

Session 5- July 15-Film Appreciation- C S Venkiteswaran



Dr. C. S. Venkiteswaran is a renowned Indian film critic, professor, documentary filmmaker and writer. He writes predominantly in English and Malayalam and won the National Film Award for Best Film Critic in 2009. He started off by stating that the primary goal of this session is to understand cinematic images and other elements that give depth to movies. Cinema is a versatile medium where different elements like visual imagination, emotional expressions and art comes together. It is also an industrial art, as cinema is a result of a lot of scientific and industrial experiments. From the invention of celluloid camera to today's digital camera, we can see how science and technology have influenced cinema.

Cinema is a hybrid composite art that is evolving. It has a global history as well as local history. Cinema has always tried to capture the diverse custom, culture, literature, art and politics. Throughout history, we can see the evident influence of different artistic forms (music, dance and literature) in different elements of cinema like: costume, background, light and settings.

Then he gave an overview of how ancient paintings and artworks are an early depiction of cinematic image. Colours, people, things, backgrounds, and other features helps to evoke

emotions and create a dramatic cinematic situation. The second BC paintings in the Ajan caves, the Maheswamadhini stone statues, the last judgement mural in St. Mary's church Angamali and the Pat Chithra of Bengal, Raja Ravivarma's oil paintings are perfect examples.

The first form of cinema introduced to Indians was 'Tholpaavakooth': an art of light and shadows, where historical stories were projected on a screen using dolls. Talking about Cinema and techniques used to create cinematic images, he defined cinema as a continuation of a long history of visual imagination, expression and arts. Cinema is also an industrial art made possible by revolutions in science and technology, techniques of chemical processing, optics, electricity and a long tradition of popular cultures of storytelling, folk performance, and song and dance. It is an illusion of movement through persistence of vision. The experience of a continuous movement is totally artificial and exists only in our minds.

Dr C S Venkiteswaran then elaborated on shots and sequences. A string of shots creates a sequence. While the succession of frames create the appearance of motion, the succession of shots creates meaning and reason. He talked about different types of shots: extreme long shot that provides a distant view of people and events, which gives us a sense that no one is individualized, long shot that integrate settings and characters, their emotional state/intent etc, medium shots that usually frame two people waist up and it depicts the dynamics of relations of power/attachment etc, close up shots, low angle shots that makes the subject seem larger than life and tilted shots that indicate disturbed state of mind.

Films are shot in a particular order chosen by its creator. Editing is the process of putting shots together. There are two types of editing Montage and Mise en scene. Montage relates to the element of time. It depends on the genre of the film, or on the information communicated to the audience. It is used to speed up time, to convey lot of information in short span of time. It is also used to create laughter and to develop characters, to communicate the transformation and growth of a character over a short amount of time. We can also combine multiple storylines in films.

Mise en Scene is a French term meaning 'everything in the frame'. Elements that make up mise en scene include, actors and their performances and their styles, location that sets the mood of the scene and supports the action, set design that builds the world of the location and add context to the story, Lighting, camera composition, depth of space, costumes, hair and makeup. He explained how these elements influence the cinematic images.

Lighting picks out relevant details or figures in a scene and prioritises the plot. It also establishes a set of values to what we are seeing, by throwing more or less light on the elements

in scene and heightens mood and atmosphere. Camera and its various components like angle movement, position, composition and depth of field are important in cinema.

He concluded his lecture by talking about sound in cinema. Sound has existed in film since 1927. Sound is used conventionally to create a more involving and believable narrative. There are primarily two types of sound in film, Diegetic and Non-diegetic. Diegesis, the Greek term for world is used in film analysis to describe the narrative world of a film. Diegetic sound can be subdivided into: dialogue, speech sound effects, footsteps, doors closing, gun shots, ambient sound, background noise, distant chatter, wind, traffic etc. Non-Diegetic sounds are sound which has been added to support the mood and atmosphere that the filmmaker is trying to convey. Sound effects are of two types: synchronous and asynchronous sounds. Synchronous sounds are those which are synchronized or matched with what is viewed. It contributes to the realism in film and helps to create a particular atmosphere/mood. Asynchronous sound effects are not matched with a visible source of the sound on screen. It provides an appropriate emotional nuance, and they may also add to the realism of the film. Meaning of a visual image is dependent upon all these elements. Obviously, it has social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions and its reception varies from viewer to viewer. Not only what is included but also what is excluded from the frame/shot/sequence or narrative is important to understand cinema.

Session 6 July 19- Panel Discussion on ‘Independent Cinema in Malayalam: Opportunities and Challenges’ by Sri Sajin Babu and Don Palathra

