data collection for the research. The order in which they are sequenced shows the development and evolution of the research. The first few vlogs are of discussions with folklorists and then the performers of Theyyam, but subsequently a wide range of contents was explored. Organic growth in the understanding of transcendental philosophy can result from this method, ranging from a very old folk-art form to modern and contemporary experiments.

The second research trip to India was mainly focused on interacting with Indian film-makers and technicians and discussing their experiences and insights into transcendence in Indian cinema and world cinema. This resulted in a documentary exploring all the faint traces of transcendental elements in the work of various Indian film-makers and their personal observations and visions concerning transcendental films across the world. This practice also helped me to identify how effectively a film becomes transcendental in terms of its cinematic narrative, content and form, and how diversely the transcendent is reflected and manifested in the works of various masters and contemporary film-makers.

The investigation was intended to elucidate the forms and modes in which transcendental ideas are manifested in the traditional arts and life of India. For this I conducted semi-structured interviews with various academics, performers, and lay people. My first phase was targeted at understanding transcendental arts, as in traditional and contemporary folk culture.

The videos are categorized in three sections:

1. The Mystic Heights
2. Transcendental Cinema
3. Transcendental Spaces

The Mystic Heights comprises a series of 19 vlogs; interviews with folklorists, folk performers, local people, Hindu philosophers, contemporary art performers, scientists, etc.

Transcendental Cinema is a section involving interviews with the most senior film academic in South Asia, a veteran film-maker, a screenplay writer, an editor and a film critic. A vibrant choice of people from various specializations in film-making was selected so I could focus on various aspects of Indian cinema in depth and the reasons for many of the questions to be addressed through my research. The interviews were designed around each expert's area of specialization, but the contributions were more than mere information about contents. They also included the experts' insights and experiences concerning transcendental elements in film based on their prolonged experience and practice.

These interviews were possible because I already had good contacts with most of the interviewees, as I have been a delegate and guest at many film festivals in the country during the course of my practice as a filmmaker. Edited versions of the individual interviews are published as separate vlogs, a method for gathering essential data related to the content.

A contextual analysis was made of all these data involving practice; that is, by editing selected fragments of the interviews together in a specific order along with cut-aways to the films discussed in the interviews. This resulted in a 47-minute documentary, 'One + 1 of Transcendence'. Although the individual interviews were discussed a wider context, the editing to documentary form generated a subjective narrative in which the content was analyzed through the research. Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz characterize the latter as a process of inquiry in which "Knowledge is not prior but emerges through the very grain of film-making" (Ravetz & Grimshaw, 2005)". As is well known, this is a methodological stance typified in 'observational cinema', which assumes the possibility that the "film-maker and subject exist in a shared physical and imaginative space, one that encompasses but is not necessarily synonymous with the events that are filmed" (Ravetz & Grimshaw, 2005).

Amalgamation of all these research findings with my own creativity generated the most significant practical outcome of this research project: "Tide of Lies", a feature film. This fictional film reflects answers to the questions addressed through my research. The plot is formed by understanding the soul or essence of the philosophy that is communicated aesthetically through many traditional art forms.

The research identified three keywords that encapsulate the essence through which the Indian transcendental philosophy permeates:

1. Unconditionality
2. Oneness
3. Fertility

However, a cinematic telling of the same is very different. I decided to write a screenplay for the feature film set in a modern urban context. Through the complexes and traumas of the central character, the philosophy is underlined cinematically. It is not just the content that makes the narrative but also the form. The narrative form of **“Tide of Lies”** is influenced by various findings from the previous contextual studies, such as those of colours, landscapes and terrains, translated into cinematic equivalents to become the elements of *mise-en-scène*.

The interim findings contributed to the ‘decisions’ in the film from the story to the shot breakdowns, lensing, choice of locations, set properties, camera angles, colour tone, camera movements, editing pace, music, sound mixing and colour grading. Questions of how the interim findings were translated into these cinematic equivalents, what methods were involved and how it was done in practice are answered in the “Reflective visual essay”. This is another method of practice documenting, editing and contextualizing the final practical outcome, which is the film with the interim findings that led to it.

Chapter 1. Research Rationale

Introduction

As this project involves multimode, practice-based research, and most of the primary research is analysis and the research outcomes are based on methods of practice, there is no specific literature review. However, there is contextual analysis of both the video and the text materials at various stages. This chapter illustrates and pinpoints how this is done and organized across other chapters.

Process and Structure

Transcendental philosophy and transcendental practices in India are a mélange of a broad spectrum of ideologies that could be generally described as spiritual deliberation of truth beyond the understanding or cognition achieved through the physical senses. The philosophy has evolved over time, inspired and influenced by various historical events. Detailed research concerning how this philosophy can be identified in various folk and classical art forms is covered chapters 2 and 3.

I have adopted a multimode approach to my interdisciplinary research, incorporating various tools such as contextual analysis, auto-ethnographic research and participant observation, and using film-making practice as a tool for collecting and analyzing data and producing a result.

“Tulloch’s research had three research methods: it combined textual analysis, in-depth interviews with the production crew and personal observations and field notes based on his ethnographic approach. Tulloch was granted two weeks to observe the recording of the production” (Kerrigan, 2016).

Throughout this research my aim was not to make significant contributions to theory, but to focus from the outset on contributing an innovative narrative method to the stream of film-making practice. Therefore, I have not included a separate literature review chapter, as in most PhD projects. I have mostly used contextual analysis of both textual and film materials, and this is distributed over the different chapters.

The significant notion that led to this research was that Indian film-makers have made no conscious or deliberate attempt to incorporate Indian transcendental philosophy into their film-making practices. To address this issue it is essential to involve a practice-based output that focuses directly the problem, rather than text-based research that addresses the issue peripherally, and to suggest some solutions.

The primary research focused on identifying and understanding the importance of transcendentalism in various art forms. There is literature concerning several of these folk-art forms but very little about the transcendental philosophy aspect. To explore this perspective in the light of the primary research, semi-structured interviews about transcendence in various art forms were conducted and the performances were documented. Understanding of transcendentalism is distributed across a vibrant spectrum of arts that have evolved over various time scales in India. In the light of the interviews with academics, the primary research was extended and restructured to include a few more art

forms and contemporary artistic manifestations of transcendental philosophy. Certain findings from the primary research also pointed to a secondary level of investigating transcendence:

- Traditional spatial manifestations of transcendental philosophy
- Reasons why contemporary Indian Society has become distanced from transcendental philosophy
- Modern-day manifestations of transcendental philosophy.

Chapter 2 includes details of the methods by which the primary research was conducted and the preliminary findings that shaped the practical methods of data collection and contextual analysis that were carried out later.

Chapter 3 covers the outcome of my field trips and practice-led methods of data collection and analysis using film-making as a tool. This analysis led to identification of the key points on which the narrative pattern of the final feature film was based.

“It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator”
(Smith and Dean, 2009).

This method of research combining, shaping of art work and the documentation of doing it is done at various stages of the research.

To identify whether any Indian film-makers have ever addressed the primary research questions in their film-making practices, I used a participant observation process of interviewing film production veterans and the academic community and performed a contextual analysis of the content. The process and the results are described in Chapter 4.

Apart from identifying the lack of conscious attempt by any film-makers to engage transcendentalism in their works, I have addressed such issues as the commercial market and the political pressures that have restricted it. I also done a case study of attempts by the Malayalam industry to make innovations in narrative and their effects on the box office.

“I mean, I might think it’s great for students to learn all these skills and ways of engaging with knowledge, people and themselves. However, sometimes the research/practice may not lead to making work that can find an audience as well as having to meet other requirements” (Munro, 2018).

Few film-makers from different cultures, from other countries, have actively engaged the transcendental philosophies of their lands in their work. Paul Schader included Carl Dreyer, Yasujiro Ozu and Robert Bresson in his book ‘Transcendental Style in Film’. However, there are other Asian film-makers who do engage with the transcendental philosophies of their

lands. Those film-makers were identified through participatory engagement. A contextual analysis using film editing as a medium, the interviews with the subject experts, and visuals from the films of these film-makers, are edited together to create a visual essay that identifies and analyses their engagement with transcendence in their films in terms of both form and the content. This essay is discussed in chapter 5.

“It should be clear from the description above that my own practice does not extend to highly interactive, multi-authored or web-enabled practices, nor the distributed practices one might associate with social media and online collaboration. Mine is fundamentally a single authored, documentary video practice that seeks to analyze and represent participatory culture on screen, and for this reason the Ph.D. refrains from a sustained discussion of the kinds of collaborative practices listed above. This is not to say that such practices don’t also represent an important intersection of documentary practice and participatory culture, they simply represent a different point of intersection. Being practice-led, this research takes its procedural cues from the nature of the practice itself, and sketches parameters that are most enabling of the idea that the practice sets the terms of its own investigation” (Tarrant, 2008).

Since the beginning of my career as a filmmaker I have made both deliberate and unintentional efforts to engage transcendental philosophy in my works, both by adopting the visual forms used by other film-makers to suit the new content I am portraying and by setting up a visual form from my own creativity. I have also engaged with psychoanalytical theories and the visual forms that have evolved from them. Chapter 4 illustrates how my previous works have experimented with visual forms and helped me develop an understanding of visual grammar.

“In the autoethnographic research method, researchers analyze their own subjectivity and life experiences, and treat the self as ‘other’ while calling attention to issues of power. At this juncture, the researcher and the researched, the dominant and the subordinate, individual experience and socio-cultural structures can be examined” (Cayir, 2017).

To address the primary research question in the light of the findings, I developed a narrative feature film screenplay that uses transcendental narrative structure in fictional form. The content is influenced by the key issues arising from the practice-based research methods. With further improvisations, this screenplay developed into the feature film “Tide of Lies”. The development of the content and form from the research is explained in Chapter 7. The film, which is the most significant output of the research, is attached as a link.

There is also a visual essay that explains how each segment of the film such as screenplay, direction, cinematography, editing, sound design and music engages with transcendentalism, and identifies the research findings that inspired the design of the film.

Organization

The organization or structure of the written document reflects the workflow of the research. Chapter 2 is based on data from the primary research and the factors that identified and designed the rest of the work. Chapter 3 covers the results of the contextual analysis of the audio-visual content created during the field trips to India. Here, some of the

transcendental art forms are identified and the narrative structure and content of each is described. This chapter also gives an introspective study of the strong connections and engagement of transcendental philosophy with the lifestyles of Indians and seeks the reasons for the break-away. This leads to the major contemporary attempts to reinstate the philosophy by a few artists and spiritual teachers in their respective media.

To substantiate the original contribution of the research, it is essential to prove the absence of deliberate attempts by Indian film-makers to engage with Indian transcendental philosophy. This is done through participant observation and contextual analysis of the data by involving the practice of film-making. This process substantiates the point addressed in 'Research Questions' and 'Problem and Context'. Apart from substantiating the significance of the research, the visual essay shares the content discussed in Chapter 5. It helps to identify the major film-makers from different parts of the world whose films engage with transcendental philosophy. The choice of participants was based on the requirement for at least one participant with expertise in one major department of cinema. All the participants have years of experience in their respective fields and have won the most prestigious "National Award" from the Indian Government.

As the transcendental philosophy of India is closer to and more intimate with the rest of Asia than the West, I decided to choose three Asian film-makers and some of their films for the case study. As Buddhism is also a 'Dharmic' religion like Hinduism (both believe in Karma and rebirth) I could identify a close proximity between these cultures. Chapter 5 was thus formed.

As I approached the manifestation of the research findings by a practice-led method, I understood the need for an auto-ethnographic study of my own creative practices, reflecting on how some of my previous works were made. This is covered in Chapter 6.

"It is important to recognize that practitioners are often working across genres and forms and use different modes of production, like documentary, fiction, essay films and digital media hybrids, or modes that are specific to particularly stages of production, like screenwriting occurring before production and visual effects occurring after production" (Kerrigan, 2016).

The major outcome of the research is the feature film, which manifests all the other outputs in a narrative fictional form. To explain clearly how the interim findings, engage with "Tide of Lies", I have included Chapter 7 and the visual essay "Transcending Tide of Lies".

Conclusion

This chapter serves as a pointer to the remaining chapters and illustrates the 'What', 'Why' and 'How' of the research and its structuring in this specific pattern.

Chapter2. BACKGROUND: INDIAN TRANSCENDENTALISM, MULTIMODE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND KEY LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This aim of chapter is to understand Indian Transcendental philosophy and the concepts associated with it in the light of ancient Indian scriptures. Some common aesthetic concepts provide the theoretical foundation for all Indian Transcendental art forms. This chapter also explains the methodologies used in the research and their relevance.

“Indian Transcendentalism” is addressed in this research as a philosophical ideology and a spiritual mode of thought that broadly encapsulates the concept of “seeking beyond”. This also means a deeper conscious exploration of realities beyond peripheral physical perceptions.

Transcendentalism is a term that cannot be limited to a single definition. As Paul Schrader said, ‘Transcendental style’ can be anything from a camera angle to a way of life. I focused on improving the possibilities of exploring an alternative cinematic narrative that engages the core Transcendental elements widespread in the Indian ethos and milieu.

Most religions have mystical elements or groups, both complementing and contradicting the orthodox religious ideals, as in Sufism to Islam, Zen to Buddhism, Tantric to Hinduism. Generalizing a pan-Asian way of considering Transcendentalism, we can identify the interactions of mysticism with religious perspectives.

How does perception happen? Through our senses, is it not? We see, hear, smell, taste and touch. But are those the only ways in which we perceive? Is there anything that transcends them? Aren’t there visuals that we cannot see with our eyes and sounds that we cannot hear with our ears? Transcendental films explore such audio-visual manifestations that transcend physical perceptions and extend the horizons of experience, both spiritual and intellectual.

It was this dialectic nature of spirituality that attracted me to the topic. Mysticism could be considered an absolute form of religion that has no sound or form, neither seen nor heard. A contradiction exists even within the framework of the term “Transcendental art”, where art is a constructive process and Transcendental ideologies share a view of a dignified void. At its best, therefore, art is self-destructive. The “Maya Vada” of Adi Sankara says nothing is real, everything is an illusion. I think this relates to the core idea of Transcendental arts. Therefore, Transcendental art for me is a creative process of constructing this sense of illusion aesthetically, which enables one to realize the ‘Absolute’.

Rationale for adopting relevant research methods

During the primary research, I also explored the tools that could effectively be used to investigate the context. Understanding many popular research methods made me realise that a single mode of research such as qualitative or quantitative analysis would not fit the framework of investigation. I therefore decided to adopt a multi-mode approach integrating different research methods, implementing them at various stages of the investigation.

“Mixed-mode surveys (sometimes referred to as multi-mode surveys) combine different ways (modes) of collecting data for a single project. Different methodologies may be used during distinct phases of a survey, such as recruitment, screening, and questionnaire administration, or they may make use of different survey modes during a single phase, like data collection.” (Lavrakas, 2008)

The research therefore uses a multi-mode research methodology, a combination of contextual analysis, auto-ethnographic research and filmmaking practices. A brief note on the methods adopted and their usages follows:

*“**Autoethnography** is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.” (Anon., 2011)*

I have partially used Leon Anderson’s methodology of “Analytical autoethnography”, adopting elements he suggested as auto-anthropology, autobiographical ethnography or sociology, personal or self-narrative research and writing (Anderson, 2006). Being born and brought up in the southern tip of India, Kanyakumari, Transcendence and spirituality was an essential part of my cognitive and cultural experience. Kanyakumari served as a venue and hosting ground for many spiritual practitioners including ‘Swami Vivekananda’, hermits such as ‘Mouna Guru Swami’, and Sufi Practitioners such as “Labba Swami”. This research revisits my cultural experiences along with the social experiences of Transcendental philosophy; both its historical and contemporary premises. The research structures a perspective that enables one to choose, understand, film and contextualise various Indian art forms that engage with Transcendental philosophy (this is published as vlogs with the title ‘The Mystic Heights’) and also to identify and investigate the spatial manifestations of Transcendental philosophy (This is published as vlogs with the title ‘Transcendental Spaces’).

“A **contextual analysis** is simply an analysis of a text (in whatever medium, including multi-media) that helps us to assess that text within the context of its historical and cultural setting, but also in terms of its textuality – or the qualities that characterize the text as a text. A contextual analysis combines features of formal analysis with features of “cultural archeology,” or the systematic study of social, political, economic, philosophical, religious, and aesthetic conditions that were (or can be assumed to have been) in place at the time and place when the text was created. While this may sound complicated, it is in reality deceptively simple: it means “situating” the text within the milieu of its times and assessing the roles of author, readers (intended and actual), and “commentators” (critics, both professional and otherwise) in the reception of the text.” (Behrendt, 2008)

After the primary research, understanding what data were to be collected and analysed, I filmed semi-structured interviews, performances and events and these were subjected to contextual analysis of the multi-media content. The editing process of the collected content served as a method of formally analysing the data and systematically compiling them into a research content in terms of practice.

Answering the key questions was based on a prescribed format (Behrendt, 2008), considering “Transcendental Spaces” (Short Videos), “One plus Ones of Transcendence” (Visual Essay), and “Transcending Tide of Lies” (Visual Essay) as the key texts.

1. *What does the text reveal about itself as a text?*

Three short videos in the series “Transcendental Spaces” investigate Transcendental philosophy and its integration with physical spaces. One video seeks the reason why distancing from Transcendental philosophy has occurred, the second inquires into society’s distortions in understanding the essence of the Philosophy, and the last one reveals a contemporary effort to reinstitute the core philosophy.

“One Plus Ones of Transcendence” is an edited version of the interviews with the subject experts who serve in academia and are also film professionals in India, along with the visuals from the Transcendental films. This visual essay analyses the visual documentations and demonstrates the lack of conscious efforts to embed Transcendental philosophy in Indian filmmaking practices; also it cast light upon filmmakers from other cultures who have made significant contributions to Transcendental cinema.

“Transcending Tide of Lies” is a key component of the research, which analyses all the major outcomes of visual and textual investigations and their implications for framing cinematic practice.

2. *What does the text tell us about its apparent intended audience(s)?*

I selected Audio-Visuals as medium of text. ‘Transcendental Spaces’ tells about the distortions that have befallen “Transcendental Philosophy” in the Indian Psyche and contemporary attempts to reinitiate it. ‘One plus Ones of Transcendence’ tells about the lack of conscious effort by Indian Filmmakers to engage with Transcendental

Philosophy. “Transcending Tide of Lies” tells how filmmaking is used as a tool to identify the ‘key points’ of Indian Transcendental Philosophy and how narrative feature films have been used as a tool to solve the problems addressed by the research.

3. *What seems to have been the author’s intention? Why did the author write this text?*

All these visual essays are intended to address the original research questions, using filmmaking as a tool to investigate, analyse and resolve the ‘Problems’ that led to the research.

4. *What is the occasion for this text? That is, what is it written in response to?*

The environments that led to the creation of all the videos are the need to develop a narrative form that could engage Indian filmmaking practices with Indian Transcendental Philosophy.

5. *Is the text intended as some sort of call to – or for – action?*

“Transcendental Spaces” and “One plus Ones of Transcendence” identify the issue of need for a cinematic narrative structure to engage with “Indian Transcendental Philosophy”; “Tide of Lies”, my future film, is a practical solution to the issues; and “Transcending Tide of Lies “ explains how the actions have been taken.

6. *Is the text intended rather as some sort of call to – or for – reflection or consideration rather than direct action?*

No, that is not the case.

7. *Can we identify any non-textual circumstances that affected the creation and reception of the text?*

Several historical, economic and sociological events influenced the development of a gap between “Indian Society” and “Indian Transcendental Philosophy”. These events have been investigated and identified during various stages of the research.

“Filmmaking research” is a form of practice research that enquires into production practices, techniques, modes and genres used in cinema, television and online. The outputs are films that may include fiction, documentary and hybrid forms. Filmmaking research pushes at the boundaries of traditional filmmaking and traditional research methods by adopting distinct approaches to professional and critical practices. This is in contrast to typical industry research where commercial pressures dominate. There have been spectacular success

stories that demonstrate this potential such as the Academy award nominated

'Act of Killing' (Callaghan, 2018)

I have used filmmaking as a tool both to analyse the problem and context and to resolve the issues discussed in the research. Being a filmmaker and cinematographer myself, and as the problem addressed lies within the spectrum of Indian filmmaking practices, a practice-based approach is essential for resolving the issue rather than making a contribution to knowledge and waiting for a call to action. "Tide of Lies", a narrative feature film, is developed as a practical outcome of this research. Using the combination of different research methods discussed earlier, three key elements have been identified as the core of Indian Transcendental philosophy, and these elements have been layered in fictional form. A screenplay was developed and then an Independent film production started, which resulted in a feature length narrative fiction.

