



Sri Lankan Tamil directors' preference on making short films over feature films

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Abstract— *The research seeks to find out the Sri Lankan Tamil directors' preference on making short films over feature films. The study examines what are the reasons that made the Sri Lankan Tamil directors make more short films than feature films. In order to carry out the objective of the research, survey methodology was employed. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews. The research found out that Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers' initial aim is to make feature films. The Sri Lankan Tamil directors give priority to the short films because of the following reasons; No industry for Sri Lankan Tamil cinema, Lack of knowledge regarding distribution and productions of Tamil feature films, no producers are ready to make feature films in Sri Lanka but Short films in little budget, most of the diaspora producers are investing money in Indian Tamil cinema, Sri Lankan Tamil audience are influenced by the Indian Tamil cinema, no proper Tamil filmmaking institute in Sri Lanka, lack of technical knowledge, Lack of interest among theatre owners on Sri Lankan Tamil movies. Sri Lankan Tamil directors use short films to practice the process of filmmaking in script writing, editing, cinematography and other filmmaking elements. Due to lack of producers Sri Lankan Tamil directors produce the short films from their own money. But somehow, they are getting income from screening the short films. Though few film festivals have political influences, National and International short film festivals and competitions encourage the Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers to make more short films. Number of Tamil short films from Eastern province in Sri Lanka have been selected to Cannes film festival recently. Sri Lankan Tamil short film directors have earned very good profit in the short film competitions just by spending few amounts to produce the short films. Now a days Sri Lankan Tamil television channels are producing more TV programs on Sri Lankan Tamil short films such as IppadikuIyakkunar, Film City, Vizhuthukal, King maker and Namma Hits. It pushes the Sri Lankan Tamil directors to get involved in more short films.*

Keywords— *Preference, Sri Lankan Tamil Cinema, Feature films, Short films, Survey method.*

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

“Film, also called motion picture or movie, series of still photographs on film, projected in rapid succession onto a screen by means of light. Because of the optical phenomenon known as persistence of vision, this gives the illusion of actual, smooth and continuous movement. Film is a remarkable effective medium in conveying drama and especially in the evocation of emotion” Says Professor of Film and Comparative Literature, Yale University

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science defines a short film as “an original motion picture that has a running time of 40 minutes or less, including all credits”.

Sri Lankan cinema encompasses the films made in Sri Lanka. It is a fledgling industry that has struggled to find a footing since its inauguration in 1947 with Kadawanu Poranduwa produced by S.M. Nayagam of Chitra Kala Movietone. Sri Lankan films are usually made in the Sinhalese Language as well as in Tamil Language. In the first nine years most films were made in South India

and followed the conventions of Indian cinema. (Thampi Ayya Thevathas). Sri Lankan Tamil cinema, the Tamil Language film industry in Sri Lanka has remained relatively small with fewer than 100 films produced. The Tamil film industry in Sri Lanka is not as developed as Sinhala Cinema or its Indian counterpart, the Tamil Cinema of Kodambakkam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. There is a lot of competition from Tamil films from Tamil Nadu, India as well as obstacles from the long run ethnic civil war in Sri Lanka. Tamils contributed significantly to Sinhala Cinema as well as Indian Tamil Cinema. Only a few Tamil language films were produced in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Earlier Tamil movies produced were all most destroyed or unrecovered due to civil war. A Sinhalese film was dubbed in Tamil in December 29, 1951. The movie Samuthayam (Society), an adaptation of C.N. Annadurai's Velaikkari was made in 16 mm and Technicolor. It was shown in 1962 and 1963. Thottakkari (Plantation Woman), released on March 28, 1962, was the first Sri Lankan Tamil film in the standard 35 mm format.

So far there are 50+ Tamil films have been made. There are few posters and advertisements of Sri Lankan Tamil films since 1960s, but most of the films had been dropped. The Tamil Films which were produced here are restricted in film screenings. Those films were shown only one or two times and had not distributed to the theatres in other areas. Meanwhile Sri Lankan Tamil directors are keen on making short films and there are more than 100 short films released every year in recent times, especially on YouTube or Short film festivals in Sri Lanka. (Thampi Ayya Thevathas)

Since no much formal studies have so far been undertaken for the Sri Lankan Tamil cinema, the aim of the present study is to find out the reasons why do Sri Lankan Tamil directors prefer to make short films than feature films.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select process, and analyze information about a topic. (Research guide, University of Witwatersrand).

2.1 Survey Methodology

A survey is a research method used for collecting data from a predefined group of respondents to gain information and insights into various topics of interest. They can have multiple purposes, and researchers can conduct it in many ways depending on the methodology chosen and the study's goal. (Adi Bhat, Global VP).

The present study has used Personal-in-depth interviews, which is one of the survey methods to examine the

research problem. As such the present study has used a total number of 15 personal in-depth interviews as follows,

Five interviews of Sri Lankan Tamil film feature film directors

Five interviews of Sri Lankan Tamil film short film directors

Five interviews of Sri Lankan Tamil film critiques.

The samples for the present study have been selected through purposive non-random sampling method.

