



Research Paper

## Struggles of Storytellers: Obstacles Encountered By Sri Lankan Tamil Short Filmmakers to Promote Themselves as Sri Lankan Tamil Feature Filmmakers.

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**ABSTRACT:** *Filmmaking is a potent form of artistic expression that cuts beyond national borders and tells stories that both celebrate the subtleties of regional cultures and speak to universal truths. Fundamentally, cinema acts as a catalyst for narrative by providing creators with a wide range of genres, styles, and issues to work with that spark viewers' curiosity, arouse feelings, and stimulate their thinking. The amount of feature filmmakers in Sri Lanka is noticeably different from the lively presence of short filmmakers in the country. This occurrence begs the issue of what obstacles and difficulties prospective filmmakers face while making the switch from short to feature-length films. In South Indian industry, many short filmmakers who had never worked with a feature film director before, went on to become successful feature directors and made good money at the box office with their productions. The majority of the young filmmakers are working with South Indian actors in high-end productions. In the meantime, despite the fact that there are a good number of Tamil short filmmakers in Sri Lanka, they are unable to advance their directorial careers to feature films. The primary objective of this study is to compile information regarding the challenges of Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers in making feature films. This research has been conducted to find out the obstacles encountered by Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers to promote themselves as Sri Lankan Tamil feature filmmakers. The research was conducted among Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers and Sri Lankan Tamil feature filmmakers. The study comes to the conclusion that the filmmakers' short filmmaking expertise aided them much in directing feature films, including in terms of character selection, camera and editing techniques, and managing a tight budget. Though the languages, filmmaking tools and proper technicians are not a challenge in Sri Lankan Tamil filmmaking, they find lack of producers, need of money for the promotion, lack of promotion from Sri Lankan Tamil media and social media channels, no proper distribution of Sri Lankan Tamil films to the theatres, no proper support to the Sri Lankan Tamil films in theatres when a South Indian movie is about to release in the same time, Time wastage due to non-professional actors, directors' lack of knowledge of filmmaking crafts, recovering the invested money of the producers, bringing audiences to the theatre, lack of collaboration from Sri Lankan Tamil artists are the major challenges to the Tamil short filmmakers to create Tamil feature films in Sri Lanka. Further the study recommends that with qualified specialists, an industry catering to Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers ought to be established. Crowdfunding will help the filmmakers get funding to make movies, and the income should be shared among the funders in the correct percentage that they have invested.*

**Keywords:-** Short films, Sri Lankan Short filmmakers, Feature films, Challenges, Sri Lanka.

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### I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Film and Short film:

Filmmaking is a potent form of artistic expression that cuts beyond national borders and tells stories that both celebrate the subtleties of regional cultures and speak to universal truths (Smith, 2018). Fundamentally, cinema acts as a catalyst for narrative by providing creators with a wide range of genres, styles, and issues to work with that spark viewers' curiosity, arouse feelings, and stimulate their thinking.

Films have the unique ability to capture universal human experiences, emotions, and values, transcending linguistic, cultural, and societal barriers (Turner, 2019). Through nuanced storytelling and visual imagery, filmmakers convey shared emotions such as love, loss, resilience, and hope, fostering empathy and understanding across diverse audiences.

Films showcase the diversity and depth of regional cultures in addition to universal topics by depicting values, rituals, and traditions that are exclusive to certain communities (Li, 2020). To preserve and promote indigenous knowledge and viewpoints, filmmakers use the power of storytelling to highlight cultural history, identity, and tales.

Filmmakers may explore, try new things, and tell powerful stories in short amounts of time with the help of short films (Sutton, 2017). They act as talent incubators, giving up-and-coming voices a platform to express themselves and get notoriety in the film industry, adding to the rich fabric of diverse stories.

The cultural relevance of Tamil film in Sri Lanka is examined in "Cinema and Nation: The Tamil Case" by S. Theodore Baskaran. It draws attention to how it engages with identity politics, preserves cultural history, and represents a variety of narratives. Filmmakers tackle issues including ethnic conflicts and political upheavals by examining subjects pertaining to Tamil culture, traditions, values, and historical experiences. Baskaran also talks about how social inequalities and rights advocacy are highlighted in Tamil films, as well as how representation, marginalization, and resistance are addressed.