The objective of the research is to develop a cinematic narrative, an alternative to the classic narrative, by engaging Indian Transcendental Philosophy with Indian cinematic practices. The essential aim is to understand the impact and involvement of Transcendental philosophy in various Indian art and practices. That is why it is essential to incorporate a multi-mode research methodology.

I had to customise my research methodology according to my own ethnographic and theoretical grounding to avoid restrictions and obstructions.

Primary Research

Most traditional Indian arts are imbibed as a process of establishing a connection with 'The Supreme'. Although the various Indian philosophies have different notions about 'The Supreme', I would accept the idea of 'pure consciousness' (Suddhabodha). Most classical and ritualistic Indian arts are intended to realize the trance experience of this 'pure consciousness', which they may name differently, for example 'Brahman', 'Paramporul', etc. Each of the art forms has its unique aesthetic way of manifesting this idea. The spatio-temporal details of most of the arts deal with such theoretical concepts as 'Rasa' (essence) and 'Bhava' (emotion), as described by Baratha Muni in 'Natyashastra', which is the Bible of all Indian arts. He describes the following as the elements of *Mise-en-scène* (Muni, 1959):

- a. Expression
- b. Costume
- c. Decor

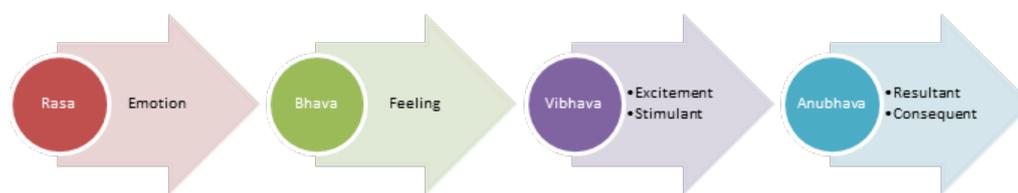
They consider the performing and ritualistic art forms as methods for opening the way to self-knowledge. The ideas were more elaborated and theorized in the various literary schools during the medieval period:

- a. Dhawni
- b. Alamkara
- c. Kavya
- d. Rithi

Abinavaguptha, who formulated the 'Dhawni sidhantha', articulated the most effective way of bringing out the Transcendental qualities of 'Rasa'. Bhattanayaka developed a theory of analogy between Rasa Vada (tasting the essence of aesthetic expression) and Bramasavada (tasting the ultimate reality).

Although Hinduism is treated as just a religion nowadays, it is an umbrella philosophy comprising many contradictory philosophies and ideologies. Saivism (followers of lord Shiva), Vaishnavism (followers of lord Vishnu) and Shakthiyism (followers of the goddess Shakti) are three significant ideologies (Shemin B Nair, 2015). As various empires represented each of these, they were in continual conflict to establish dominance, which resulted in developing art forms and gigantic monuments such as temples with magnificent architecture to express the power of the empire and the gods in which they believed (Shemin B Nair, 2015).

All these architectural extravagances serve more than an aesthetic purpose. They are also manifestations that transcend the philosophical ideas they belong to.



- Kashmiri Saivism has made significant contributions to the aesthetic theories of classical Indian theatre. Those divine plays leading to spiritual rasa can be enjoyed only by an active spectator with spiritual sensibility. Natya (Drama) is regarded as a Veda as it provides visual and auditory delight (and a blissful state of being). Natyashastra explains the flow of articulation of the emotions to the aesthetic experience as follows (Muni, 1959).

To address the original research problem regarding Indian Transcendentalism and to develop an alternative to the popular cinematic narrative it is essential to apprehend it in a wider cultural frame. “Emerson felt that the times were growing reflective and intellectual. Transcendentalism represented one of the recurrent periods in which the party of the past and the party of the future collide.” (Golagond, n.d.). In this research I have made a deliberate attempt to understand and synthesize Indian Transcendentalism in a wider cultural context, by investigating on the concepts of various regions, spaces and time frames. This is apprehended by investigating the manifestations of Transcendental Philosophy in both the folk and the contemporary world.

“Transcendental philosophy does not want to give any explanations of things or facts. It only seeks to account for the possibility of meaning. The Transcendental self or subject is nothing but pure consciousness. Transcendental self or subject is the condition of the possibility of objective world and science. The term ‘Transcendental’ may be taken provisionally to mean what we are certain about

as not objective. By object' is meant a content that is other than the consciousness of it. So the Transcendental then would be a content that is not distinct from the consciousness of it." (Biswas, 2016)

"In this drama of human life, one keeps on wandering without any goal. The desire of physical things never dies and can never be fulfilled. Further Sri Aurobindo explains other hurdles in the path of evolution. There are thrills of the flesh, but not the soul's desire. (Savitri, p.77) An unconscious mind pleases with physical appearance and is indulge in seeking pleasures for this mortal body. He never thinks of the liberty of soul and desires of the soul. These pleasures can never satisfy the inner self of a person and he keeps on exploring for more such mundane pleasures. An ignorant man easily becomes prey to Maya Emerson writes for self-reliance' and to rely on the Over-Soul. He writes for the ethical and moral uplift of his generation. For him, ignorance is to run behind the glittering of materialistic desires. He writes in his essay the Self Reliance" (Dixit, 2018).

Some perceptions like discrete distancing from material life and certain sociological interactions of institutional Brahmanism have resulted in erosion of Transcendental Philosophies from the lifestyle practices of Indian society. Cinema being an art form that India started to explore much later than this erosion began, it could seem natural that Indian filmmakers tend not to explore the research problem we are addressing.

The commercial pressures of the film industry, and limited access to resources for independent filmmaking in India, limited films to certain themes and narratives that are popularly repeated. Digitisation has democratised independent filmmaking practices and that has had a significant role in providing a financially friendly ambience for using filmmaking as a tool at various stages of this research. I used my own DSLR camera and a zoom lens and a laptop to edit the videos as I was travelling to film the vlogs and interviews. Using a Blackmagic 4K camera provided by the university, and hiring few facilities and equipments from outside, I was able to make a feature film. It could have been an extremely difficult and more expensive task if it had been attempted before the revolution of digital filmmaking.

Most classical Indian art forms work on this concept of 'Rasa' as the core element and the manifestations define a schema for *mise-en-scène* for all arts. There are nine main rasas called 'Nava rasa' as per Natyashastra:

1. **Śṛṅgāram** Love, Attractiveness. Presiding deity: Vishnu. Colour: green.
2. **Hāsyam** Laughter, Mirth, Comedy. Presiding deity: Ganesh. Colour: white.
3. **Raudram** Fury. Presiding deity: Rudra. Colour: red.
4. **Kāruṇyam** Compassion, Tragedy. Presiding deity: Yama. Colour: dove-coloured.
5. **Bībhatsam** Disgust, Aversion. Presiding deity: Shiva. Colour: blue.
6. **Bhayānakam** Horror, Terror. Presiding deity: Kala. Colour: black.
7. **Vīram** Heroic mood. Presiding deity: Indra. Colour: whitish brown.
8. **Adbhutam** Wonder, Amazement. Presiding deity: Brahma. Colour: yellow.
9. **Śāntam** Peace or tranquillity. Deity: Vishnu. Colour: white.

There are 'Bhavas' (Moods) corresponding to eight of the rasas:

1. Rati (Love)
2. Hāsya (Mirth)
3. Soka (Sorrow)
4. Krodha (Anger)
5. Utsaha (Energy)
6. Bhaya (Terror)
7. Jugupsa (Disgust)
8. Vismaya (Astonishment)

Alamkara of Bhamaha and Smilacrum of Epstein

Indian art and literature have a tradition of aesthetic theories and approaches dating back centuries. There have been many texts by both the North Indian and the South Indian Philosophers. Whether it be “Thilkappiyam” from the ‘Sangam Literature’ or ‘Kāvyaḷamkāra’ (The ornaments of poetry) or ‘Dhvanyāloka’ (A Light on Suggestion) from the ‘Kashmiri Pundits’, all have served as a foundation to the aesthetic principles of Indian arts and literature. Alamkara’ is a literary concept that has influenced to most of the Indian aesthetic principles discussed in this chapter.

The etymological meaning of the term 'Alamkara' is decoration or ornament. It is derived from the word 'Alam' (GK. Aurum = gold), which in Sanskrit means Adornment. That means the term Alamkara is that one which creates beauty. It (Alamkara) can be embellished by the 'Kavyasarira' as the ornaments like 'Katakakundala' etc. adhering to the beauty of the human body. Alamkara thus connotes the shaping of adornments or ornaments or decorations.’ (Das, 2013)

Since the earliest days of Sanskrit poetry, the concept of beauty has been closely connected with the idea of ornaments as a means to poetic beauty, and the concept of beauty of word and sense have influenced the minds of the leading ancient theorists. These figures of speech in literature have also influenced the development of a grammatic schema of various performing arts. As we have seen in the ‘Rasa’ theory, the colours become the articulation of expression.

"Two birds of same feather live on the same tree. One of them tastes the fruit of Pippala while the other shines ever, without eating that fruit."

"It is certainly not a story of two birds remaining on the same tree, one enjoying the fruit thereof and the other without tasting it. The Alamkara employed here is very clearly the variety of Atisayukti, i.e. the Rupak:atisayukti. It is meant to refer to the 'Individual soul' in the world whereas the latter is a mere witness. (Jivatma)

and the 'Supreme soul' (Paramatma) the former experiencing the pain and pleasure" (Das, 2013)

"Tide of Lies" uses a similar method of adopting fictional elements from the material world but layering them through an emotional graph and a narrative pattern that signifies the philosophical essence of the key points of Indian Transcendental philosophy; this is explained in the later chapters.

"Experimentation thus substitutes to narrative conventionality the power of scientific reasoning, which it transposes into the aesthetic domain and subordinates cinematography to three vocations: claiming the figurative acuity of analysis; accessing a re-cutting of phenomena by means of figurative synthesis; acknowledging its own genius thanks to the choice of a fertile yet well-defined field of research – that of movement" (Sarah Keller, 2012)

Epstein's concept of 'simulacrum' could be read as a cinematic method similar to 'alamkara' in literature.

"I will term photogenic any aspect of things, beings and souls that enhances its moral quality through cinematographic reproduction." (Epstein, 1926)

Photogénie is thus the filmic as such, yet not devalued as a copy or simulacrum less essential than its model, but on the contrary as the enhancement of the model's "moral quality." (Sarah Keller, 2012)

In "Tide of Lies" I have implemented this technique to portray the research findings, mainly by using the revelations of her moral quality. A fictional landscape is layered to embed the identified elements of Indian Transcendentalism and is rendered through both the form and content of the film. Both the characters and the locations serve as elements of *Mise-en-scène* to implement Transcendence.

"What is cinema? What can it do? And why does it matter? For Epstein, cinema is revolutionary. It provides an artistic mode for making sense of and, equally, for transforming the world it observes. Cinema triggers a revolt against the dullness of the senses and the habits of the mind; it recognizes and generates

ecstatic attention; and it allows a representation of the world that is true to the nature of that world.” (Sarah Keller, 2012)

The narrative has been developed with this perception of triggering the mind of the viewer. Although the whole sense of dramaturgy and cinematic tensions are internalised in the lead characters, there are moments that could generate a feeling of empathy.

“Several enduring concerns for Epstein inform both kinds of projects: for instance, both of these films embrace the contradiction of an interest in narrative conventions coupled with visual experimentation through editing. (Sarah Keller, 2012) Cinematic techniques such as the close-up, rapid editing, slow motion, and slow-moving staging, among others, aim to make perceptible the inner sensory state of the actor.” (Sarah Keller, 2012)

“Cinema’s inherent dynamism, its ability to join together pictures of different places, needed to be reined in so that spectators could negotiate the gaps between shots and create at least the illusion of continuity so that “time-space relationships...play the role of a basic semantic link, outside of which the viewer cannot orient himself...” Only when the film’s narrative and montage complied to motivate such transitions between segments could internal speech “give the viewer of a film the impression of completeness and logic.” (Sarah Keller, 2012)

The rhythm and the progression and regression of the pace in editing have also been integral tools for integrating the Transcendence. Several Indian traditional art forms have a discrete rhythmic pattern. This is analyzed by filming performances of traditional folk-art forms, “Theyyam” and “Baul”. I have also investigated the influence of Transcendental philosophy in the art forms of contemporary researchers and artists. Dr Sarada Sreenivasan has innovated a performance of combining video conferencing and participatory intercontinental performance, a fusion of ‘Bharathanatyam’ and ‘Ballet’. Madhu Samudra and Sajeev Samudra have derived an art form, ‘Samudrandanam’, which is a contemporary physical dance theater form. All of these have seen a process of analyzing the rhythmic patterns in both the traditional and contemporary manifestations. This understanding of the rhythm is interpreted in cinematic pace, both in terms of the emotional curve and the pace of editing. More information about the identification of the rhythm and how it is interpreted in “Tide of Lies” is presented in “Transcending Tide of Lies”.

These notions are not only found in the performing arts but are also widespread among lifestyle practices, fine arts and performing arts; which are thus elevated to a language of spiritual enlightenment.

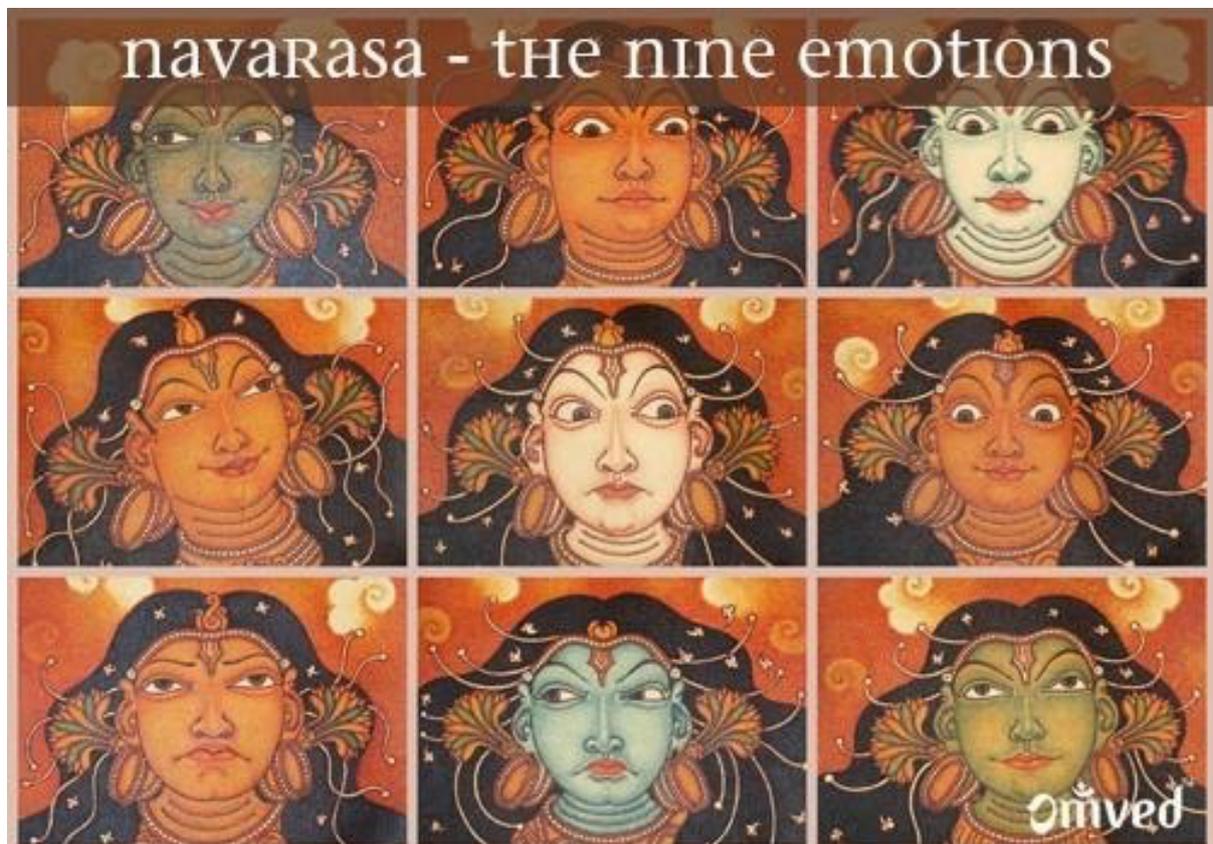


Figure 2.1 Navarasa and colours

There are interactions and influences among all religions and the aesthetic systems of various societies and cultures. The experience of art is explained by scholars as

1. Art-making as a ritual (encapsulates a cosmic creative process)
2. Appreciation of art as an expression of ecstasy (art lifts one out of the particularity of his own time and space).

As per Abhinavaguptha, the religious and the aesthetic experiences are closely linked:

1. Camatkara – inexpressible state of consciousness
2. Visranthi – repose of the limited ego.

The works of 'Meerabai' clearly express the transcending of consciousness and experiencing the state of bliss and love for The Supreme, which she encounters in the form of Lord Krishna.

Hinduism conceives the ultimate reality as a cosmic drama unfolding the illusory elements of emotions. Drama, rather than an art form, is considered as a 'yagna' (offering to the god),

where the playing of character becomes a process of a 'physico-spiritual Transcendence'. Acting is considered as a way of salvation as per the words of Haberman (Shah, n.d.) Roopa Goswami says as per the theories of the 'Upanishads' that God is perceived in the following forms:

1. Truth
2. Consciousness
3. Bliss

The physico-spiritual Transcendence makes the actor experience these dimensions of consciousness and the states of being as the characters, more as a process of embodiment. Even Stanislavski explains acting as the transformation of identity into a new being.

"This aesthetic experience pre-figures and prepares one for ultimate realization, primarily though the Transcendence of limited vision and hindering preoccupation of limited ego." (Muni, 1959). I consider film an ideal art form to serve this purpose as it encapsulates the nature of limiting vision in the concept of frames.

Key Literature Review - Research Methodology and Framing the Narrative Structure

A detailed Contextual and Literature review is elaborated as two separate chapters; one in connection to Indian Transcendental art form and the other on Transcendentalism in cinema (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). This is a brief summary of the key texts taken into account mainly in framing the research methodology and the key literature that has been referenced as an empirical approach to developing an alternate narrative to the classical one.

The review of the literature concentrates more on the available textual literature in Transcendental cinema, film language and film theory. This influenced the shaping of the relevant methods of practice and the theoretical framework. It was essential to review "Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer" by Paul Schrader, one of the key texts available on Transcendental cinema. A detailed investigation of the films of Ozu, Dryer and Bresson is presented in Chapter 5. Paul Schader evokes the insight of expression of spiritual emotions and spiritual universality in the vigorous style of Transcendental movies. He also explains the factors that give this style universality. Transcendental style uses precise temporal means; camera angles, dialogue, editing for predetermined Transcendental ends. The book not only explores the cinematic context, but also the cultural and sociological premises of the filmmaker. It tries to explore how the spiritual premises of Japan have influenced Ozu in his filmmaking style and in his striving for traditional values in contrast to the westernized influence on the Japanese youth of his days. "The whole world exists in one family" is a schema referred to in most of the Ozu's films, which also means the internalisation of social realism. It also explores the gradations or the growth of Ozu as a filmmaker and reveals his realisation on the essentiality of structuralism in cinema.

"In Ozu's mind Japanese life had resolved into certain opposing forces which he repeatedly demonstrated in his films, and although these forces must be

reconciled, they would not be reconciled by anything as artificial as plot. The incidents of estrangement are in themselves remarkably petty: marriage, relocation, bickerings, and at most running away from home.” (Schrader, 1972)

These concepts influenced me in shaping up the narrative and content for “Tide of Lies”; the internalisation of the opposing forces and incidents of estrangement within marriage, for example.

Bresson’s approach towards Transcendence is to address inner spiritual problems and is mostly portrayed as a retelling of the philosophy and message of Christ’s Life. Scharader explores the stylistic dualism of Bresson and also offers a comparative analysis of his frames with Byzantine mosaics and paintings. This influenced me in developing a visual schema for interpreting traditional Indian visual motifs to integrate into cinematic form.