A purposive sample, also referred to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. This is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a non-random manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population (Paul J. Lavrakas 2008)

This study was conducted with ten Tamil filmmakers in Sri Lanka and two Tamil film critiques in Sri Lanka.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to this study, all the respondents have stated that short film is a main tool where filmmakers can learn many things regarding filmmaking. The film critiques stated that the Sri Lankan Tamil Cinema industry was destroyed due to the civil war. Very few Tamil films were released during the civil war period. Sri Lankan Tamil directors started to make more number of short films than feature films after the war, meanwhile Sri Lankan Tamil audience have been influenced by South Indian cinema since the Tamil cinema in India have been grown to the international level.

80% of the Sri Lankan Tamil movie directors stated that since they don't have producers to make feature films, They are making short films with their own money. Film critiques said that most of the Sri Lankan Diaspora producers like to invest their money on South Indian movies rather than Sri Lankan Tamil movies. 60% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that most of the diaspora producers produce small budget Tamil short films in Sri Lanka rather than Tamil Feature films. 20% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that few diaspora producers helped them to make feature films in Sri Lanka.

Film critique Thampi Ayya Thevathas stated that total number of Sri Lankan Tamil audience is lesser than Tamil audience in India. Therefore most of the Sri Lankan producers are willing to produce films in South Indian industry. Producers are not able earn money in Sri Lankan

Tamil cinema since Sri Lankan Tamil Audiences and media are attached to the Indian Tamil cinema. He further stated that so many short film directors have become as feature film directors in Indian Tamil cinema.

Film critique Uma Varatharajan stated that Sri Lanka doesn't have any professional Tamil institution to teach filmmaking. Therefore most of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors carry their filmmaking passion with short films. And Sri Lankan theatres give priority only to the Indian Tamil cinema.

Majority of 70% Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that now a days Sri Lankan Tamil media have started to give some importance to Sri Lankan Tamil short films. The Television channels are telecasting Sri Lankan Tamil short films in their programmes such as *Ippadikulyakkunar*, *Film City*, *Vizhuthukal*, *King maker* and *Namma Hits*. Sri Lankan director Ananda Ramanan got a chance to make a feature film after his short film won the first place in a short film festival conducted by IBC Tamil television channel.

Film critiques stated that There are a lot of Tamil short film directors in Sri Lanka now a days. There are so many registered and unregistered Tamil short filmmaking groups in Sri Lanka who have done number of short films with their own money or very few budget.

40% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that they didn't face any challenges in making short films since they had the filmmaking equipments with them. 60% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that they faced many challenges in making short films such as no producers, no quality camera, no proper actors, no proper technical team.

Majority of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that though their aim is making feature films, they prefer to make short films because they can convey a message in a short time span.

Director Kodeeswaran said that directors don't need censor certificate to screen the short films. Therefore it is easy for them to screen the short films in the theatres.

80% of the directors stated that making short films help them to learn the process of the feature filmmaking. The short film directors learn about cinematography, Editing, Lighting, Story discussion and other aspects of the movie from the short films.

Film critiques stated that people are not ready to spend much time on movies now a days. Therefore they watch only famous movies. That's why now a days most of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors are making short film than feature films.

60% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that they were encouraged by the national and international short

film festivals to create more short films than feature films. Director Grason Prasanth said though he earned money from short film festivals, these festivals have political influences and they restricted the directors vision by giving theme for the short film competitions.

Majority of the Sri Lankan Tamil short film directors stated that they have earned good income from the short films from the film festivals and by screening in theatres or screening halls. Few short films from Sri Lankan Tamil directors from Batticaloa and Trincomalee have been selected in Cannes film festival. 50% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors have agreed that they got recognitions by a group of people and few media because of their short films. Rest of them stated that they didn't get recognitions among people or media.

70% of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors stated that they are not able to screen their feature films in all theatres in Sri Lanka. Their films screenings are restricted to one or two theatres or few number of screenings as they don't have very big producers to distribute to the theatre circuit. *Komali Kings* is the last Sri Lankan Tamil feature film which was screened in all the theatres in Sri Lanka due to the proper producers.

All the Sri Lankan Tamil directors and the film critiques have agreed that because of not having an industry for Sri Lankan Tamil film, most of the directors have no idea how to start the process of feature filmmaking and they are not aware about the movie distribution to the theatres with a good profit. Therefore most of the Sri Lankan Tamil directors are afraid to make feature films though they like to do it.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that, Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers' initial aim is to make feature films. The Sri Lankan Tamil directors give priority to the short films because of the following reasons; No industry for Sri Lankan Tamil cinema, Lack of knowledge regarding distribution and productions of Tamil feature films, no producers are ready to make feature films in Sri Lanka but Short films in little budget, most of the diaspora producers are investing money in Indian Tamil cinema, Sri Lankan Tamil audience are influenced by the Indian Tamil cinema, no proper Tamil filmmaking institute in Sri Lanka, lack of technical knowledge, Lack of interest among theatre owners on Sri Lankan Tamil movies.

Sri Lankan Tamil directors use short films to practice the process of filmmaking in script writing, editing, cinematography and other filmmaking elements. Due to lack of producers Sri Lankan Tamil directors produce the

short films from their own money. But somehow, they are getting income from screening the short films.

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