The history of Tamil cinema in Sri Lanka dates back to the introduction of silent and early talkies, which were screened in mobile theatres and improvised auditoriums. During the early stages of Sri Lankan Tamil filmmaking, the influence of South Indian cinema, especially Chennai's Tamil cinema, was crucial in forming the films' subject and artistic components (Velayutham, 2008).

#### Challenges:

The amount of feature filmmakers in Sri Lanka is noticeably different from the lively presence of short filmmakers in the country. This occurrence begs the issue of what obstacles and difficulties prospective filmmakers face while making the switch from short to feature-length films. Short filmmakers who want to get into feature filmmaking face several obstacles, and money and resource availability seem to be the biggest ones. This difficulty arises because feature film production requires large financial outlays, a complex production infrastructure, and strong financial support (Acharya & Prabhakar, 2016). Feature films require more funding than short films because they have larger-than-life stories, better production qualities, and more complex technological needs. Emerging filmmakers have difficulties in gaining access to necessary resources such as cutting-edge filmmaking equipment, knowledgeable staff, appropriate shooting locations, and post-production facilities (Sinha & Raja, 2020).

The resources and money available for feature film productions are also influenced by regional and cultural perspectives. For budding filmmakers looking for funding and production resources, cultural attitudes toward filmmaking, creative preferences, and industry standards may provide extra obstacles in some situations (Sharma & Verma, 2017).

The distribution networks, marketing platforms, and exhibition outlets that make up the infrastructure of the film business are critical to the success of feature films. Emerging filmmakers frequently have limited access to established distribution channels, marketing tactics, and theatrical release chances, which makes it difficult for them to reach a larger audience and recover their investment (Kumar & Singh, 2019). One important factor in determining the viability and profitability of feature film production is its financial component. For independent filmmakers without established industry contacts or financial support networks, obtaining adequate finance to cover pre-production, production, and post-production expenditures continues to be a substantial challenge (Rao & Srinivas, 2018).

Many short filmmakers who had never worked with a feature film director before, such as Lokesh Kanagaraj Rathna Kumar, Arunraja Kamaraj, and Sri Ganesh went on to become successful feature directors and made good money at the box office with their productions. The majority of the young filmmakers are working with South Indian actors in high-end productions. In the meantime, despite the fact that there are a good number of Tamil short filmmakers in Sri Lanka, they are unable to advance their directorial careers to feature films. The primary objective of this study is to compile information regarding the challenges of Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers in making feature films.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

There are generally two types of methods used to collect data in research. Primary and secondary data collection methods are used to conduct research. Primary data is explained as the data collected by the researcher to address the research questions.

### **2.1. SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

Surveys provide evidence on practice, attitudes, and knowledge. However, conducting good survey research is harder than it looks. The authors aim to provide guidance to both researchers and readers in conducting and interpreting survey research. Like all research, surveys should have clear research question(s) using the smallest possible number of high-quality, essential, survey questions (items) that will interest the target population.

Interviews are primarily done in qualitative research and occur when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers. Often audiotapes are utilized to allow for more consistent transcription (Creswell, 2012). The researcher often transcribes and types the data into a computer file, in order to analyze it.

The present study has used personal in-depth interviews, which are one of the survey methods to examine the research problem. As such, the present study has used a total of 10 personal in-depth interviews, as follows:

- Five interviews of Sri Lankan Tamil short film directors
- Five interviews of Sri Lankan Tamil feature film directors

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Short film directors:

Each of the short film directors claimed to have produced over five short films, all of which had appeared at various film festivals and worldwide cinema screenings. However, the main problem in Sri Lanka, according to filmmaker Dinesh Balasri and two other directors of Tamil short films, is screening feature and short films made in Sri Lanka. We lack an appropriate distribution system for the films. To get the movie shown in theatres, we have to approach the theatre owners on our own. Distributors are needed to screen throughout Sri Lanka. Afterwards will it turn a profit. Director Dinesh went on to say that language is not an obstacle in movies. The Sinhala audience can also watch Tamil movies, and the Tamil audience can also watch Sinhala movies in Sri Lanka.