The limitation of this literature is that it concentrates on only three filmmakers. I have chosen three Asian filmmakers; two of them are more contemporary and were active after the book was published. This text influenced me in understanding the psychological techniques used by each of these filmmakers in operating the Transcendent.

“Creation and I, me and my work” by Prof. Erik Knudsen is personal account of relationships between film, filmmaker and teaching. He identifies key ingredients in artistic expression that are centred around its ‘irrationality’, an attempt to express ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’.

“ When I distinguish between feelings and emotions, I do so in the physiological sense: feelings, as belonging to our participatory emotions (such as rapture, longing, grief, awe, love and so on), usually associated with our parasympathetic nervous system; and our self-assertive emotions (fear, anger, lust, excitement, jealousy and so on) usually associated with our sympathetic nervous system”. (Knudsen, 2003)

The author clearly sketches the relevance of emotion and irrationality, in contrast to evidence and proof as the basis of the conventional education system, in written form. He treats the reflection as a retrospective process of creation and the academic as a living part of the whole creative process; which means that practical problems need practical solutions. This is exactly how I have addressed the issues dealt with in the context of my research.

Practical addressing signifies the need to seek the experience rather than its meaning. He treats meaning as something static, finite and final, whereas experience as not something that happens to someone, but what someone feels about it.

The article also mentions the need for humility to see the essence, and how someone could fail to see it.

“If conscious reflection serves to help develop an awareness of unconscious processes, then when I reflect on the processes and outcomes of my filmmaking I start to see patterns: patterns of concern, patterns of interest, patterns of expression and so on. These patterns include what can only be described as fortuitous events and influences on my work which only become apparent when looking back. With an increased awareness of these patterns, I think it is possible for the filmmaker to make incredible strides in their art by being simultaneously conscious and unconscious of their practice, without one negating or conflicting with the other” (Knudsen, 2003)

This article shaped my approach in looking at my context and developing a perspective on Transcendental filmmaking methods to address my research problems.

“Sculpting in Time” by Andrei Tarkovsky chronicles art and cinema, his own cinema in particular. We could find he uses his cinema as a tool to address existential questions and his concerns about filmmaking practices.

“The whole question of avant-garde is peculiar to the twentieth century, to the time when art has steadily been losing its spirituality. The situation is worst in the visual arts, which today are almost totally devoid of spirituality. The accepted view is that this situation reflects the despiritualised state of society. And of course, on the level of simple observation of the tragedy, I agree: that is what it does reflect. But art must transcend as well as observe; its role is to bring spiritual vision to bear on reality” (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986)

He addresses a similar issue of losing spirituality in films and also identifies the despiritualised state of the society, which is similar to my findings about Transcendental practices in Indian society.

“When we talk of the language of cinema as modern or not modern, we tend to gloss over the essential issues and see only a collection of current techniques, as often as not borrowed from the neighbour arts.” (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986)

He also points out the need to borrow techniques from the neighbour, art, which was exactly the method I used in developing a Transcendental narrative structure for cinematic storytelling. We have analysed the visual elements, spatial temporal concepts and colour schemes used in traditional art forms including ‘Theyyam’, interpreted them in a cinematic concept of time and space, and integrated this into the *Mise-en-scène* of “Tide of Lies”. This is discussed explicitly in the visual essay “Transcending Tide of Lies”.

Tarkovsky also discusses the need to connect to the audience at the highest intellectual, emotional, psychological and philosophical level. The text also explores his films, how they relate to him at an intrapersonal level and how he connects back to the characters and moments. He adds a note about his personal definition of time and rhythm of cinema. He explains that the film image itself is rhythm and the course of time is expressed within the frame.

In the journal article “The eyes of the beholder: does responsibility for the lack of quality screenplays really lie at the door of inadequately trained screenwriters?”, Prof Erik Knudsen identifies, “given the extent that religion and spirituality plays in the lives of many communities and individuals, we see little work that reflects this” (Knudsen, 2004). He also illustrates the need for filmmaking as an alternative to the mainstream and gives examples of new independent production and distribution methods in Ghana.

“Diversity must ultimately mean diversity of values, perspectives, priorities and attitudes. The paradox is that it is through such diversity that common ground is found between people and peoples and the creative person generating cultural work is an important part of the ongoing definition of our ever-changing cultures. Such individuals, and groups of individuals, must be encouraged to find a voice for their distinctive and diverse perspectives” (Knudsen, 2004)

He also discusses the decentralization of power in decision making in filmmaking practices. Though the article contributes much to the healthy environment of British filmmaking and screen writing, I can identify issues in common with the Indian filmmaking scene and could anticipate some common solutions. “Diversity is the crucial element of any film industry”, says the author. I suggest the Indian film industry is reluctant to explore the diversity and the evidence is discussed in forthcoming chapters.

The journal Article “Heart of Gold: Fact and mysticism in documentary form A research report” by Prof Erik Knudsen summarises a research project that he has done and made an alternative mode of documentary as a research outcome. This explores how traditional storytelling methods could be used to shape alternative methods to cinematic documentary form. This research project questions the limitation of the classic narrative paradigms and affirms the essentiality of practice in research in developing alternative forms especially bridging facts and mysticism.

“How far can visual imagery, colours, shapes, objects, camera angles and sound be used to bring to life the essence of predominantly oral African story-telling traditions to reveal non-materialistic perspectives on life and living?” (Knudsen, 2007)

This is also an issue addressed in the research project and has effectively brought a solution through practice. This methodology has essentially influenced me in shaping an empirical approach in assimilating the core ideas of Indian Transcendental Philosophy into filmmaking practices.

“While most of the world rushes headlong into embracing a largely materialistic engagement and perspective on life, some parts of the world still have remnants of cultures in which the spiritual, the mental and the physical occupy equal status in epistemology. Though, increasingly, Africa, too, is part of these developments, the difficult postcolonial era sees it struggling to fully achieve western ideologies and values.” (Knudsen, 2007)

I can also identify some issues in common with those I address through my research in respect of Indian society, and the reasons including the post-colonial influences. We can also identify the autoethnographic approach in this research, the researcher himself having been born in Ghana, and his experiences with the past and the present.

The researcher uses a background study primarily on a textual level on gold and African storytelling and has done video interviews with the stories from the Chiefs in the region 'Akim Abuakwa'. It is these stories that shaped the entire research project including the documentary.

I have used a similar methodology to investigate my research problems primarily by textual study of the culture and traditional folklore performance "Theyyam". Then he made video interviews with the practitioners and performers and identified the key elements of the philosophy. He also describes the entire work flow of the process of development of the research, which is clearly an indicator for me to develop my own methods. The differences I find in the problems addressed are primarily Erik had to work on the oral storytelling traditions in Ghana, whereas I had to work on the performance arts. The key issues seem to be different in the two cultures, but at the same time they share common elements.

Conclusion

Transcendental Indian art forms are based on various philosophical doctrines, commonly dubbed "Hindu Philosophy". This chapter has addressed the philosophical and aesthetic notions that comprehend Transcendence in various Indian art forms. It has explored "Indian Transcendentalism" in the light of the scriptures and has identified the key concepts that constitute a recurring theme along the various perspectives of the philosophy. This chapter also illustrates the multi-mode research methodologies used in this research, and the literature review and key texts that influenced me in shaping the methodologies and narrative structure.

Chapter 3. Contextual and Literature Review Part 1: INDIAN TRANSCENDENTAL ART FORMS

Introduction

Transcendental philosophy has influenced traditional art forms in India and has also been the most significant element in them. This chapter gives a detailed study of particular art forms that work with transcendental philosophy. It also includes descriptions of interviews with subject experts and links to them. The strong presence of transcendental philosophy in early Indian life is described, the reasons for the break-away, and contemporary attempts to reinitiate it.

All cultural activities and performances are continuations of a long history (Varma, 2015). To understand the essential meaning of transcendental identity amalgamated with the very origin of culture, I chose to make an in-depth study of 'Theyyam', a ritual folk-art form strongly interconnected with sociological premises. This enabled me to understand how transcendence is manifested as a practice and indeed how the concept is intertwined with social structure and works for the sake of humanity.

Theyyam

The sociological premises of India entail a terrible imbalance in terms of castes. The upper caste was greatly dominant over the lower castes and there were inhuman practices such as untouchability. Art forms such as 'Theyyam' constituted a ballad of resistance.

Theyyam (Theyyattam, Thira) is a ritual art performance found especially in the Northern Malabar belt of Kerala. It is a form of worship where man dons the guise of God and propitiates the gods through possessed dancing. Etymologically, it relates to 'Deyvam', meaning 'God'. There are different forms of Theyyam; they represent different characters or incarnations of gods and narrate different episodes from myths.

This art form became a very significant ingredient of my research. It unifies the elements of narration of a story harmoniously with the characters performing, not just as a piece of acting but as an embodiment of possession. The performer transcends himself to become the character, to be God. Each character has its unique schema and system of makeup. Each can be recognized by the variations of Theyyam. There are about 450 kinds of Theyyam, though not all of them are in vogue today.



Figure 3.1 Make up of Theyyam Artist

As per Hinduism, there are different incarnations of God, primarily the 'Thrimurthi', Bhrama, Vishnu and Shiva, and they are the manifestations that perform 'Srishti', 'Stitihi' and 'Samhara' (creation, preservation and destruction). Each different Theyyam belongs primarily to one or other of the traditional cults of Hinduism: Vaishnavism, Shakthism, or Shaivism. I wish to concentrate on aspects of the Shaivism tradition of Theyyam because it is closely related to many further aspects of my research.

This art form also has sociological and culturo-political significance. Theyyams are usually performed by backward communities such as Vannan, Malayan, etc. It is ironic in a society where untouchability was in practice. The higher community treated lower caste members as God and worshipped when they performed: a perfect example of the power of art to triumph over social evil.

Theyyam performers belong to one of the Hindu communities: Malayan, Vannan, Velan (Thuzhuvelan), Koppalan, Mavilan, Chingatthan, Panan, Parayan, Pampatharavan, Anhuttan, Munnuttan, etc. (Panikar, 2016).

"Each individual caste has the right to perform certain deities and all performers must possess a wide range of extraordinary skills" (Peruvannan, 2015).

"They must know the ritual and character of every deity. They have the inherited right to perform, know-how to sing, dance with the drum, do the complicated make-up and dress their costumes. Theyyam artistes are male. It is not a profession or calling that can be adopted. The artistes share a common training and tradition in which the process of becoming the deity is achieved after intense mental, physical and spiritual preparation". All Theyyam artistes must be able to do much more than just perform. Every deity's physical appearance conforms to an image envisaged centuries ago in the dream or vision of a respected guru. An artist must know how to make the headdresses and costumes of all the deities, how to apply the face and body makeup in all the different styles and designs, how

to sing, play the drums, and know the stories, songs, and character of each deity” (Peruvannan, 2015).

Theyyams are performed with a vision of prosperity and wellbeing for society and the removal of all hazards. The stage area of the Theyyams might depend on the type being performed:

1. Kaavu
2. Kazhakam
3. Muchilottu
4. Mundiya
5. Sthhaanam
6. Kottam

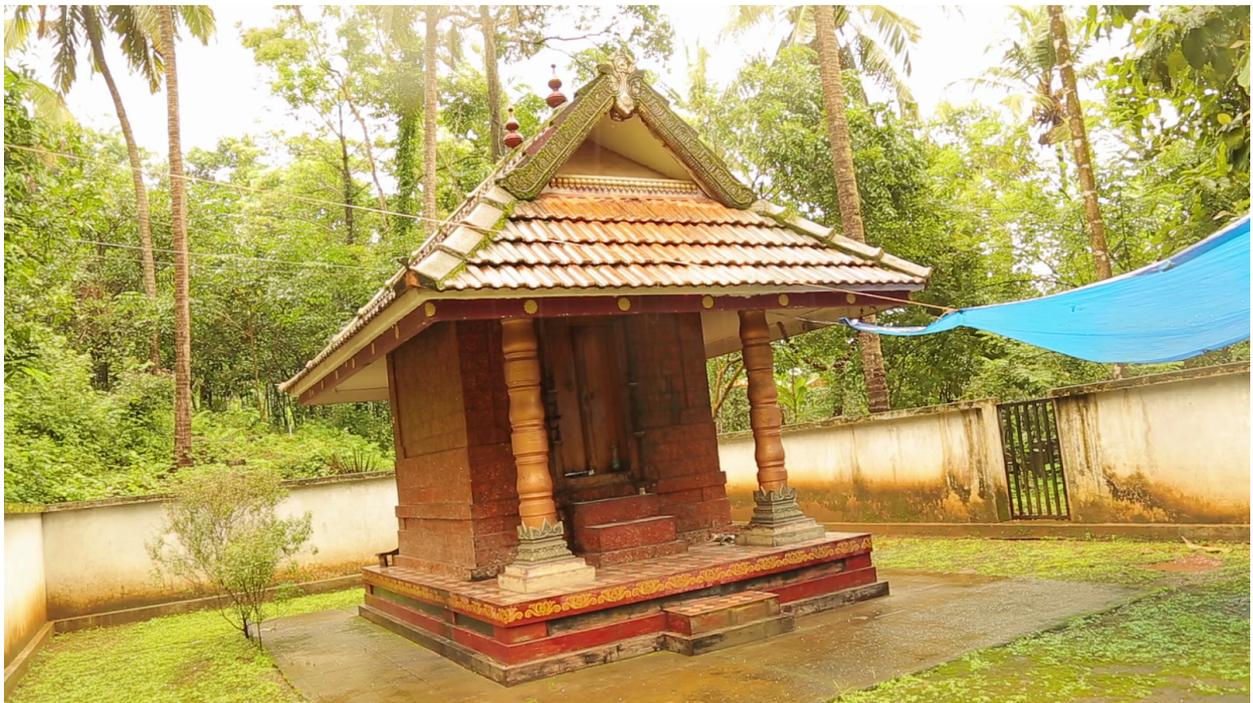


Figure 3.2 Sanctum Sanctorum of Pottan Theyyam



Figure 3.3 Sanctum Santorum of Karimchamundi

The makeup and décor is unique to each character and is very elaborate and complicated. The preparation or the process of doing makeup is called 'Theyyamkettal', and only organic materials may be used for the costumes and the makeup.



Figure 3.4 Makeup of Muthappan Theyyam

The costumes of Theyyam are made by cutting coconut sheaths and painting them in black, white and red patterns. Fresh coconut fronds form skirts, breasts are fashioned from dry coconut shells and a red cloth is tied around the waist. The facial decorations are intricately

designed with enriched symbolism. Theyyam is performed in the courtyard of a house or village temple, and the spirit of the deity is evoked during the night as the artist prepares. The hood, headdress, face painting, breastplate, bracelets, garlands and fabric of attire of each Theyyam are distinct and meticulously crafted.



Figure 3.5 Ornaments and Costumes of Theyyam

“The performance of Theyyam is a perfect blend of pre-choreographed movements and improvisation. The movements and choreography depict the ‘Bhava’ (dominant emotion) of each character. The colours, the scheme of makeup, the décor, the rhythms, everything works together to complement the permanent emotion of the character” (Panikar, 2015).



Figure 3.6 Performance of Muthappan Theyyam

Pottan Theyyam

Although there are hundreds of Theyyams and many more myths revolving around them, I confined my attention to a detailed understanding of Pottan Theyyam.

The Myth

Sankaracharya was on his way to be enthroned 'Sarvanjapeeda' (throne of supreme knowledge) while untouchability was a prevailing practice. When he was walking along a path through a paddy field, a Chandala (untouchable) family appeared. Sankara asked them to clear the way. That started a debate.

The Chandala argued about the equality in God's creation. He said, if we both bleed, it is of the same colour. Don't you present the fruits grown in our mud as offerings to your God? Don't you use the lotus from the mud to perform religious rites? (Panikar, 2016). At the end of the debate, Sankara realized it was Lord Shiva who had appeared to him as the Chandala along with Nandikeshava (Shiva's Bull) and the goddess Parvathi.

Performance

All these characters are represented by a single performer wearing different masks. Lord Shiva, Nandikeshava and Parvathi are presented in Pottan Theyyam as Pula Pottan, Pula Maruthan, and Pula Chamundi.



Figure 3.7 Masks of Pottan Theyyam Characters

The presence of Sankaracharya is not staged in any performance, but there are many dramatic and emotional moments that literally elevate the audience to greater emotional heights where they equate themselves as one and realize the issues that the performance addresses.

I have also documented places where the events in the myth are believed to have happened. These are spatio-temporal manifestations, or in a sense spatial installation, of the philosophies represented by this art form.

It is believed that Lord Shiva took this form of Pula Pottan inside a dark tunnel and then walked out on to the slippery path of a paddy field where the debate took place. This connects to other myths in which events occur in hilly landscapes with elevated and open perspectives. This could be metaphorically read as a journey from the darkness and narrowness of ignorance and arrogance through the slippery confused stages of self-enquiry or 'Sadhana', the hilly open terrains signifying the bliss and outcome of wisdom. Many other elements of nature often provide meaningful metaphors as parts of the narrative. Geysers and waterfalls are metaphors, often representing the emotional elements of situations.



Figure 3.8 Tunnel - Inception of Pula Pottan



Figure 3.9 Paddy Field - Pottan Theyyam



Figure 3.10 Hills- Karimchamundi Myth

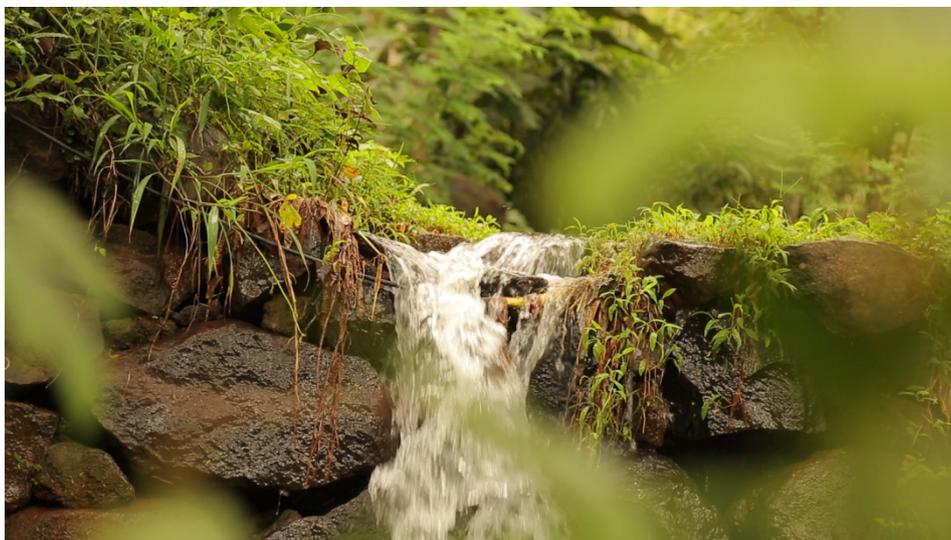


Figure 3.11 Waterfall - Karimchamundi Myth

I could see that the Indian notion of transcendence has an aesthetic unity with nature, the latter often becoming the signifier of the narrative and its representative. This performance is not just a religious ritual art but uses the capabilities of a transcendental art form to manifest social injustice and present itself as a deep protest, even involving the people for whom the protest is made.

“There are many metaphorical representations of the philosophy, apart from external physical characteristics. This distils the most significant notion of Indian philosophy, the concept of ‘Tatwamasi’. “The Indian context of God is not knowing ‘God’, but being ‘God’, which means raising ourselves to a level of godliness” (Eashwar, 2016).

“Tatwamasi” (concept of oneness) is identified as one of the key element of Indian Transcendental Philosophy and it has contributed in shaping up the practical outcome.

Transcendence and other Indian Arts

Many other Indian art forms in addition to Theyyam engage with transcendental ideologies and use them as integral elements of their narratives. In Bharatanatyam, the classical dance form of the south, the literature and all other elements such as the 'mudras' (hand signs), the movements, the choreography, etc. attribute much to oneness with The Supreme, so the performance is a spiritual act that takes one close to the essence of existence.

The image of Nataraja (Lord Shiva as the cosmic dancer) signifies much about the universe. It acts as a vibrant aesthetic representation of the cosmos. "There are layers of meaning that connect the inner self and the outer self" (Sreenivasan, 2016). Lord Shiva dancing over 'Muyalagan' (ignorance) involves the movement of the wavy locks relating to the movements of the cosmos and the orderliness of the dance ruling over chaos (disorder).