Most of the directors have stated that they have learned filmmaking by watching films and YouTube tutorials for technical knowledge and script writing knowledge. Half of the short film directors stated that they learned cinema through reading books. All the short filmmakers have stated that making a feature film is their aim and that's the reason they have started to make short films. Director Havijithan stated that as he wants to make a movie with 24 crafts, he tries to practice them in short filmmaking.

Director Dinesh stated that, rather than civil war, there are a lot of stories in Sri Lanka that we can make into movies. The majority of the directors stated that they are not able to make their short films reach a large audience. They have only a few options to screen their short films. YouTube, Facebook, screening at small events, screening at festivals, and screening in a theatre for one or two times are the only options that Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers have.

According to Veenu Priyan Yogarasa, the short filmmaker, the Tamil population in Sri Lanka has many deeply ingrained narratives to share. He therefore wants to adapt those stories into short films. Further, he stated that, regarding the film screening, if we register our movie in the film cooperation, the theatres should screen that movie. As a filmmaker, I will not screen immediately. I want to send my movies to film festivals. If it's a South Indian movie, it will be screened everywhere. All the audience will watch those movies. But here, we can screen a maximum of 2–3 shows in a day. And also, we need to work hard to sell the tickets ourselves. It's a challenge to release our Tamil short film in Sri Lanka's all-out theatre at once. The theatre's cost is high, and getting back the money that we invested in the theatre is also difficult.

When it comes to investors and producers, most filmmakers stated that the biggest obstacle to making Sri Lankan Tamil short films is finding producers. There are numerous investors from the diaspora. Most of the time, they compel filmmakers to create short films that reflect the beliefs or preferences of the producers.

The majority of short filmmakers stated that making a feature film comes with higher costs because there are more crew members to pay and post-production is always more expensive. Regaining the money after making a significant investment is difficult, particularly in Sri Lanka. We're using our own money for this.

When it comes to technologies, majority of the Tamil Short filmmakers stated that we can find proper technologies in Sri Lanka. If we have a good investor, we are able to hire the technologies from Sinhala cinema industry in Sri Lanka. Few short filmmakers stated that writers block is one of the issues.

Regarding the difference of making short and feature movies, most of the short filmmakers stated that the primary distinction is the budget. The director and writer have an impact on the budget. There may be variations in how technology is used. We work on both kinds of films in the same manner for the most part. A feature film will have a larger cast, crew, and use of technology. However, both will require the same amount of work and effort.

Feature film directors:

All the feature film directors have made short films before they created feature films. Dir. Ajanthan, who is currently working on his second feature film in Sri Lanka, stated that he gained knowledge of short filmmaking only. That experience helped him in the process of making feature films, even though he didn't study filmmaking. Further, he stated that he understood the audience's expectations from the feedback from his short films. Through his short films, he understands what kind of films will be accepted by our audience. Dir. Thangavel Sivanesan stated that his experience in short filmmaking helped him make a feature film. A feature film consists of a number of short films. Short films talk about one story, and it should have a limited time to convey. But feature films will have many lines to convey stories. He was able to apply the experience of short filmmaking to feature films in terms of storytelling methods and camera angles. Dir. Jacob L. Jeroshan stated that his experiences with short films involved experimentation and learning what works and what doesn't in filmmaking. These lessons were invaluable when transitioning to making feature films. Dir. Grashon Prashanth stated that he had learned a lot of things from the short films; he had upgraded many pieces of equipment by making short films and observing the outputs, such as cameras and cinematic lenses. Further, the short filmmaking experiences helped them train the actors for the feature film. In reference to finding producers for Tamil feature films, the majority of filmmakers stated that, despite having directed short films and demonstrated their ability to direct feature films, it is extremely difficult to get producers for their feature films. Few directors have spent their own money to produce the movies. Some directors borrowed the money from their friends. Meanwhile, Dir. Jacob L. Jeroshan stated that "finding producers for feature films can be challenging, even for established industries. However, there was one instance where I found a producer at an international competition in Singapore after showcasing my short film. We developed a feature film over six months but couldn't complete it due to the producer going bankrupt. Nevertheless, having a short film on hand can be beneficial for pitching or entering festivals". Dir. Grashon Prashanth also stated the same.