Figure 3.12 Nataraja Sculpture at Chidambaram Temple

Baul is another art form from Western India that is strongly connected to the Bhakti movement, where the performer is transported to a state of divine love.



Figure 3.13 Baul Singer

Even this art form is intended to be a protest against institutional Brahmanism. Its practitioners spread the messages and complex philosophies of the scriptures to the common people while wandering around as the Nomads.

The ektara, a single-string instrument, represents the philosophy of Advaita (non-duality) (Baul, 2016).

Transcendence and Contemporary arts

India still invokes this fragrance from its roots and continues to develop innovations and experimentations in various arts forms.

‘Samudranadanam’ is a contemporary physical dance theatre invented by Madhu and Sajeev, inspired by various traditional arts such as ‘Theyyam’, ‘Padayani’, ‘Mohaniyattam’, ‘Bharatanatyam’, ‘Kathakali’, etc. (Gopinadh & Vekkom, 2016). They have developed a new vocabulary incorporating various elements of folk tradition with emotions associated with nature. They have made new productions on the theme ‘Jalam’ (water) connecting to the concept of ‘Varuna’ (god of water) as revealed in the myth. However, current issues about the misuse and abuse of water are also addressed, and the reactions and various emotions of water are expressed. The love, grace and romance of water and the battle between pure and polluted water are well expressed through their new vocabulary. There is also a warning: ‘We should pay for all our actions against nature when her power strikes back’.

Another production using the same vocabulary is the ‘Life Chakra’, the wheel of life. It also encapsulates the spirit of Dharmic philosophies. Even when it is performed in different parts of the world, the emotional resonance of the audience is very much connected and becomes deeply involved in the content and the performance.

The 'Cosmic Dance of Shiva' reinterprets Shiva as tribal. Shiva is imagined as performing through their own bodies, beginning in the form of 'Shivalinga' to a Sathwik dancer. Then Madhu and Sajeev represent the various moods of Shiva as a romantic dancer, his vigour and his cosmic connections. This physical vocabulary they have developed is not just restricted to dance or theatre but has extended to choreographies for film, for which they have won a national award.

Dr Sarada Sreenivasan, a dancer and a metallurgist, has created a new type of performance: two dancers perform two different forms of dance in two different parts of the world (India and France) but combine them through internet streaming: Bharatanatyam and quantum mechanical performance.

The dialectic nature of combining the orderly with the chaotic again elicits the sort of representation that the figure of Nataraja represents. The aesthetic concepts of India are manifested through such a scheme: construction out of destruction! The deltaic way of bringing 'Santa' (Peace) and 'Roudra' (anger) together expresses the transcendental nature as an experience from the images.

Transcendence and Indian Life

Indian life is all about applied spirituality (Prasad, 2016). All the Indian scriptures were aimed at making a man better. 'It is the divine who is manifesting himself through the cosmos, like a poet expressing himself in poem' (Pandey, 2016). The integral psychological concept of Sri Aurobindo is about enabling man to grow to the divine state, where life is made perfect with spiritual power and spiritual consciousness. Yoga plays a vital role in transforming the self.

We have a state of desire and a state of dispassion, and yoga is the pivotal power that unifies them. The body, mind and soul are integrated to perfect life, which is intended to realize its oneness and to connect with the cosmos.

"Everything emerges from the state of consciousness. Then the consciousness transcends itself and life is intended to full fill the realization of the universality within. This is through exploring the consciousness not from mere cognition but having a practice of 'integral life'. Aurobindo says, after discovering the transcendent, you return and perfect your life" (Pandey, 2016).

Although these scriptures express many complex ideas, the core of their meaning is global unity and a state of consciousness, where man is one with nature and all men is united with each other by realizing that they are connected by pure consciousness, which holds no other emotion than 'Santa' (Peace).

Reasons for the break-away from the spiritual tradition

I have made videos with the aim of understanding how present-day Indian society and psyche engage with these aspects of spirituality and to what extent there is separation from the traditional Indian way of life. Unfortunately, yes, we have a terrible vacuum! This has not only unsettled temporal power, it has also severely undermined the zonal culture and religious soul.

India is a nation that has been subjected to various invasions for thousands of years. Many of these caused irreparable cultural and spiritual damage. The Islamic or Mughal invasion, one of the earlier ones, had a deep impact on traditional Dharmic views, especially in Northern India. The era of Tippu Sultan is regarded as one period of destruction that handicapped the Hindu world-view. Tippu had conquered many little regions ruled by minor monarchs, which not only affected their administrative independence but also caused such damage. The vacuum we see today is the lamentable consequence of a series of invasions of our land by diabolical alien forces and their uncontrolled vandalistic acts.



Figure 3.14 Broken Sculptures at Chidambaram Temple



Figure 3.15 Broken Sculptures at Chidambaram Temple

Many architectural monuments were looted and destroyed during military assaults by Tippu Sultan. My video of the Chidambaram temple reflects the ideas and complex philosophies manifested in artistic architecture, where the elements of architecture become a vocabulary for transcendental ideas. The damage caused by the military assaults can also be seen.

A view has been expressed that Tippu Sultan was an admirer of Hinduism and he even sponsored all the utensils and the expensive chariots for the temple in Seringapatam. However, his people were behind all the destruction (Paul, 2016).

Nevertheless, the sagas of beheading as seen in the videos are not the whole story. Many alien factors have contributed greatly to the transcendental ideologies of India. Because of interactions with people from the Afghan and Arab regions, Indian mysticism accrued the ideas of the Sufi culture (Baul, 2016). The Baul tradition is an aesthetic fusion of traditional Indian mystic elements like the Tantra, folk storytelling and Bhakti Movements with Sufi and Sadhu culture.

Later history witnessed more colonial invasions. This resulted in the spread of Christianity and restructured traditional educational concepts, which was the main channel through which these branches of knowledge spread. This needs further explanation. The Christian missionaries played a significant role in developing and modernizing Indian education. However, in the process they reconditioned the common Indian psyche to a view of 'education as a means to the end of gaining a job'. "This has made a disconnect from the spirituality, where man was more heart oriented, very pure, simple, compassionate, lovable, believe in integrity. But the modern education has made people 'mind oriented'. Mind is very political, more manipulative and cunning" (Prasad, 2016). This manipulative state of mind restricts the exploration and realization of organic transcendental existence, which always resonates within.

Urbanization is yet another reason for this alienation, as in many other cultures (Paul, 2016). The video about the Trichur Pooram not only explores rhythms and transcendence, but also considers how the disconnection suffered by modern people distracts and distances them from understanding the elements of the soul. They only experience and celebrate the

peripheral because of its vibrancy and festive mass appeal (When Men Transcends to Rhythm - Trichur Pooram, 2016).



Figure 3.16 Young boys attending Trichur Pooram

The Mystic Heights (19 Vlogs) **(Please refer to the links as you read along)**

This section contains the semi-structured interviews with subject experts on various folk arts, classical arts, philosophy, performance, etc. In the light of my preliminary understanding of the area I planned to analyze, I documented it visually by having a conversation with Chinnu Nair, a researcher in theatre arts, Kerala University. This conversation explains my plans for data collection and methods for manifesting it.

This series of data collection vlogs on traditional art forms has been collectively uploaded on my 'YouTube' channel, the series overall being named 'The Mystic Heights' [Annex 1].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD8Alq6254s>

The foregoing vlog explains the plans and strategy of data collection. Over time, however, the method evolved differently in practice. In due course it came to attribute greater importance to the question of how the practice of film-making could express the research findings effectively.

The collection of data on the art forms that have inherited a transcendental narrative started with a semi-structured interview with Dr Govinda Raja Varma, HOD of the Department of Folklore, University of Calicut. As I had already decided to confine myself to a detailed understanding of Theyyam, the ritual art form, especially Pottan Theyyam, the interview was mainly focused on that content, understanding the socio-political-cultural aspects of the art form. The higher and lower myths in the same performance were also discussed. It is uploaded in two versions, Vlogs 2-1 and 2-2 (Varma, 2015; Varma, 2016) [Annexes 2 & 3].
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxS4_L4IKI4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEBxOhD6cxc>

The next semi-structured interview was with Vijisha Haridas, a PhD student researching Pottan Theyyam. Vlogs 2-1 and 2-2 discussed in detail the sociology and ritual practices and

the castes involved in performing the art form. The interview with Vijisha Haridas discusses the scientific perspective of the performances and her experience of enjoying them. She also discusses the limitations while visually documenting the performance [Annex 4].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l41XTxIBBQA>

Vlog 3 discusses the scientific aspects of Theyyam. The involvement of transcendence in Indian folklore intercalates with Theyyam and is evident across the spectrum. Transcendental ideas, rituals and performances are not limited to artistic notions alone but also extend to sociology and ecology. The ecological aspect is inseparable from the transcendence of India. Serpent worship, its habitat and environment are encapsulated in devotion and arts. There is evidence that the significance of identifying the oneness of nature and human life is considered an act of benevolence to nature. This idea of serpent worship and both the meaning and meaninglessness of the related rituals are discussed in an interview with Sujitha, a researcher on this topic [Annex 5].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26kd8Pcopy>

The close knitting of these rituals and art forms with social structure, the caste system and hierarchy is clearly evident in these art forms. Only people from the so-called 'untouchable castes' perform Theyyam. Dr Vijisha Haridas had the opportunity to meet performers from different castes performing various Theyyams. The essential outcome of these interviews was a decision to focus my attention, as recommended by the interviewees, on an exponent of the art form who has performed in many countries. The result was definitely an eye-opener for me, enabling me to understand how the caste system is intertwined with aesthetic perspectives on the art form (Panikar, 2016). This paved the way for me to make a deeper contact with many other artists of the same art forms [Annex 6].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEDQdcR1QrE>

In vlog 5, Ramachandra Panikar describes the folk-art Pottan Theyyam. Although Theyyam was originally a folk-art form, I initiated an analysis of its aesthetic perspectives in relation to classical Indian perspectives. Indian aesthetics is based purely on the 'Rasa' concept. The folk texts and folk sciences signify no correlation, but I tried to work out how the characters of Theyyam could be classified under the Rasa System. Rasa, which means emotions, are a schema for classifying the traits of the characters in Indian classical arts. Each character is built and developed in the light of this schema. This also contributes to the narrative structure of these art forms, as explored in a semi-structured interview with Surendra Panikar, a Theyyam performer with good knowledge of the classical arts. This interview also provided an insight into how original is the amalgamation of the behavioural pattern of the character in Theyyam with those of classical art forms [Annex 7].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf41jRn6Q6k>

The data collection process was not linearly organized. My aim was to study Pottan Theyyam in detail with the intention of revealing how the transcendental ideology of India is effectively manifested through fiction, and how the original philosophy is adapted to the local psyche by the way in which plot and characters are organized. At first, my plan was to adapt the plot to cinema by making a short film of the performance. However, I realized that it is the complex philosophical ideas conveyed by the performance rather than just the plot itself that are important, and this could inspire the design of my final feature film.

Therefore, instead of making a short film, I decided to explore more aspects of the characters, the narrative structure and the philosophy expounded thereby. The essence of the philosophy is that the art form seeks to communicate ideals of non-discrimination, state of oneness and communal harmony.

We explored the myth of Pottan Theyyam in Vlog 5. Exploring the various factors that contribute to transcendental narrative in Indian art forms was the objective at this stage of the research. Indian mythology is a complex *mélange* of historical events, fiction and imagination. Real places and their landscapes and the terrain are integrated with those elements and they frame the narrative. How do these ideologies influence people in regions that are the venues of these stories? In order to answer that, I travelled to the places discussed in the myths, starting with the alleged site of inception of the Pottan, where Lord Shiva disguised himself as the downtrodden. Such places are given divine haloes and are structured as places of worship. I realized that they are the practical spatial manifestations of the philosophy behind the myth and the performance. The visits to these places are documented as vlog 5 [Annex 8].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s8xsEB7tD4>

Vlog 5 explores the myth in which Pula Pottan is the protagonist. From the local community, I discovered that the character 'Pula Pottan' is presented in Pottan Theyyam, but is called 'Karaimchamundi' in another Theyyam. Deep examination of the plot reveals that the character's intention is again to restore communal harmony, but over a much wider spectrum. Unlike the Ballad of Resistance against caste and untouchability in Pottan Theyyam, 'Pula Pottan' here has more of the characteristics of a 'Saviour', whose actions preserve a Muslim mosque from destruction, thus eliminating the prospect of a potential religious revolt [Annex 9].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dG6iXQ4bu8>

Theyyam as an art form was designed for performance mostly in temples and places of religious interest (Panikar, 2016). However, this has changed over time; Theyyam has become widely accepted as an art form adapted to an increasingly secular society. I was keen to know how it retains significance in a multi-cultural, multi-religious society. However, it was interesting to find one Catholic Church where Theyyam is performed, though it is considered a Hindu ritual [Annex 10].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCSxUV9fOEU>

I travelled to India during an off season for Theyyam. Nevertheless, to understand how this experience of transforming from 'man to god' happens, I decided to document the available performances.

The different kinds of premises at which the Theyyam is performed are discussed later in this thesis. However, along with exploring the secular performance spaces, I found it equally important to understand the performance in the spaces for which it was originally designed. To establish whether plot, myth, narrative and performance have any influence on local communities, two performances of Muthappan Theyyam in two different premises were documented, one at a temple where the Theyyam is worshipped, unlike the idols in the *sanctum sanctorum* as practised in most other temples [Annex 11].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqp9IL-REYM>

Effective emotional connection is also established through the dialogues between the character and the devotees. He calms them, tells them how to solve their problems, and consoles them with his jokes as part of his performance. I documented the whole performance right from the makeup to the end. I found that when Theyyam is performed at a house it is an interactive theatre form, the performance itself being an opportunity for discussing solutions to the local community's problems. To sum up: the art doesn't function only for the sake of art but also as a process of psychological conditioning or an act of counselling.

All these vlogs explore and elucidate not only the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of a transcendental art, but also the way it interacts with the local community and acts as a medium for engaging their daily lives with transcendence [Annexes 12, 13].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRkANi_DQZo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9w9Q8rooFI&t=563s>

Once I had understood the aspects on which the art form focuses, the later videos focused on exploring various other aspects including my own previous practices. A semi-structured interview with Noble Peter, a researcher in film music and my long-term collaborator as a music composer, was filmed. Noble travelled with me on the research trips and focused on understanding the nuances of the music and how it supports the rising part of the emotional graph during Theyyam performances. Noble composed the music for the final film "Tide of Lies", and this study helped him to determine the scheme of music to be used in that film. This interview expresses our own experiences as film-makers and academics and explores how music is used effectively in films that integrate local sociology with elements of film grammar [Annex 14].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MedriLHLiAA>

Vlogs 1-11 explore the myths, sociological aspects and spatio-temporal manifestations of traditional Indian transcendental art forms. Since I felt it essential to understand the philosophical dimensions of transcendence, I interviewed Rahul Eashwar, a writer on Vedanta philosophy and a renowned media person. The interview mostly focused on "Tatwasmasi", which is one of the 'Mahavakya' (soul concepts) of Indian philosophy [Annex 15]. This is an extract of the same idea manifested in Pottan Theyyam.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sY-8ni_87w&t=396s

The philosophy of transcendence isn't limited to Theyyam, though Theyyam was taken as a useful platform for exploring how transcendental philosophy is manifested in Indian arts. I filmed an interaction between two veteran Indian film academics, Prof Chandra Mohan Nair and Prof Shiva Prasad, exploring the concept of applied spirituality in Indian society. This discussion also illustrates the elevation of various art forms in India and their spiritual lineage [Annex 16].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-JpNWd0Huw>

Transcendental art forms are not only connected to ancient ones. I tried to investigate whether any innovative art forms are currently evolving. 'Samudranadanam' was my answer

to that question. It is a contemporary 'physical dance theatre' derived and performed by national award-winning choreographers, Vekkkam Sajeev and Madhu Gopinad. It is a new grammar of choreographed movements influenced by traditional Indian arts but applied across various platforms such as dance, theatre, cinema, etc. A semi-structured interview with those choreographers clearly explains their new vocabulary and how it is communicated to people across the globe irrespective of apparent barriers [Annex 17].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0JC7T9Tplw&t=1932s>

Although my initial plan was to make a short film integrating the Theyyam performances with cinematic narratives by exploring the various philosophical dimensions, I recognized that the core idea of the plot of Pottan Theyyam could be an effective source of inspiration for my feature film. I therefore decided not to make the short film but to reserve the idea for my feature film, revealing the core of the plot effectively but not involving a Theyyam performance.

As my research involves the broader notion of 'Indian transcendentalism', a pan-Indian understanding of the concept is essential. Having limited my attention so far to Theyyam, a North Kerala-based art, I also tried to identify similar notions in other parts of India. I identified Baul, another ritual art performed mostly in North-West India and Bangladesh. A semi-structured interview with Parvathi Baul, an international performer of Baul, explains the ubiquity of devotion to performance. It also elucidates various traditional and spiritual movements such as the Bhakti Movement, Sufi Culture, etc. [Annex 18].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbHYziZR328&t=29s>

The Indian transcendental concepts are not just limited to performance, but also extend to architecture, images and motifs. One example is 'Nataraja', Lord Shiva as cosmic dancer. A semi-structured interview with Prof Sarada Sreenivasan, a metallurgist and a dancer, explains the idea of the cosmos manifested in the image of Nataraja. She also shares her experience of developing a performance with two dancers; herself performing Bharatanatyam in India and another dancer performing a western dance in France, but integrating the two through live video conferencing, creating an experience of transcendence [Annex 19].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ops0WJ1jBjM&t=1294s>

Dr Sarada Sreenivasan performing in Ted EX:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfKibs7dhWk&t=657s>

Indian literature is also rich in transcendental elements. The works of Sri Aurobindo are examples, transcendental notions being evident in their form, content, structure and philosophy. Sri Aurobindo didn't limit his visions to writing but developed an idea of 'Integral Psychology', a practical system of living the complex philosophies expressed by many others. Its aim is to achieve global oneness, with a state of higher quality of consciousness. A semi-structured interview with Dr Alok Pandey, a psychiatrist, author and leader of the Shri Aurobindo Foundation, explains various perspectives of 'Integral Psychology' [Annex 20].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJWNzvmDWk&t=933s>

Transcendental Spaces

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5cVpnQ3ZDU2F1c28>

Few of my questions were left unclear and unanswered. Why do Indians denounce or distance themselves from their earlier situation in which transcendental ideas were one with their lives? Do any of these ideas in any way result in a better society? If I could identify anything, that should be the pivotal point for my film to address and for the research to develop.

I produced three videos investigating these questions:

1. **When men transcend to rhythm - Trichur Pooram:** It is a video of one of the most magnificent temple festivals in South India, 'Trichur Pooram'. The video not only explores the vibrancy and richness of the festival, but also tries to identify how close or distant people are from the essence and quintessence of the rituals and celebrations. It is one of the most crowd-pulling events in the country, where hundreds of thousands of people gather irrespective of religion, politics, caste, colour, status, etc. Playing of percussion instruments is one of the significant rituals. People enjoy the music, forgetting festivals in the country, forgetting discrimination and becoming unified by the rhythm. However, the aspect of devotion, which is one of the virtues of the event, is often ignored by many. It becomes merely an occasion for celebrating, though it also serves as a way for some people to make their living. 'Urbanization' could be identified as one answer to my question through this video [Annex 27].
2. **Chidambaram - The dark clouds in the sky of consciousness:** A video of a magnificent work of architecture, Chidambaram, an age-old temple in Tamilnadu. The temple is intended as an unambiguous display the philosophy of 'Closeness with The Supreme leads to the experience of reaching the skies of consciousness'. The temple is a vocabulary in itself. However, territorial invasions by various forces had tried to destroy it. These are the present-day visuals of this [Annex 28].
3. **Sadhana - Globe in the benevolence of nature:** A video of Auroville (a universal city based on the vision of Shri Aurobindo and The Mother) and Sadhana Forest (100 acres of man-made forest). The integral psychology of Shri Aurobindo is perpetuated partly by forming a universal township where people from more than 130 nations are settled together. There is no sense of discrimination against anyone. They live with an inner realization of one world. A man-made forest is grown by investing the efforts of many people across the world, working together for a single reason, to enjoy and protect Mother Nature! It is all made by volunteers from different parts of the world. This unity continues to function in developing and practising a new life, enjoying the benevolence of nature and experiencing the true essence of spirituality, the 'Karma' [Annex 29].

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the aesthetic significance of Indian transcendental philosophy in shaping a transcendental narrative in folk, traditional and contemporary art forms. It also illustrates how real landscapes and elements of nature have influenced the form and structure of the narrative. The philosophy, sociological influences and inspirations to derive new art forms are also discussed.

Chapter 4. Contextual and Literature Review Part 2: Transcendentalism in Indian films

Introduction

This chapter addresses a major research question: “Have any Indian film-makers attempted to engage the native transcendental philosophy in their films?” Indian film academics and professionals were interviewed to find the answer. The chapter briefly reviews the history of Indian cinema and discusses the classical narrative followed by mainstream Indian films, and presents case studies of films that have experimented with narratives and how they have been accepted by audiences.

India has the second largest film industry in the world, contributing \$8.1 billion to the Indian economy in 2013 (Bhushan, 2013), 0.5% of the country’s total GDP. The revenue generated and the numbers of films produced each year have grown consistently. In 1986, 840 films were passed the censors (Dhyaksha, 1988), and since 2010 Indian cinemas have made an average of 1600 to 1900 films per year.

The popular and the artistic traditions of film-making in India must be distinguished. Most films are melodramatic, often musicals, conveying some clear moral message (Dissanayake, 1998). Artistic films constitute about 10% of the total output (Dissanayake, 1998). It is film-makers such as Sathyajith Ray, Ritwik Gatak, Adoor Gopala Krishnan, Manu Kaul and Balu Mahendra who have made significant artistic contributions.

History of Indian Cinema

The first Indian film was made in 1913, exactly thirty-four years before India gained independence from British rule. “Raja Harishchandra” by Dada Sahib Phalkae was the first Indian film production. Strikingly, it was a story taken from the great epic Mahabharata.

Film as an art form was evolving globally at that time. Most films still had salient features of staged theatre. Those early productions would have been better dubbed ‘photo plays’ because of their resemblance to stage plays, and Indian films of the era were no different. The early 1920s were a landmark period in world cinema as a grander and more cinematic grammar emerged through the films of D.W. Griffith, and aesthetic and artistic evolution was evident in the work of German expressionist film-makers.

I understand that the popular strand or entertainment formulas entered Indian cinema because the technicians working on Indian productions were mostly British. Although Indian films mostly recounted Indian myths, the need for a distinctive narrative for them was never addressed at that time. Marathi films made by Phalkae had a national appeal and influenced a few others from various parts of India to make films. That was when regional Indian cinema started. In the South, Nataraja Muthaliyar made the first Tamil film (a silent film), “Keechaka Vadam”, which is also a story from the Mahabharata.

As this is an auto-ethnographic research project, even a brief history of Indian cinema would not be complete without a brief mention of the first films in my own language, Malayalam: “Vigathakumaran - the Lost Child”, by J.C. Denel. Unlike the previous myth-based ‘photo

plays', Vigathakumaran was a realistic social drama. The making of the film was a journey along rough roads as this was an era of casteism and untouchability, and the elite class at the time was angry that a downtrodden woman, P.K. Rosi, played the role of a 'Nair' woman. Although the film was completed and the initial screening arranged at the Capitol Theatre, Trivandrum, few of the local élite who had been invited attended that screening. They detested the idea of a Dalit playing a Nair role and interrupted the show. A few further screenings were attempted but they were never successful, and the film reels were then completely damaged. The second film made was "Marthandavarma", an adaptation of historical novel, which also never had a successful screening because the book publisher obtained a legal stay; the film lacked permissions and copyright.

The first commercially successful Malayalam film was "Balan". For a time it was considered the earliest Malayalam film, but this was proved wrong by the efforts and research of Chelangand Gopalakrishnan, a film journalist. The reels of "Marthandavarma" were found and restored by strenuous efforts by the late P.K. Nair, founder and former Director of the National Film Archives, India. More auto-ethnographic facts related to the history of Malayalam cinema will be discussed in chapter 6.

Post-Independence India witnessed the growth of mainstream cinema to "Bollywood", the second largest film Industry in the world. Films have evolved technically and socially. New stars rose on the silver screen. The era of superstars was accompanied by a transition from film fans to devotees of actors. Some stars used film as a way to persuade the local crowd to regard them as leaders, which then helped them to enter mainstream politics. But did all this detract from the aesthetic growth of film? An answer will be developed in later chapters.

Avant-garde and more serious artistic attempts were made in regional Indian cinema across various languages. Sathyajith Ray, Ritwik Ghatak from Bengal, Ramu Karyat, P.A. Beker in Malayalam and Balu Mahendra in Tamil made groundbreaking efforts and raised the aesthetic and artistic qualities of Indian cinema so it achieved global recognition. This strength and prosperity were further increased through the works of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mani Kaul, Girish Kasrwalli, John Abraham, Shaji N Karun, K.G. George and many others. However, this attainment of successful formulas and commercialization seriously constrained attempts to foster and develop a narrative structure that engaged with transcendental philosophy.

Although no literature identifies film-makers who have made evident efforts to engage transcendental philosophy in their work, this needs further investigation, so I embarked on semi-structured interviews with film-makers and academics. The interviews yielded not only factual information but also more in-depth insights and experiences gained from decades-long film careers and associations with people who influenced their work spiritually.

Transcendental Cinema

(NB: Please refer to the documentary **One+1 of Transcendence** -

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5bTZpVjA4UEpaNUk>

The original ideas behind the research interviews are contextualized in the documentary, forming a narrative. The interviews with different subject experts are uploaded as separate links as they cover broader topics; this helps me to summarize the content. Please refer only to as much as you find necessary, as some parts may seem repetitive. There are six interviews.)

Having understood the appearance of Indian transcendence over a very wide and vibrant spectrum, the rest of my research focused on understanding how effectively Indian films have used it, and what transcendental films are in the rest of the world. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with exponents of various film-making specialisms. The subject experts were selected on the basis of their proficiency and of winning various national and international awards. This part of the work was begun by interviewing Prof John Sankaramangalam, the most senior film academic in India and a national award-winning film-maker. He was the former Director of the Film and Television Institute of India and a member of CELECT, and is now the academic chairman of St Joseph College of Communication. He examines the evolution of various art forms from classical origins to abstract developments. He illustrates his exposition with examples from painting, theatre, literature and cinema. This also explains the early silent films and how abstraction came to evolve in the history of cinema. He shares his views about the films of Maya Deren, Andy Warhol and Akira Kurosawa. He also shares his experience as film-maker, making attempts at transcendental narrative in his documentary "Samadhi" [Annex 21].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEA8_tlyL3A&t=734s

Sunny Joseph ISC is a filmmaker and a cinematographer with experience of handling cameras for films in thirteen languages. He has worked with many major film-makers including Kristof Zanussi and has served on juries at various national and international film festivals. He is now the Director of Revathi Kalamandir Film Academy. In a semi-structured interview he shares his experiences as a DOP and an academic. He does not restrict his exposition to his films but considers various aspects of images that influenced him even as a child and later inspired his method of image-making. The most significant part of his account is his experience of working with Aravindan, the only Malayalam film-maker whose work contains identifiable traces of transcendence [Annex 22].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTN7LNmtq8&t=983s>

John Paul Puthusery is a senior screen-writer, producer and academic who has won several national and state awards. A semi-structured interview with him explores the transcendental narrative in both Indian and world films. He clearly discriminates between 'being explicitly philosophical' and 'being transcendental'. He shares the view that the most prominent people who lived their philosophies - Jesus Christ, Shri Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi - never preached anything complex. They simplified complex philosophies through little stories. How are these motifs of 'simplicity' adopted by literati such as Vikom Muhamad Basheer? Puthusery also identifies traces of transcendence in the films of Rithwik Ghatak and G. Aravindan, and shares his personal views of film-makers such as Akira Kurosawa,

Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky. He clearly explains how stories can be transcendental, and why and how Indian films have failed to manifest this. Transcendental incidents in films, literature and history form another significant part of his interview. As a reply to the question why Indian films have failed to be transcendental, he cites 'invasions' [Annex 23].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnb9aTnPGP4&t=1194s>

Beena Paul is a renowned film editor, winner of multiple state awards and a national award. She was the artistic director of the International Film Festival of Kerala and is now the Vice Chairman of Kerala State Chalachithra Academy. A semi-structured interview with her explains her vision of how the editing styles of various film-makers work as different methods for constructing an experience of transcendence. She differentiates between the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Appichatpong as well as highlighting their similarities. Her discussion considers not only the classical masters but also contemporary film-makers such as Lars von Trier, Terrence Malick and Appichatpong. Anurag Kashyap and Girish Kasrwalli are contemporary Indian film-makers whose work could loosely be deemed transcendental. She recounts a few incidents from her own experience, where the film extends beyond the screen and editing serves as a tool to evoke the experience. She also addresses 'urbanization' as one reason why Indian films have become distanced from transcendental considerations [Annex 24].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg_fTcb_rgg

Vijayakrishnan Parameshwaran is a national award-winning film-maker and critic. A semi-structured interview with him clearly explains why Indian film-makers have failed to experiment in the transcendental style. He identifies the outpourings of leftist movements as one reason. He also explains some sequences of films by Rithwik Ghatak as transcendental experiences. He disagrees with and criticizes certain attempts by G. Aravindan, whom most other experts cited. He appreciates some sequences from films by Akira Kurosawa and Ingmar Bergman and how they work to create an experience of transcendence [Annex 25].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Y0uZjKcMg&t=6s>

As many interviewees pointed to the films of Girish Kasrwalli, I decided to include him and ascertain his views and perceptions. For him, transcendental cinema comprises "films which go beyond mere socio-political perceptions and go philosophical and bridge between the myth and the real". Transcendental approaches in his own films, and films made by others that he appreciates, were discussed. He questions why should we limit the label 'transcendental film-makers' only to Carl Dreyer, Ozu and Bresson. Why not Ingmar Bergman and Tarkovsky? He also finds a relationship between the concept of pilgrimage in Indian beliefs and the recurrent motif of travel among characters in Bergman films [Annex 26].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8eAlfTIQxc>

These semi-structured interviews helped me not only to identify the meagre threads of transcendence in some Indian film-makers' work, but also to address the reasons why Indian film-makers generally fail to create it. They were also my method for collecting data to identify film-makers who have established a transcendental narrative in their work. The significant parts of the interviews along with various film sequences were edited to form a

narrative flow in the research documentary 'One + 1 of transcendence', which investigates the following questions.

1. What exactly is transcendental cinema?
2. What attempts were made during the early silent film era?
3. Which popular film-makers are considered veterans of transcendental cinema?
4. Which other world masters have contributed significantly to transcendental cinema?
5. Which contemporary film-makers attempt transcendental narratives in their films?
6. Does Indian cinema make any significant attempt to deal with transcendence?
7. What are the reasons why Indian films have failed to do so?

Modern Attempts

Since digitization, mainstream Indian films have made deliberate efforts to introduce new narrative styles.

Dev D

"Dev D" by Anurag Kashyap made such an attempt. "Devdas" is a tragic novel that holds a unique record: it is the only Indian novel to have been made into films sixteen times. However, Dev D differs from the other fifteen. The story concerns Devdas, born into a rich Bengali family during the 1900s, who falls in love with a girl called Paro from his village. Under family pressure, Devdas is unable to profess his love for Paro, and she ends up marrying someone else. Devdas arrives at the doorstep of a courtesan, Chandramukhi, but vows to return to Paro before he dies.

In the earlier adaptations, the social backdrop of the film remained the same, along with the storyline and characterization. However, Anurag Kashyap refuses to bow to conventional niceties. Dev D remains true to the original novel at times, but it becomes daring and often bizarre at others. The difference lies in its modern-day take on Indian youth. The interpretation, which is slick, pushes the boundaries of Indian cinema.

City of God

Another remarkable recent attempt is the film "City of God", a Malayalam film by Lijo Jose Plaiiserii. *City of God* starts with a road accident and the story traces the lives of the four families involved in it. Each family has a different perspective on the city of Cochin.

The first story revolves around the lives of Tamil migrants. One of them, Swarnavel, has a special affection for another migrant, Marathakam. Marathakam was already married but she had run away from her old husband in Pollachi because of his unbearable torture. Marathakam and Swarnavel know they love each other but they don't show it. Personal considerations drive Lakshmi ([Rohini](#)) to break up their relationship and force Marathakam to marry another migrant; but on the night of the marriage, Marathakam learns that her new husband is a thief and returns to Swarnavel. They realize their love is mutual and start living together. The second husband, stricken with envy, takes revenge by bringing the first husband (a rowdy) from Pollachi. The following day, Swarnavel rescues Marathakam from her old husband and tries to escape on a moped; they meet with an accident.



Figure 4.1 Poster for Hindi Film *Dev D*

The next story deals with the life of businessmen Sony (Rajeev Pillai) and his forehand Jyothi Lal (Prithviraj Sukumaran). As per Sony's instructions, Jyothi Lal and his gang kill a plot owner, the husband of Liji Punnosse. She identifies her husband's murderer as Jyothi Lal and associates with another businessman, Shamir, to plot revenge and destroy Sony and Jyothi

Lal. Liji promises to marry Shamir if he can kill Jyothi Lal and Sony by arranging it with another gang.

Sony has an eye on the actress Surya Prabha, whose fame is growing. Surya is leading an unpleasant married life with Mehaboob, a friend and later business partner of Sony. Sony, intending to snare Surya Prabha, cheats Mehaboob in the construction business; the police put Mehaboob on remand for inadequate and unsafe construction practices that had caused the death of the Tamil migrant Lakshmi. Sony forces Surya into an illicit relationship to obtain papers that prove her husband's innocence. Jyothi Lal rescues Surya from this predicament. Later in the story, he rescues her from a suicide attempt. Jyothi Lal takes Surya to Sony's guest house to collect the papers and they pick up Sony on the way. However, their vehicle is in the same accident as Swarnavel and Marathakam. Sony dies at the scene. The gang recruited by Shamir and Liji Punnosse arrives and tries to kill Jyothi Lal, too. Jyothi Lal escapes with Surya and they begin to realize each other's importance for their future lives. Liji marries Shamir and goes to Dubai for further business.

In the final scene, Swarnavel and Marathakam marry each other and settle in a scenic village, living happily ever after ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_God_\(2011_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_God_(2011_film)), n.d.)

The film uses a hyperlink narrative between the stories of these characters and a non-linear editing pattern. However, it was a commercial flop at the box office.



Figure 4.2 Poster for Malayalam Film *City of God*

Solo

This recent film (September 2017) showed some transcendental elements in its narrative structure. “Solo” is a mainstream film by Bijoy Nambiyar; actually an anthology of four films, each integrating one of the five elements as an emotional theme, and each using the name of a manifestation of Lord Shiva.

World of Shekhar (Water/Jalam)

A wounded Shekhar lies on the road after an accident. We're brought four years earlier where Shekhar, a kind but assertive student, along with his best friend Pattu and gang, beats up Sanju. Sanju, a student, is beaten up because he and Nelson (Shekhar's friend) are

in love with the same girl, Radhika, a free-spirited dancer. Radhika rejects them both, saying she loves Shekhar. After realizing that her love is true, Shekhar falls in love with her.

Four years later their relationship is disrupted by Radhika's brother Shravan. Both families meet to discuss the relationship, and everyone is shocked when Radhika reveals she is pregnant with Shekhar's child. Radhika's family does not let Shekhar see her, but later they marry with the consent of their families.

On their wedding night, Radhika tells Shekhar that her father always cared for her and she always felt safe when her father was beside her. Shekhar promises that he will do the same for their child. After recovering from the accident, he goes to see his new-born daughter and Radhika. It is then revealed that Radhika has died of complications during childbirth, and grief-stricken Shekhar loses control of his bike and collides with a truck, causing the accident. The story ends years later with Shekhar playing with his daughter on the beach where Radhika used to go with her father.

World of Trilok (Wind/Vayu)

The story begins with Ayesha, whose cycle collides with a BMW driven by Thomas Zachariah, a rich businessman. Zachariah's son-in-law Justin decides to save her, but Zachariah declines by saying they will be arrested for drunk driving. Justin puts Ayesha in the car anyway and rushes to the hospital, but she dies on the way. Instead of taking the body to the hospital, Zachariah disposes it on the road.

Four years later, Justin and his wife Annie are saddened by the death of Zachariah. After returning from a business deal, Justin discovers that his car brakes are not working. The car crashes, leaving Justin wounded, but he is saved by Dr Trilok Menon, a veterinary surgeon. As Trilok rushes Justin to the hospital, Justin notices a photo of Ayesha in Trilok's car and realizes she was his wife.

After recovering, Justin tells Annie everything and decides to reveal the truth to Trilok. He narrates the whole incident and Trilok asks him whether he can feel his hand. Trilok reveals that it was really he who killed Zachariah. He also orchestrated the accident, and had injected a drug into Justin's drip a few minutes earlier to make him brain-dead. He says he'd been tracking them for four years and had heard everything that Zachariah and Justin had said during the original incident through Ayesha's Bluetooth earbuds, telling him she was pregnant and still alive even after they disposed of her. Trilok then exits the room leaving Justin to die.

World of Shiva (Fire/Agni)

Shiva's mother leaves him, his father, and his brother Siddhu. Years later, Shiva is a gangster working under his mentor Bhadran, a crime boss. Shiva protects his brother and is harsh with his girlfriend Rukku. Bhadran invites Siddhu to join the gang when he is released from prison for almost killing someone in college.

Shiva's life changes when his father is found shot in a bar. The CCTV records show that his father was killed by Vishnu, a crime boss in Mumbai. Shiva decides to take revenge. Along with two of his gang members, Nandha and Prabha, he goes to Mumbai. On the bus,

Nandha and Prabha find Siddhu and Shiva attempts to throw him out, but Nandha allows him to stay. On reaching Mumbai, Shiva joins forces with a gangster to take out Vishnu.

The next night, Shiva and gang reach Vishnu and start a shootout in which Prabha and many others are killed. Shiva eliminates almost every member of Vishnu's gang and Siddhu escapes, rushing to Shiva only to see him killed by Vishnu. Siddhu and Nandha manage to escape and reach their hideout hotel. The next morning, Siddhu takes Nandha's gun and goes to Vishnu's house, only to be shocked by seeing his mother there; she is now Vishnu's wife. This is revealed as the reason why Vishnu killed Shiva and Siddhu's father and then Shiva. Vishnu enters the room; Siddhu kills him, and his mother begs him to escape. The story ends with a grieving Siddhu running through the streets of Mumbai.

World of Rudra (Earth/Bhoomi)

Rudra Ramachandran is an army trainee, madly in love with his girlfriend Akshara. He continually ruins Akshara's marriage proposals by creating scenes in their house. Rudra is the son of Brig. Ramachandran and Vidya, who always scold him for his aggressive behaviour, but his father always considers him a friend. Akshara's father, Brig. Sundarrajan, decides to file a case against him to expel him from the army as revenge for his aggression, but Rudra's father and mother ask him not to. Later, Akshara tells Rudra she has been accepted for a degree course in Australia and must leave soon. She promises she will always be his.

Four years later, Rudra is an army officer narrating the story to his senior officer Col. Raunaq Sachdeva and team. He tells them Akshara never contacted him. He went to Australia but she refused to see him, and now he has been invited to her wedding. Raunaq says that his team must never accept defeat so Rudra must attend the marriage ceremony. Rudra, along with Raunaq, Daisy, and others, goes to Akshara's house the day before her wedding. Rudra sees her but she refuses to talk to him. The night before the wedding, Rudra barges in and demands that Alok, Akshara's fiancé, should fight him. Alok, a boxing champion, beats up Rudra, but Raunaq encourages him to fight back. Rudra brutally beats up Alok but is hindered by Akshara, who tells him it was really his father, whom he considered his best friend, who asked her to abandon him. A shocked Rudra leaves the function. Later, his mother tells him that his father had an affair with another lady when he was two years old and that his parents were on the verge of divorce. Although he stopped the affair for the sake of his marriage, the lady was declared pregnant; she is revealed to be Akshara's mother, which makes Akshara Brig. Ramachandran's daughter and Rudra's half-sister. The film ends with Rudra asking forgiveness from Alok on the day of his marriage to Akshara.