Most directors stated that they need a large sum of money to do promotional work for their films; even the mainstream media in Sri Lanka is not providing enough support for local films, preferring to focus on South Indian films and teledramas. The directors also mentioned that it was hard to recover their investment, even though their films had been screened in the diaspora. The producers have to pay a lot of money for their films to be shown in theatres, and the theatres won't show films when well-known South Indian films are set to be released at that time.

Regarding the technical facilities in Sri Lanka for Tamil feature films, majority of the directors have agreed that there are very good technicians in Sri Lanka. For that too, they need a big budget to hire the professionals. Otherwise, they need to find out a technical crew who are passionate about filmmaking and work for less money.

In the meantime, some filmmakers are having trouble building a strong cast for their films. Finding enough talent remains a challenge for most filmmakers, particularly when it comes to actors and actresses. Casting is usually approached in two ways: either a screenplay is written, and actors are then found to fit the roles, or characters are identified, and a story is then written around them. They choose artists from their team the majority of the time. Filming could only take place when the artists had spare time. The majority of the acts had never been performed before. As a result, trying to fix them will occasionally waste a lot of time. Dir. Jacob stated that he was able to find the actors needed for his films. Sri Lanka has a pool of talented actors, particularly those with backgrounds in drama and theater, whom he plans to continue working with in the future. Further he stated that While South Indian short filmmakers have found success in Kollywood, he believes Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers can also shine with consistent efforts in creating quality content. Collaboration between Jaffna and East side Tamil cinema is crucial for collective success, but it may take around 40 years of consistent work to achieve significant recognition. Each filmmaker must focus on producing compelling content to contribute to this goal. Regarding the support of the government, every director said that they were granted authorization to proceed with the filming without any problems because the screenplays were not offensive or divisive.

All the directors have agreed that most of the media in Sri Lanka are not supporting their productions. Even the Sri Lankan YouTube channels and websites are going back to the artist from south India. The promotion is one of the hardest jobs in the Sri Lankan Tamil cinema industry. Most Sri Lankan Tamil films are given a few shows to screen in the theatre, and for that, the director himself and the film team usually invite the audience

personally. The audience for Sri Lankan Tamil movies is comparatively lesser than the other movies, which usually run in theatres.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The research has been conducted to find out the struggles of storytellers- obstacles encountered by Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers to promote themselves as Sri Lankan Tamil feature film makers. The research was conducted among the Sri Lankan Tamil short filmmakers and Sri Lankan Tamil feature filmmaker. The study comes to the conclusion that the filmmakers' short filmmaking expertise aided them much in directing feature films, including in terms of character selection, camera and editing techniques, and managing a tight budget. Though the languages, filmmaking tools and proper technicians are not a challenge in Sri Lankan Tamil filmmaking, they find lack of producers, need of money for the promotion, lack of promotion from Sri Lankan Tamil media and social media channels, no proper distribution of Sri Lankan Tamil films to the theatres, no proper support to the Sri Lankan Tamil films in theatres when a South Indian movie is about to release in the same time, Time wastage due to non-professional actors, directors' lack of knowledge of filmmaking crafts, recovering the invested money of the producers, bringing audiences to the theatre, lack of collaboration from Sri Lankan Tamil artists are the major challenges to the Tamil short filmmakers to create Tamil feature films in Sri Lanka.

#### Recommendation:

With qualified specialists, an industry catering to Sri Lankan Tamil filmmakers ought to be established. Filmmakers should upgrade their selves in writing, technical knowledge and filmmaking knowledge. The directors should have a good team with script knowledge to make good stories that can engage the audience towards the movie. Crowdfunding will help the filmmakers get funding to make movies, and the income should be shared among the funders in the correct percentage that they have invested. Directors should do rehearsals with actors; that will make the unexperienced actors perform well, and it will save time. Sri Lankan Tamil media should give equal opportunities to promote Sri Lankan Tamil movies as well as South Indian movies.

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