Figure 4.3 Poster for Malayalam film *Solo*

A few other films have made out-of-the-box attempts in terms of narrative. Some of them became box office sensations whereas others flopped. *Dev D* made an impact and achieved critical acclaim, including the National Film Awards.

There are significant factors other than the aesthetic quality of a film that affect its impact on the theatres. Public relation efforts, marketing and media publicity matter little for the initial uptake of the film. If the film has any popular stars in its caste, the initial few showings will be dominated by the presence of members of that particular star's 'fan club'.



Figure 4.4 Fans worshipping film actor Rajinikanth

Films are mostly released on Fridays, and family audiences prefer to watch at the weekends. A film with a star caste receives an initial boost, which enables it to survive in the theatre for longer. However, if a film has no popular stars and the box office collection is not satisfactory during the first week, it is likely to go on hold and the next film might be released the following Friday. This makes it less likely that audiences will see reviews of the film and catch it in the cinema at a weekend.

As more multiplexes and online platforms are popularized, contemporary attempts are gaining greater acceptance. Modern developments in film distribution practices are opening new paths and potential markets.

Conclusion

A practice-based approach was used to address the particular research question using “One +1 of transcendence”, the visual essay, as a tool of investigation. The semi-structured interviews with film-makers are comprehended in a structure that answers the question and contributes to the interim findings. This chapter also proves the significance of the major research problem: there have been no conscious or deliberate attempts to embed Indian transcendental philosophy in Indian cinema.

Chapter 5. Case Studies: TRANSCENDENTAL FILMS ACROSS THE GLOBE AND FILM-MAKERS IN FOCUS

Introduction

In the previous chapters I identified the significance of transcendental philosophy and how it contributes to various art forms. However, transcendental philosophies of other cultures are being embedded in films from different parts of the world. This chapter presents case studies of film-makers who have contributed to this niche. The case study films are researched here to ascertain how cinema as an art form can be transcendental; how various aspects of film-making, its mise-en-scène, can be elements of a transcendental narrative structure.

What defines a transcendental film? This question can never receive a definite answer, but there are films that go beyond mere aesthetic enjoyment and become an experience. The source of this is an image, but one that transcends the physical characteristics of an image and takes you to a different plane, where you experience a deeper essence or a meaning different from what you hear or see.

There were traces of transcendence in the work of American experimental film-makers such as Andy Warhol and Maya Deren. Warhol's films are lengthy shots of happenings or objects. His films "The Sleep", five-hour footage of a man sleeping, "The Kiss", fifty-two minutes of people kissing, "The Eat" forty-two minutes of a starving man chewing raw mushrooms, etc., are not intended for the viewer only to watch what is happening on the screen, but to provoke him to move inwards, taking him deep to experience a subjective essence of the image.



Figure 5.1 *The Sleep* - Film

The films of Maya Deren work at different level from Warhol's. Her films such as "Meshes of the Afternoon" are surreal and the viewing experience achieves meaning by juxtaposing those surreal moving images. "Meshes of the Afternoon" portrays vague, unclear images of a woman going to bed. It includes a hooded character chasing her, climbing the stairs upside down. At one point it shows the hooded character has a mirror instead of a face. Those images have no specific meaning but carry us to a different plane of defining our own meanings. At the same time, "Meshes of the Afternoon" is more an experiential happening than a film to watch.

Ozu, Bresson and Dryer

The three masters of transcendental film-making identified by Paul Schrader are Yasujirō Ozu, Robert Bresson and Carl Theodor Dreyer. Transcendence can be found in various shades and forms in the work of these three film-makers.

Yasujirō Ozu

Transcendence in Ozu's work is largely rooted in oriental philosophy. His films are highly personal and yet open to a horizon to which everyone can relate. Most of his films are stories of families but there are evident reflections of the entire nation. He has a unique cinematic style that contributes to the experience of transcendence. Long takes and repetitive use of similar shots are stylistic signatures. Ozu's camera movements are very limited and he usually deploys a single camera angle, typically three feet off the floor.

"He is repeating the architectural nature of the image, he is repeating the lighting pattern of the image, he is repeating the compositional value of the image, once you experience it in first few shots, and then you again experience it, you start withdrawing from the external values. The moment you start withdrawing from the external values, at the sub conscious level your mind starts working at the connotation level. So, what you see using your naked eye is what you see using your inner eye" (Sankaramanglam, 2016).

Seasons seem to be another motif in most of his films. This is even suggested by the names of some of them; "Spring Comes from the Ladies", "Early Summer", "Late Spring", "Late Autumn" and "Autumn Afternoon" are examples. Apart from the names, the seasons influence the visual pattern, mood and unique narrative of each film.

Ozu's films have a unique vocabulary that encourages the audience to withdraw from the external nature of the image and internalize it an experiential level. This experience is constructed by long-duration shots. There is a lack of visual variety because similar shots are often repeated. Taking "Tokyo Stories" as an example, the film takes place mostly in interiors, often very small spaces, which eventually contributes to the experience level of the viewer, creating the illusion that he is somewhere inside the filmic space. Almost all

shots in “Tokyo Stories” are static except in one sequence. This contributes to the connection between the character and the viewer. Most of Ozu’s images use low-key lighting with a very low contrast range, resulting in natural, non-dramatic imagery.

Silence plays a significant role in his films. His silences speak even more than the dialogues.

Robert Bresson

“Films of Bresson elevate the viewer to a meditative experience. It is not the same as watching the film when it comes to the end of the film. The film transforms us” (Vijayakrishnan, 2014).

“There are few cultural elements, intermingled with transcendental style in his films” (Schrader, 1971).

What are these cultural elements? Biblical notions and Christian life is often key sources of inspiration for his films. This is not to say that his films are religious, but they are highly spiritual and invoke an experience of spirituality in the viewers.

“Our journey is not to become a Buddhist; it is to become a Buddha. Our journey is not to become a Christian, but to become a Christ himself” (Eashwar, 2016).

This fits the cinematic style of Bresson closely. His films are not Biblical but they encapsulate the philosophies rooted in the Holy Bible and the life of Jesus Christ.

“In **Au Hasard Balthazar**”, the relationship between Marie and her Donkey is depicted. The film has very subtle but evident undercurrents of the Biblical image of ‘donkey’ and it acts as a metaphor. However, the central consciousness depicted in this film is not human, nor is it exactly anthropomorphic, and it does not function as transparent medium. The human characters in the film, whose fortunes are parallel with Balthazar’s, are similarly opaque. What follows, then, is a study of the aims and strategies of narration in a text whose rhetorical form is articulated on special premise” (Browne, 1977).

The film is connected to the seven deadly sins as expounded in the Bible, but the narrative extends beyond Biblical conditioning of morality and moral perceptions. Its connections have a much wider sociological and psychological scope.

“The narrator exhibits the images of the film and by control of camera position, mise-en-scène, editing, and sound, positions the spectator in a certain relation to the depicted world” (Browne, 1977).

The cinematic narratives of most of Bresson’s films are connected to Christian symbolism and religious aesthetics. A unique cinematic style can be identified in his films with evident influence from all these elements. The cinematography of some of them relates to Renaissance paintings. They use contrasts and shades poetically. Often the contrast between shades of grey acts as an element of *mise-en-scène* and communicates much in itself.

The closing scenes of “Au Hasard Balthazar”, for instance, the black dying donkey in midst of a milling herd of white sheep, transcend the frame and the physical meaning of the image and induce an experience in viewers that is related to their understanding of the religious symbolism in those images. Wonderfully, however, aesthetic appreciation of the film or its meaning is not limited to any one society or religion. The cinematic narrative Bresson develops is transcultural and acts as an experience for every viewer.

Carl Dryer

Carl Dryer is a Danish film-maker, more prominent in the silent era, who was an inspiration for most of the film-makers discussed earlier. Bresson, Bergman, and several modern film-makers such as Van Tryer or Terrence Malick acknowledge that Dryer’s film style inspired them in many cases. His films are expressionistic, and he explored the possibilities of the cinematic tools then available to develop his own vocabulary. He also contributed to the formulation of a cinematic grammar.

“Passion of Joan of Arc” is a film based on the interrogation of Joan of Arc by the clerical court. The plot is narrated using only the potential of the *mise-en-scène* by the effective use of lighting, camera angles, composition, makeup, décor, etc. The antagonists are portrayed using high key lighting and low angle shots. Even their looks are arranged so their faces reflect the true nature of their character. The film is shot mostly using deep focus lenses, which naturally creates an ambience and contributes to the emotional atmosphere of the entire film.



Figure 5.2 *Passion of Joan Arc* - Film

Film-makers in Focus

Although many film-makers in the world have used transcendental narratives effectively in their films, I decided after my references and investigations to confine my research to three of them.

Akira Kurosawa

This Japanese master was widely accepted and has influenced most film-makers in the world. I personally feel his timeline is similar to that of Pablo Picasso. The history of Picasso's paintings could be analyzed if you look at them across their timeline. Similarly, the organic development of film-maker to master is clearly evident in the timeline of Kurosawa's films, starting from "Sanshiro Sugata", his first, to his recent film "Madadayo".

His first few films were dramatic, mostly samurai stories. No doubt he is the best samurai film-maker in the world. However, his growth as a film-maker is better expressed through his later films. His films present a distinctive narrative, discussing the concerns of the nation but simultaneously intertwining his perspectives with oriental philosophies. Set both in traditional samurai backgrounds and urban environments, they portray these ideas. However, the concepts of his films transcend the plots and relate to any time and space.

Fear of existence is a motif present in most of his films. In “**Seven Samurai**”, for example, it is the farming community’s fear of the bandits who come to loot their farm. In the film “**I live in fear**”, the fear is of existing in a nation where an atomic threat is always present. Connecting these films, set in two different contexts, is the trauma of existence and a powerful source acting as a threat. The fear is accompanied by resistance and a longing to protect somebody. It is the agony of the old man’s need to protect his family in “I live in fear”, whereas it is the samurai protecting the villagers from the bandits in “**Seven Samurai**”.



Figure 5.3 *Seven Samurai* - Film



Figure 5.4 *I live in Fear* - Film

This also references the myths of the Dharmic religions, where it is the Karma of one to protect his own people from negative forces. Whether it be the wars between the 'Devas' and 'Asuras' in the Puranas or 'Rama', 'Ravana' Yuddha in the 'Ramayana', or the Great War for reimbursing Dharma, 'The Kurukshethra' war in Mahabharata evokes the act of protecting throughout. This is initiated by someone and they fight the negative forces. The divine is to protect his people and re-establish goodness and wellbeing.

Kurosawa often used nature as a part of his narrative. It is the changes and events in nature that complement the incidents and emotions of the plot. The rain sequence at the end of "**Rashomon**" is explained in 'One + 1 of transcendence'.

When it comes to a film like "**Dreams**", this relationship to nature attains much greater clarity and meaning. Nature appears as living character in the film and narrates its concerns and griefs to humans. The images transcend far beyond what is seen in all senses. The sequence becomes a trail for all viewers, questioning their inner existence about their actions against nature. The film becomes highly experiential. The *mise-en-scène* works as the medium for transporting the experience. It is the integration of all these elements that transforms the plot to an experience.



Figure 5.5 *Dreams* - Film

The colours, arrangements, tone, costumes, choreography, composition and lighting all together result in the creation of experiential film viewing. Kurosawa brilliantly connects local rituals and beliefs to his films. In “Peach Orchard” he intertwines a local doll festival to the architectural nature of planting a peach orchard, and through his choreography he enables us to experience the grief of the slaughtered trees.

A similar use of local folklore can be seen in “Sunshine through the Rain”. It is a popular folktale in Asian countries: when the sun shines during the rains, the wedding ceremony of the foxes takes place and the rainbow appears. But does the film only explore a folktale? Does it show anything beyond what is apparent? Yes! Without uttering a single word directly to us, it reminds us of the rules of nature and the consequences we must face if we violate them. The narrative says this to us without words. It is the colours, the images, that tell us more than the film-maker makes explicit.



Figure 5.6 *Dreams* - Film

Kurosawa's films can be equated to any orbit of time. "What is the situation, what are the realistic premises? His films transcend beyond. He is mentioning about the dogma that could be carried out over decades. That is when a philosopher becomes a prophet" (Paul, 2016). The fears he portrayed in "I live in fear" or "Mount Fuji in the Red" were proved valid by later history, including the incidents in Fukushima and Chernobyl.



Figure 5.7 *Dreams* - Film

It is indeed essential to know the stories that the film-maker tells. His films are not just of the time when the film was made, but could be equated to all dimensions of time, past, present and future. It is essential for a transcendental narrative to consider plots in such a

perspective. The films tell stories of today, but none can predict the longevity of their transcendental appeal.

A detailed analysis of many of Kurosawa's films is presented in 'One+ 1 of transcendence'.

Kim Ki Duk

Kim Ki Duk is a South Korean film-maker popular among the festival circuits. Many of his films have been screened in major film festivals including Cannes, Berlin and Venice. What makes the films of Kim Ki Duk transcendental? Some factors demarcate him from the film-makers discussed earlier. He is more contemporary, and his later films have strongly influenced cinema's technical evolution to digital.

Kim's personal life experience of involving and interacting with both Buddhism and Catholicism is articulated in his form and content. The storylines and plots tend to differ in each of his films, but sex, violence and spirituality are elements that recur in most of them. I think his cross-cultural interactions with Buddhism and Catholicism could be the predominant factor in these recurring ideas and the perception of sex as forbidden fruit. His films have strong transcendental elements that contain the physical constraints of reality.

Nature becomes more significant than any other character in "**Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall and Spring**". This film identifies a very close synergy between the seasons and humans living through them.

His films transcend to become the medium in which the entire idea of the films resonates. The metaphorical and semiotic usage of Buddhist elements is also notable. The floating monastery, the doors to open areas, etc., transcend from mere physical presence to poetic and philosophical juxtapositions of the spiritual states of existence. This is a perfect example of cinema as an experience of meditation.



Figure 5.8 *Spring Summer Winter Autumn and Spring* - Film

This film has an undercurrent that signifies the 'Jeevitha Lakshya' (aim of life), a significant component of Buddhist philosophy. Here, the four seasons aren't only portrayed physically, they extend as metaphors to such concepts as the Four Ashrams of life:

1. Bhramacharya (Student/ Bachelor life)
2. Grihasthashrama (Family Life)
3. Vanaprashtha (Retired/ Nomad life)
4. Sanyasa (Renounced/ Hermit life)

and to Purushartha (objects of human pursuit):

1. Dharma (Duties, rights, laws etc.)
2. Artha (Meaning or objective of Life)
3. Kama (Sensual desires)
4. Moksha (Emancipation/ Liberation)

It the concept of 'Karma' that is layered as a plot in this film. Carrying the bondage of one's own sin is one of the key elements in the philosophy of Karma. It is interpreted by incidents and visual form in this film. The boy ties stones to the fish, frog and the snake. The master ties a stone to boy's body. Then the boy realizes the effect of his sinful actions. He finds the fish - dead, frog - dead, and snake - struggling hard. he saves it, but realizes that actions once done are irreversible and the only virtue remaining is to experience their consequences. This is called Karmachakra (wheel of action): whatever you have done bounces back to you.



Figure 5.9 *Spring Summer Winter Autumn and Spring* - Film

An integral aspect of the Dharmic religions is perpetuity despite death. They believe life to be an endless cycle, but once you satisfy the 'Purushartha', you are led to 'Moksha' or

liberation. This concept of cycle is well depicted in the film. Ages after the master embraces his own death the boy comes back, grown to middle age, to pursue the life of a hermit.

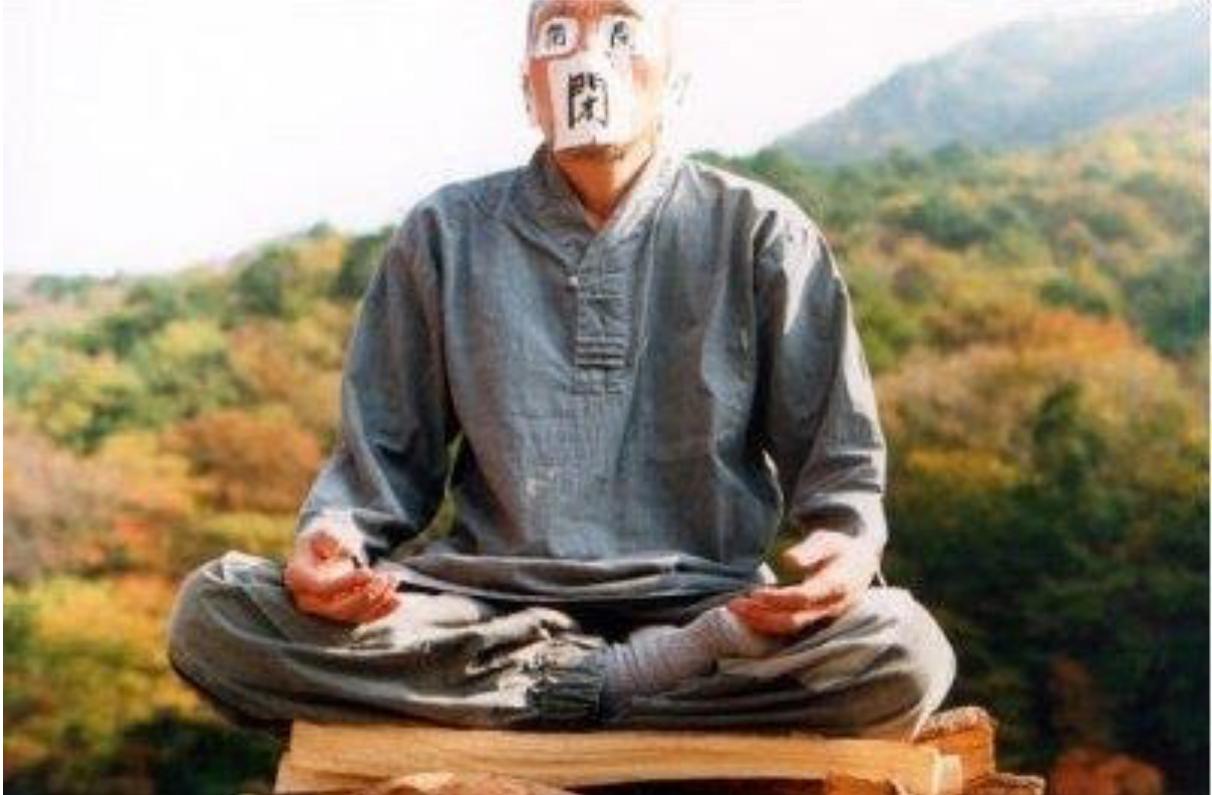


Figure 5.10 *Spring Summer Winter Autumn and Spring* - Film

To enter his next phase of life, 'Sanyasa', he torments himself: carrying the bondage, climbing the hill in extreme weather, as an act of living out his own sins.

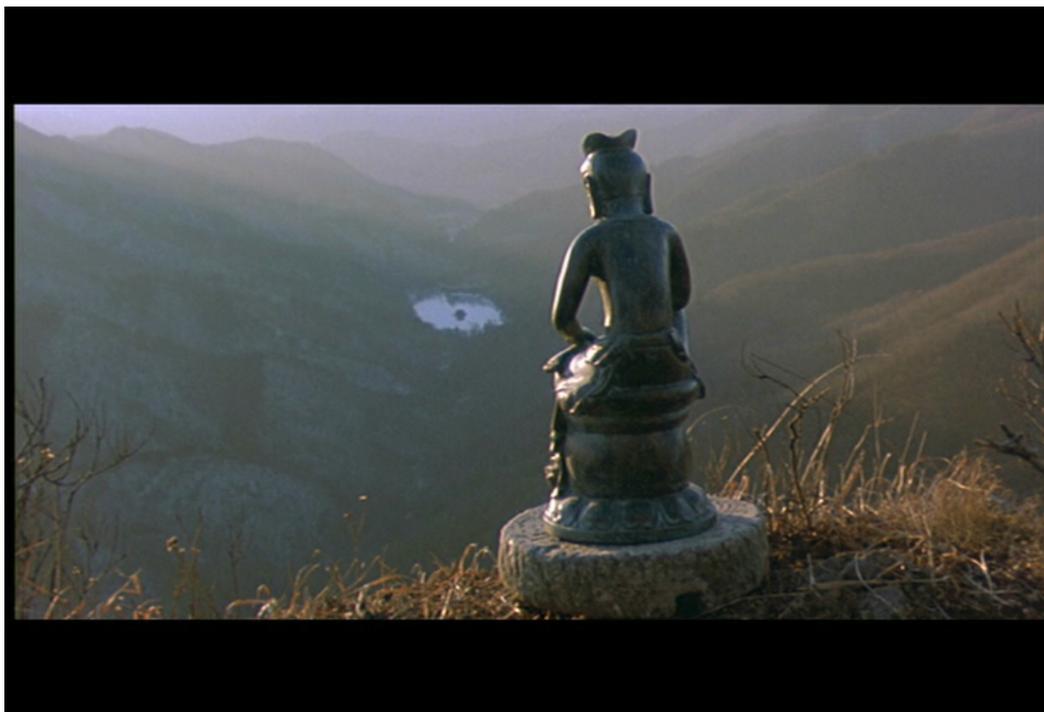


Figure 5.11 *Spring Summer Winter Autumn and Spring* - Film

“Time” is a very futuristic film exploring the physical perceptions of relationships, but as a spiritual, poetic and symbolic depiction of emotional element by a melodic cinematic means. Unlike “Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall and Spring”, “Time” has an urban setting and questions the dogmas and complexes of a male-female relationship.

Seh-hee has been dating Ji-woo for two years. She feels insecure about her own body and suggests during love-making that he should fantasize about another girl. But this takes the film to further complexities; she decides on cosmetic surgery to transform her looks. Ji-Woo is still searching for her girlfriend but fails to identify her. Does she succeed in identifying the reason why she did it?



Figure 5.12 *Time* - Film

Ji-woo becomes attracted to a new waitress in the restaurant, but when she discovers his relationship with She-hee, she asks him to choose between the two. Shockingly, Ji-woo undergoes cosmetic surgery.

Considering the whole picture, nothing changes. This signifies the meaninglessness of actions done in modern urban life that result in nothing. Symbolical elements are used as the set properties. These also connote the meaningless, which is the dominant content of the narrative. These symbolic set props along with the ambience denote the passage of time.



Figure 5.13 *Time* - Film

“**The Bow**” is a melodic amalgam of mysticism, complex psychology, oriental spirituality, relationships, detachment, lust and nature; yet another expression by Kim Ki Duk through nature and metaphorical ambience.



Figure 5.14 *The Bow* - Film

There is an invisible simulacrum across most of his films that defines his narrative style. The integration of human life and nature and the meaninglessness of human desires are the key elements.

Appichatpong Weerasethakul

A film-maker known for his experimental techniques and personal approach to film-making, Appichatpong Weerasethakul is a controversial icon in his native Thailand because of his cinematic involvement in the country's socio-political scenario. His films are distinctive in blurring the boundaries between fiction and documentary. He took inspiration from the avant-garde film-makers of America. The speciality of his films is the collision between modernity and spirituality. He addresses the contemporary socio-political scenario with a subjective intervention of oriental spirituality. Mysticism predominates in his narrative and addresses the issues of the social psyche.

In **“Uncle Boonmee who can recall past lives”**, Boonmee is a middle-aged man in need of kidney dialysis who has come to a remote forest to end his days. The place was important to him as a child and he believes it to be the location of his former existences. His recalling of these past lives is partly, but only partly, a case of previous incarnations being presented in a mystical parallel flashback. At the dining table, Boonmee encounters the ghost of his wife. A hairy mystical creature is often seen throughout the film, which is a reincarnation from some past life.

Although the film portrays the trauma of a patient who has lost his wife, the narrative focuses largely on the implications of mystical beliefs and a cinematic style of layering it into the plot.



Figure 5.15 *Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past life* - Film

The ideas of Dharmic religions, such as Karma and rebirth, are manifested in films like “Uncle Boonmee, who can recall his past life”.

“Tropical Malady” has two parts. The first is based on a gay relationship but the second is much more mystical; a soldier lost in the woods encounters a tiger. These mystical creatures are identified as the respective motifs in his films. Reading along the lines of Buddhist symbolism, we can identify them as semiotic elements in relation to the myths and mystical concepts. They represent reincarnations. The living person’s encounter with the spirits could be read in a much-internalized sense of his own quest and dialogues with his internal existence.

Weerasethakul’s narrative techniques are closely associated with his cinematic style. The images are often very dark and motionless. Usage of long takes and very little movement are elements of his style. The camera is mostly static, and he uses a high contrast lighting pattern for most scenes. As the content is mostly about death, darkness and excessive blacks act as effective elements of the *mise-en-scène*.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on four film-makers. Films that effectively work on a transcendental narrative have been short-listed and subjected to detailed critical analysis, thus elucidating the structural cinematic features that manifest that narrative. This understanding has helped me to inculcate Indian transcendentalism in the narrative feature film “Tide of lies”, which manifests my research findings.

Chapter 6. CONTEXTUALIZING TRANSCENDENTALISM IN MY CREATIVE PRACTICES

Introduction

It is almost a decade now since I made my first short film, "Rhythm of Love and death". This chapter is more introspective; it identifies transcendental elements in the films I made before I started this research. It also explains the influences of other films and film-makers that helped me to structuralize the cinematic form.

I wrote a brief note about myself in the introduction, but it would be better at this stage to detail my background to delineate what engendered this research theme. People from my home town ask me, "Why, why are you into Cinema?" I might ask myself that question. What led me to the road I am now travelling?

When I recall my childhood, I remember my fascination with the magic of light connected with most of the pictures I see in my memory. We had a traditional model kitchen roofed with tiles with glass pieces between them. Being a kitchen heated with firewood, it was smudged with smoke. Daylight entered as streaks, moulding a scene of illusion of lights and shadows; the mud pots, utensils, fire and smoke added flavour to the magic. I fantasized unicorns, elephants, foxes appearing and disappearing through the magic of smoke and light.

Even when it faded my mind created further stories. The white smoke elephant was the 'Airaavata' (carrier of Lord Indra) of long-ago bedtime stories. Like most other children of a joint family, I also grew up hearing stories from the Mahabharata and listening to Ramayana chanting by Grandmother. My house and surroundings planted the seeds from which the thoughts I long to understand in depth were to germinate. When I was awake I could see my father sorting the best seeds for our plantation. Through him I developed a strong connection to and an admiration of nature. Integrating all these childhood experiences, transcendental philosophy is not something I chose; it is something that grew with me.

In 2010 I made my first short film, "The rhythm of love and death", and that was when my drive to develop a narrative that works on the internal dimensions of reality started. The film was about a dancer who is diagnosed with cancer. Later, he develops an alter ego of a lover woman, who is nothing but a personification of his love for death.

My later films were clearer attempts to experiment with a transcendental narrative. "Narcissus", a tale of self-love, is a film about a solitary lesbian who becomes a narcissist as she has no one other than herself to love. This film used images like those in "Meshes of the afternoon" by Maya Deren, juxtaposing them in a different plot and different context to create a different meaning.



Figure 6.1 *Meshes in the Afternoon* - Film



Figure 6.2 *Narcissus* - Film



Figure 6.3 *Meshes in the Afternoon* - Film



Figure 6.4 *Narcissus* - Film



Figure 6.5 *Meshes in the Afternoon* - Film



Figure 6.6 *Narcissus* - Film

“Awake in your Dreams” is a twenty-minute short film I made in 2012. This is a non-learner experimental film. It is a fiction about ‘sleep paralysis’: what if reality and dreams happen at the same time? Laura experiences the death of her daughter in her dreams but at same time it happens in reality. This creates a psychological trauma; she is tormented by her hallucinations and dreams. The film visualizes dream sequences based on the sleep analysis theories of Wilhelm Stekel. It deals with the invisible margin between reality and dreams and uses a transcendental narrative that makes the viewer experience a state of emotional upheaval.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2gtNP23_FA&t=478s



Figure 6.7 *Awake in your Dreams* - Film



Figure 6.8 *Awake in your Dreams* - Film



Figure 6.9 *Awake in your Dreams* - Film

Since I started film-making I have attempted to integrate various transcendental themes in my films. Most of them are very abstract. They were appreciated on the festival circuits and won awards, but many found them difficult to understand. My practice as a cinematographer gave me opportunities to travel and interact with people across various social and financial spectra. This made me change my approach, to make simpler films that would be understandable by everyone. Only then could the intention of the art form be satisfied.

Conclusion

As a result of analyzing transcendental elements in my own films and relating this analysis to the findings from chapter 3, which inquired why Indian society has become distanced from transcendental life, I have concluded that these philosophies should be catered for with simplicity so that attempts to reinstate them become effective.

Chapter 7. INTERIM FINDINGS - MAKING OF A FEATURE FILM; REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The outcome of this practice-led research on “Embedding Indian Transcendental Philosophy in Indian Cinematic Practice” was a feature-length narrative feature, “Tide of Lies”. This chapter portrays how the research findings were manifested through the fictional content and how the various transcendental schemas identified through the research contributed to framing the cinematic narrative. You will also be watching the film “Tide of Lies”.

Theoretical Framing

How do all these philosophical elements contextualize to form the contents of a work of fiction? What is the relevance of an alternative narrative to define those contents?

“What defines the classic narrative paradigm is therefore also at the root of its limitations; it is confined to an epistemology that ties it to a material and psychological paradigm governed largely by explicable laws of cause and effect. Such notions as ‘character motivation’, ‘narrative aims’, ‘obstacles’, ‘climax’ and so on have evolved to become as overwhelmingly dominant in cinema as the dogma of reason in our daily lives. Empirical evidence of motivations, mechanistic notions of causes and effects and scientifically based justifications for events and actions all serve to reinforce the dominance of the classic narrative’s role in the storytelling of the developed world” (Knudsen, 2009).

I had learned from the Pottan Theyyam and Karaimchamundi Theyyam that the philosophies are intended to create an internalized protest against a feeling of discrimination. That is the content shared across many texts and appears to be the core philosophy of ‘Indian transcendence’. The sense of discrimination isn’t any regional feeling but is spread across the globe. The plot of the film unfolds using a transcendental narrative in which a ballad of resistance against discrimination becomes an experience for the viewer. Another aspect identified through my investigation of the tradition is ‘travel’. This can also be identified in Bergman’s films. Travel is therefore another significant element of the plot, bringing the character close to satisfying the intended ‘Karma’.

The investigations focused largely on the Shaivism aspects of Indian philosophies, so not only the content but also the symbolisms, schemas and metaphors can be interpreted as semiotic elements that contribute to the *mise-en-scène*. This includes the colours, spatial concepts, cosmic concepts, choreographies, movements, lighting pattern, compositions, etc. Concepts of the traditional Indian methods and theories of acting such as ‘Rasa’ and ‘Bhava’ can be integrated with some cinematic methods of performance, though adapted to the medium of film. The aim of the feature film is an essential integration of transcendence in all aspects including content, form and narrative with the production methods.

“However, there are certain moments in some human lives in which the notion of survival may be less of an issue. For example, some people may ask themselves: how can I sacrifice myself for a cause that is greater than myself? How can I sacrifice my individuality for the sake of someone else? How can I rid myself of wanting or desiring material things or success? How can I lose myself in that landscape and be at one with nature? How can I lose myself in the beauty of this poem or painting? How can I dissolve myself and become one with a God?”
(Knudsen, 2009, p. 5).

This is exactly what I am trying through address through my film. In a classical or five-act theatre structure a dramatic emotional curve is developed. Western and Indian film-makers follow two different systems of five-act structure. It is interesting to discover that so many different structures can be found when referring to the classical structure followed by British film-makers. I believe these differences are the influences of ancient theatre on regional practice. Aristotle’s Poetics still characterizes common practice in the Western context:

Act 1 -- Exposition. We meet the *dramatis personae*, and time and place are established. We learn about the antecedents of the story. Attention is directed toward the inception of conflict and dramatic tensions.

Act 2 -- Complications. The course of action becomes more complicated, the "tying of knots" takes place. Interests clash, intrigues are spawned and events accelerate in a definite direction. Tension mounts and momentum builds up.

Act 3 -- The Climax of Action. The conflict develops to its high point; the hero stands at the crossroads, leading to victory or defeat, crashing or soaring.

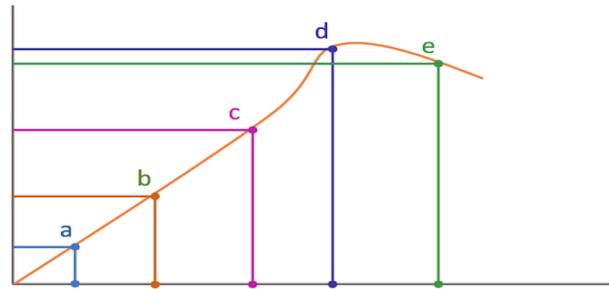
Act 4 -- Diminishing Action. Reversals. The consequences of Act 3 play out, momentum slows, and tension is heightened by false hopes/fears. If it's a tragedy, it looks as if the hero can be saved. If not, then it seems all will be lost.

Act 5 -- Catastrophe. The conflict is resolved, whether through a catastrophe, the downfall of the hero, or through his victory and transfiguration.

The history of the Indian theatre starts from the first century CE, primarily the Sanskrit theatre that flourished thanks to contributions by masters such as Kalidasa Bhasa and Bharatha Muni. Plays such as “Shakunthalam”, “Megadutha” and “Prathimanadakam” and theoretical texts such as “Natyashastra” laid the foundation for the five-act structure of Indian films.

Structure of a Story

The Classic 5 Act Structure



- a. Exposition: Introduction of characters and situations .
- b. Complication: Conflict becomes apparent and “cause” and “effect”- lead to complex situations .
- c. Crisis : Developing conflict create crisis in the story .
- d. Climax : All tensions from various crisis unify at this point, leading to the final conflict. It is the highest point of tension .
- e. Resolution : All the conflicts made by the plots and sub plots, are resolved at this point.

Figure 7.1 Five Act Structure

“The tension line or plotline will tell us how the story is going to be popular. All popular stories have a rising tension line. How far the tension line can rise? Only until, the final conflict between the hero and the villain takes place. At this climax, the good will defeat the evil. This is the point at which the audience will applaud” (Sankaramanglam, 2013).

Are the complications of the plot limited only to cause and effect? There are often coincidental and mystical premises through which complications can arise, but to manifest this we need alternative narrative structures. Films constitute a rich iconography of man that signifies a necessity of narratives that integrates both the indigenous cultural elements and the universality of film grammar.

“Cinema is made spontaneously as if images of man. Moreover, the cinema medium has been used to consciously document man’s life” (Roberge, 1985).

To explore the possible dimensions of men in the widest possible way, we need to be free from the restrictions of classical narrative and delineate narrative methods that act as the best ground for the kind of stories being told.

“Thus, a filmmaker who wishes to record human experience is invited twice over to be an artist. How can he perceive man in all his dimensions from the biological to the spiritual, unless he has the sensitivity of an artist? And how can he render what he has perceived unless, mastering film language, he can express himself fully through that language? In fact, even if a filmmaker wanted to limit himself to depicting the surface of things and persons, his instrument would almost force him to do more than that, and his medium would entice him to communicate to his records the reverberations of his own sensitivity” (Roberge, 1985).

To master this film language and to make myself the instrument that resonates with my own self, I needed to understand and be influenced by the films by the film-makers on whom I had focused. From them I learned how the philosophies that constitute the iconography of men in their indigenous settings are interpreted as a subconscious experience communicated through the language of cinema. All film-makers interpret the

reality around them as images and sounds and make personal statements, but those realities are perceived subjectively by the viewer on the basis of their cultural sensibilities and cognitive ethos. My attempt is to make the narrative work aesthetically for the viewer as a subjective subconscious experience. This defines and redefines the context to different people as unique experiences. However, there are still elements that transcend culture and communicate universally. What makes it possible? "Simplicity". I aim to make my film very simple in terms of the circumstances it portrays, so it never fails to transmit its content directly to everyone irrespective of their film literacy.

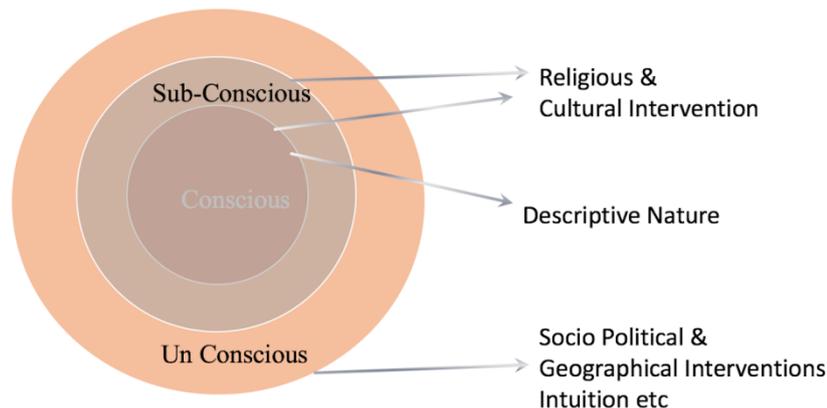


Figure 7.2 Consciousness and visual interaction

Apart from the adaptation of indigenous elements of the transcendental tradition to the *mise-en-scène* of the films, another signifier of the narrative is the 'rhythm of the film'. This will also be influenced by the rhymes and pace of transcendental music traditions and mechanical accelerations and emotional build-ups of the narrative structures, assimilated in the various art forms discussed earlier. The 'musical rhythm' and the 'film rhythm' have little in common but inspire by the ways in which they drive the narrative.

"There are, of course similarities between musical and cinematographic rhythms since both are rhythms. But there are no equivalencies such that one could speak of musical rhythm when speaking of a film. First of all, the eyes does not perceive visual durations ad the ear perceives sounds" (Roberge, 1985).

"In fact, it is by the reference to the spatial data that the eye asses the relative duration of the things. It does not attach any sense to relations of duration unless by their structure, their movement or their intensity the represented things in question already have a meaning which space 'a priori' confers into them" (Roberge, 1985).

As film is more about the relationship of the emotions of nature to human emotions and states of mind, these spatio-temporal concepts act as a stimulus to the semiotic structures

of the spatial derivatives of traditional arts, thus complementing them in formulating the patterns of duration of shots to be used and the elements of the *mise-en-scène* to be adopted.

The videos I made were a journey towards understanding the essence and depths of Indian transcendence. They also addressed the question of how disconnected the Indian psyche has become from the essential spiritual identity of India. After the Aryan Invasion, the spiritual idealism of India underwent a huge transformation and became a victim of institutional Brahmanism. The 'Chaturvarnya' (caste hierarchy system) largely confined ritual and religious practices to a class. However, later history witnessed resistance against this, using spirituality and rituals as a medium.

Trying to understand the practical meaning of the true essence of transcendental identity of India, I opted for the term 'Oneness'. The idea of 'Advaita', non-duality, is a key element in my work. All three Mahavakya (considered as extracts from the Vedas) clearly state this state of divine Oneness. They are 'Tatvasmasi' (that is me), 'Aham Bhramasmi' (I am Brahma, the Supreme), and Ayam Athma Bhrama (I and Brahma are the same). All these speak about the transcending of consciousness to a level of oneness between human and nature, in which you experience no discrimination but only the bliss of love. This oneness is reflected in the benevolence of mankind and nature.

The literature of ancient India also signifies the oneness of nature. The play "Rithusamhara" by the poet Kaladana is an ideal example. It is about the correlation between the seasons and moods of romance. Modern manifestations of experiencing integral spirituality are a beneficial act of dismantling discriminations on the basis of colour, creed, caste, nation, etc. That spiritual unity benefits both humanity and nature, as seen in my video about Sadhana Forest, '100 acres of man-made forest as an effort by people from 140 nations'.

My feature film will reflect a similar idea. It is about the interaction of human emotions and seasons. My personal experiences with people ruined by natural calamities made me understand there comes a force of oneness that wipes out all prevailing discriminations, and they unite for survival. Indeed, the act of devastation becomes a blessing in disguise. My aim is to create a work of fiction out of this philosophical idea of Adi Sankaracharya:

*manobuddhyahaṅkāra cittāni nāhaṃ
na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre
na ca vyoma bhūmir na tejo na vāyuh
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham*

*na ca prāṇasañjño na vai pañcavāyuh
na vā saptadhātur na vā pañcakośaḥ
na vākpāṇipādaḥ na copasthapāyu
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham*

*na me dveṣarāgau na me lobhamohau
mado naiva me naiva mātsaryabhāvaḥ
na dharma na cārtho na kāmo na mokṣaḥ*

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham

*na puṇyaṃ na pāpaṃ na saukhyaṃ na duhkhaṃ
na mantra na tīrthaṃ na vedā na yajña
ahaṃ bhojanaṃ naiva bhojyaṃ na bhoktā
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham*

*na me mṛtyuśāṅkā na me jātibhedaḥ
pitā naiva me naiva mātā na janmaḥ
na bandhur na mitraṃ gurunaiva śiṣyaḥ
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham*

*ahaṃ nirvikalpo nirākāra rūpo
vibhutvā ca sarvatra sarvendriyāṇaṃ
na cāsaṅgata naiva muktir na meyaḥ
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham*

Athmashatakam (Nirvana Shatakam)
Aadi Sankara
Advaita Sidhantha

- 1) I am not mind, nor intellect, nor ego, nor the reflections of inner self (citha). I am not the five senses. I am beyond that. I am not the ether, nor the earth, nor the fire, nor the wind (the five elements). I am indeed that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness.
- 2) Neither can I be termed as energy (prāṇa), nor the five types of breath (vāyuḥ), nor the seven material essences, nor the five sheaths (pañcha-kośa). Neither am I the five instruments of elimination, procreation, motion, grasping, or speaking. I am indeed, that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness.
- 3) I have no hatred or dislike, nor affiliation or liking, nor greed, nor delusion, nor pride or haughtiness, nor feelings of envy or jealousy. I have no duty (dharma), nor any money, nor any desire (kāma), nor even liberation (mokṣa). I am indeed that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness.
- 4) I have neither merit (virtue) nor demerit (vice). I do not commit sins or good deeds, or have happiness or sorrow, pain or pleasure. I do not need mantras, holy places, scriptures (Vedas), rituals or sacrifices (yajñas). I am none of the triad of the observer or one who experiences, the process of observing or experiencing, or any object being observed or experienced. I am indeed that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness.
- 5) I do not have fear of death, as I do not have death. I have no separation from my true self, no doubt about my existence, nor have I discrimination based on birth. I have no father or mother, nor did I have a birth. I am not the relative, nor the friend, nor the guru, nor the disciple. I am indeed that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness.
- 6) I am all-pervasive. I am without any attributes, and without any form. I have attachment neither to the world nor to liberation (Mukti). I have no wishes for anything because I am

everything, everywhere, every time, always in equilibrium. I am indeed that eternal knowing and bliss, the auspicious (Śivam), love and pure consciousness. (Anon., n.d.)

Plot of Feature Film “Tide of Lies”

Maria, a brown daughter of white parents, is currently a divorcee and running a comic publishing company. Deep inside she has a wounded sense of inferiority about her identity, which she disguises under a veneer of dominance, superiority and arrogance. She is now very tense as she needs to publish a new comic based on a superwoman who saved the city from a tsunami.

She has an Indian maid, Madhavi, who is an illegal immigrant. The maid works with great care and to a perfect standard, but her presence and efforts are often ignored. Madhavi sacrifices her own life to rescue Maria from an accident during their journey to work. Since she is an illegal migrant, the police say there is no one by that name in our country so her Death cannot be recorded.

Maria learns that Madhavi has a daughter, Bhanu, back in Kerala. She journeys to find her and when they meet she decides to adopt her. Maria hides the fact that she knew her mother and her mother is dead. Later, when she witnesses Bhanu’s innocent and organic childhood, she changes her decision about adoption. But will she reveal the truth about her mother’s death? Will Bhanu ever come to know her mother is dead? Maria returns to the UK to publish her new comic.

Integration of research themes into the film

The research focused on understanding the stories of the two Theyyams, Pottan and Karaimchamundi. Leaving the story aside, what exactly is the philosophy depicted through the performances? In Pottan Theyyam it is about the sense of oneness and the senselessness of discrimination. This is a major theme in “Tide of Lies”, which is set in a modern-day family context.

Death is not the end, but life after death is not taken into account in any metaphysical terms; but through a tide of lies, Madhavi sacrifices her life to save Maria. However, her life doesn’t end there. It is through her selfless actions and good deeds that Maria’s life changes. The death initiates a journey. Although this journey is a search for Madhavi’s child, it is a reflection of her own unrealized past. She decides to come back possessing nothing.

The journey is a theme associated with traditional Indian thought:

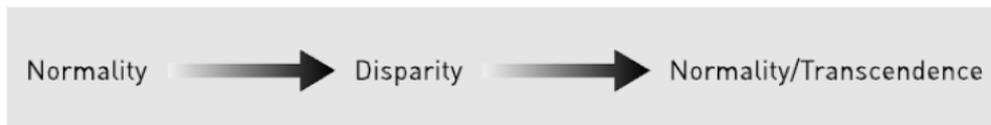
Theerthayathra, the journey which transforms you. It is through the journey you introspect (Kasrvalli, 2016).

Maria searches for Bhanu, though Bhanu is already with Maria, which she doesn’t realize until a particular situation arises. When she spends more time with her she decides to adopt her. But being with her and recognizing the innocence and beauty and simplicity of her existence, Maria relates it to the life she never had. But it is also a realization that being a

mother is not about adoption, but providing a mother's emotional support when the girl needs it. That realization dawns when the girl reaches puberty.

These situations refer to key themes identified through the research:

1. Unconditionality
2. Oneness
3. Fertility



“This tri-partite structure is reminiscent of the Zen narrative structure one might see in much of Ozu’s later work normality – disparity - normality/transcendence in such a narrative, nothing need superficially change; the change occurs in the viewer as a consequence of going through the experience and where the situation remains exactly the same at the end, as it was in the beginning, there is, nevertheless, a different transcendental relationship with that situation” (Erik Knudsen, n.d., p. 21).

Maria returns to the UK. Nothing has changed physically or conceptually, yet there has been a change that cannot be physically explained. Maria’s journey to meet her husband, and later incidents, lead to the emotional state mentioned in the Nirvana Shatakam. She goes through an emotional trauma, she expresses all her worries, but later it ends in a state of emotionlessness, Nirvana.

A detailed discussion of the form and content of the film and research aspects will be presented in the visual essay.

Conclusion

The difference between the classical five-act narrative and the transcendental narrative is illustrated in this chapter. It also explains how to read the research outcome, the feature film “Tide of Lies”, which is an Annex to this chapter. The key elements identified through the research and how they helped me to build the structure of the film are visually explained through a documentary that becomes an Annex to the conclusion.

Chapter 8. Thesis Feature Film

Introduction

“Tide of Lies” is a narrative feature film that is the main practical outcome of the research findings in fictional form. The major philosophical and the narrative and structural findings of the research are manifested in this film.



To watch Tide of Lies Film click the link and please enter the password

<https://goo.gl/forms/m7Z2K8c2XdLHZV3f2>

Password: tolfilm

Conclusion

As you have read the entire document and watched the film, it should be evident now how all the research findings contributed to the narrative structure and content of the film. This film is a major part of my submission for PhD.

CONCLUSION

The interim findings are presented in the previous chapter, but since the method of research was practice-led, involving audio-visual content, it would give a better understanding of the journey if it were illustrated in a Visual Essay form. This conclusion consists of two parts. One is the visual essay, “Transcending Tide of Lies”, which debriefs the feature film and explains its connection to the research. The other is the textual conclusion, which reflects back on the primary research questions and debriefs how they have been addressed.

“Transcending Tide of Lies” is a creative reflection and analysis of how the research findings are articulated using the various aspects of film-making.



Please follow the link to watch the visual essay
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_5KQS92O4M

How the research questions were addressed

1. *How can a film-maker develop a cinematic form that consciously engages with Indian transcendental philosophy?*

Through the primary research I have addressed the various art forms and practices that have engaged with Indian transcendental philosophy. Three key points are identified. The films of transcendental film-makers from other cultures are taken as case studies, and integrating the lessons from these with my own creative practice I have developed an Indian transcendental cinematic narrative form.

2. *How could the process of film-making contribute to the film-maker consciously engaging with Indian transcendental philosophy?*

I developed a feature length fiction screenplay, which was a result of data collection, contextual analysis and ethnographic studies all involving the practice of film-making. This screenplay was further improved in various stages of production and post-production. The film “Tide of Lies” and the visual essay “Transcending Tide of Lies” encompass the answer to this question.

Journey of Research

I believe there is a need for introspection while I conclude this thesis. “Embedding Indian Transcendental Philosophy in Indian Cinematic Practice” is the title formulated at the beginning, and this title itself raised questions that signified the necessity of the research. A practice-based research method was adopted to address all the questions that were raised. The main questions addressed were “How can a cinematic form and an alternative cinematic narrative that can effectively articulate Indian transcendental philosophy be developed in Indian cinema? How could a feature film production be used as a tool to address this issue?”

Revelations in various stages of the research contributed to the idea of how this feature film should be constructed. The three short videos on “Transcendence and Indian Life” investigated the reasons why Indian society has become distanced from transcendental ideas, which were an essential part Indian life in previous years. Most of their manifestations are too complex and abstract for the everyday busy Indian to accept cinema as an art form that is flexible enough to manifest those ideas in both concrete and abstract form. However, to develop a story that encapsulates the core philosophy in an easily-understood and clearly-related way was certainly challenging. Being simple is one answer to this challenge, so the metaphorical and philosophical notions identified were developed within a plot that is a realistic modern-day story with which most of us could empathize. It is not the godly myths of the concept of non-discrimination and state of oneness that are depicted in the film, but a realistic portrayal of human life where a sense of self-tormenting and inferiority is developed by the discriminating perception within society. The unconditional self-sacrifice Madhavi triggers a situation in which Maria submits herself to a self-imposed quest. The realization of her own inert existence and the absolute realization of motherhood evolve within her through her interactions with Bhanu.

The truth of Madhavi’s death is never revealed to her family, though there were many occasions in the film when this could have been done. However, when Bhanu says, “Now I know where my mother is”, a deliberate attempt is made to depict two versions of an unspoken truth.

The transcendental articulation is made not only to the content but also to the form of film. This is all discussed in detailed in the documentary. The time and space concepts of the film are significantly influenced by the Indian transcendental arts. Those are subjected to investigation. Most of those art forms are accompanied by percussion, which begins at a very slow tempo, changing to medium fast and then very fast as the emotional graph of the story rises, and afterwards relaxing to a very slow tempo again as the conclusion

approaches. The same tempo pattern is adopted in the organization of shots, camera movements and editing pattern.

The spatial concept of most of the transcendental forms suggest a uniform pattern, from the limited and bounded spaces to open natural terrains as the character is subjected to transformations. An attempt has been made to incorporate this into the film: Maria's darker emotions are mostly expressed in limited interiors, but the scenes where she is subjected to incidents that trigger a measure of insight and transformation happen in open natural environments.

The meanings of colours and their relationship to the 'Rasa' concept have been adopted to contribute to the cinematic form. Red is associated with 'Raudram' (fury, anger, disgust), which serves as the pivotal colour tone for scenes portraying those emotions, and green is associated with 'Sringaram' (love, unconditionality) for the scenes inclining to those emotions. Also, costumes have been selected on the basis of the concept of Rasa, where the 'Sthayi bhava' (permeant mood) of each character is referenced by the colour they wear: blacks, greys and olives for Maria; green and yellow for Madhavi; and tones of red and pink for Bhanu. These connections aren't meant to be evident when watching the film, but they work on a subconscious level to convey the nature of each character.

Three key elements of Indian transcendence identified through contextual analysis, participatory observation and autoethnographic research are:

1. Unconditionality
2. Oneness
3. Fertility

The emotions of Madhavi are always ignored by Maria and she often behaves very rudely towards her, but even when Madhavi is in the midst of all those problems, she tries to be very faithful to her Karma and even sacrifices her life to save Maria. From a materialist perspective, her act could be just an instant response to a disaster or an act of kindness. But spiritually articulating the act, someone has ascended to a higher state of consciousness to sacrifice even their life for someone else. Witnessing the act of sacrifice is what led Maria to find Bhanu, and this effects a transformation within Maria. Her innocent and earthly childhood redefines the concept of happiness that Maria postulated.

Oneness is often discussed in its metaphysical sense in Indian spiritual premises. The Upanishads signify its prominence. Even when discrimination dominated society, the Indian transcendental art forms continued to signify the essence of oneness. I wanted to demystify this to a more realistic experience. Life after death also means the ripples of Karma, the reminiscence of deeds done before death. Being a mother cannot be limited to its biological aspects. After Madhavi's death, Maria transcended to the experience of motherhood when Bhanu needed her mother. There are instances where Bhanu asks Maria, "When will my mother come back?" That question is never answered verbally, but through Maria's actions.

The philosophical dimensions of 'fertility' in Indian transcendence are discussed in earlier sections. The Shiva and Shakthi traditions denote this prominently. The myth of

Karaimchamundi and the presence of the mother in Pottan Theyyam all signify this notion. “Tide of Lies” discusses fertility in three different dimensions and it is discussed in detail in the visual essay “Transcending Tide of Lies”.

1) How can a film-maker develop a cinematic form that consciously engages with Indian transcendental philosophy?

The practice of film-making, including the development of content and form, was formulated using the research findings. Indian transcendental philosophy involves a broader spectrum of ideas, but it is essential to confine oneself to certain key themes to structure a cinematic form. The practice of film-making was also involved in investigating these key themes. As mentioned in the foregoing chapters, various transcendental art forms were documented during the research. Each of these art forms was evaluated and I was able to find three common themes they all share. These are discussed in detail in this chapter. Those key entities are layered in a fictional feature film script, consciously intending to imply a transcendental narrative structure.

The film is more character-driven than plot-driven. It manifests transcendence through the emotional states and experiences of the central character Maria. Unlike a classical five-act structure, which uses an organic emotional graph of building-up the plot through exposition to complication, which leads to a crisis, “Tide of Lies” unveils the complexity of the character right from the first scene, which is her point of normalcy. The plot develops to a point of disparity after the death of Madhavi. The film holds no factor of suspense. The audience is aware of all happenings, but the other characters are unaware of the death of Madhavi. This offers experiential empathy to the audience. There is a point of return to the character, which is her journey back to normalcy, but it is a transcended normalcy.

2) How could the process of film-making contribute to the film-maker consciously engaging with Indian transcendental philosophy?

All the processes of film-making passed consciously through a stage of engaging with the research findings about Indian transcendental philosophy, which is also attained through the involvement of research tools and film-making as a method of research.

The plot of “Tide of Lies” is inspired by the major philosophical narrative and content discussed in Pottan Theyyam, which is the senselessness of discrimination and the significance of oneness. This, along with two other key findings, is manifested in a modern-day story. Conscious efforts were made to ensure that the content unveils these key points along with the progression of a transcendental narrative structure.

The narrative structure of all the Indian transcendental arts identified uses a common spatio-temporal manifestation. The normalcy where we unveil the complication happens in closed and confined spaces. However, at the curve of the plot where disparity and transcendence happen, the special themes portray wider, natural spaces. This schema is adapted in “Tide of Lies”. During the initial part of the film where we portray the normalcy of the character, most of the shots are either close-ups or medium shots, with limited camera movement, exposing minimal spaces. Also, the dialogues and emotional overtones are accorded more significance than the ambience. However, at the point of disparity,

where Madhavi unconditionally sacrifices her life, the scene is built in connection with nature and ambient sounds. Nature is an additional character in the scene. Similarly, the pace of the editing pattern, the sound design, the music, the colour tones are all used effectively to tell the story in a transcendental narrative based on the research findings. This is discussed visually in “Transcending Tide of Lies”.

I believe my selection of tools was best suited to investigating, proving and finding solutions for all the research questions addressed. This research addressed Indian transcendentalism in a wider perspective, focused down on the core of its philosophy, and developed a cinematic form to manifest the findings. Much further research could be undertaken to explore different perspectives on Indian transcendentalism and this could lead to an indefinite number of plots and art forms.

My future plans are to engage with both cinema academics and film-making practices. I would like to extend the knowledge and experience gained through this research to develop more research projects that engage with film-making practices and Indian philosophy.

Mahabharata is a magnum opus among the Indian scriptures. It has been subjected to many literary interpretations. I would like to use the facets developed through this research to pursue another project that concentrates more on the visual interpretations of Mahabharata and related literature.

I am shaping a career in which I can create narrative features and documentaries of various themes and styles, but with a layer of seeking answers to the philosophical questions that I ask myself. I have a constant quest for “The birth of God”, which is a recurrent theme in most of my works including this research. Constant endeavours are invested in discovering myself.

ANNEX 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD8Alq6254s>

ANNEX 2: The Mystic Heights: Vlog 2-1 Dr Govinda Raja Varma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEBxOhD6cxc>

ANNEX3

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 2-2 Dr Govinda Raja Varma

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxS4_L4IKI4

ANNEX 4

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 3 -Vijisha Haridas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l41XTxIBBQA&t=257s>

ANNEX 5

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 4 Sujitha

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26kd8PcopyS>

ANNEX 6

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 5 Shri Ramachandra Panikar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEDQdcR1QrE>

ANNEX 7

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 6 Shri Surendra Panikar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf41jRn6Q6k&t=91s>

ANNEX 8

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 7 Vaathilmaadam Sree Vathil madam Pottan Theyyam
Devasthanam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s8xsEB7tD4>

ANNEX 9

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 8 Kottathalchi Hill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dG6iXQ4bu8>

ANNEX 10

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 9 Rev.Fr Anthony, Deepthi Cultural Centre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCSxUV9fOEU>

ANNEX 11

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 10 Muthappan Theyyam at Parashinikadavu Madapura

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqp9IL-REYM&t=157s>

ANNEX 12

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 11 Shri Harish

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRkANi_DQZo

ANNEX 13

The Mystic Heights Vlog 12 Muthappan Theyyam at home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9w9Q8rooFI>

ANNEX 14

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 13 Shri Noble Peter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MedriLHLiAA>

ANNEX 15

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 14 Shri Rahul Easwar

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sY-8ni_87w

ANNEX 16

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 16 Prof Chandramohan Nair& Prof Kaviyoor Shivaprasad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-JpNWd0Huw&t=690s>

ANNEX 17

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 17 Sri Madhu Samudra, Sri Sajeew Samudra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0JC7T9Tplw&t=1880s>

ANNEX 18

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 18 Transcendence and the Baul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbHYziZR328&t=1s>

ANNEX 19

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 19 The Concept of Nataraja

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ops0WJ1jBjM&t=1282s>

ANNEX 20

The Mystic Heights: Vlog 20 Sri Aurobindo and Integral Psychology- Dr Alok Pandey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJWNzvmDWk&t=918s>

ANNEX 21

Transcendental Cinema: Director's/ Academic's View- Sri John Sankaramangalam

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEA8_tlyL3A&t=73s

ANNEX 22

Transcendental Cinema: Cinematographer's View-Shri Sunny Joseph ISC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTN7LNmtqh8&t=123s>

ANNEX 23

Transcendental Cinema: Screen Writer's View- Sri John Paul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnb9aTnPGP4&t=6s>

ANNEX 24

Transcendental Cinema: Editor's View-Smt Beena Paul

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg_ftcb_rgg&t=756s

ANNEX 25

Transcendental Cinema: Critic's View-Sri Vijayakrishnan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Y0uZjKcMg&feature=youtu.be>

ANNEX 26

Transcendental Cinema: Director's View-Sri Gireesh Kasarvalli

<https://youtu.be/z8eAlfTIQxc>

ANNEX 27

Transcendental Spaces: When Men Transcends to Rhythm- Trichur Pooram

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5UXdOUU5kUWV4ckE>

ANNEX 28

Transcendental Spaces: Chidambaram- The dark clouds in the sky of consciousness

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5UXdOUU5kUWV4ckE>

ANNEX 29

Transcendental Spaces: Sadhana- Globe in the benevolence of nature

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5UXdOUU5kUWV4ckE>

ANNEX 30

One and 1's of Transcendence- Research Documentary

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx2cLDwutfg5eXNoRDFiZENKQ1U>

ANNEX 31

Awake in your Dreams- Short film

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2gtNP23_FA&t=478s

ANNEX 32

Tide of Lies- Feature Film

<https://goo.gl/forms/m7Z2K8c2XdLHZV3f2>

Password:tofilm

ANNEX 33

Visual Essay- Transcending Tide of Lies

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_5KQS92O4M

ANNEX 33

Tide of Lies- Screenplay

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=16E-FuhSa8kCC4ev4aNfK-0W5Eb-cH6vX>

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