

Analysing the Screenplay in Tamil Biopic Movies

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Abstract- The present study examines the screenplays of Tamil biopic films, analysing five films across four analytical parameters: screenplay structure, colour palette, narrative construction, and characterisation, with specific attention to the balance between biographical fidelity and cinematic storytelling in Soorarai Pottru (2020), Thalaivii (2021), Amaran (2024), and 800 (2023). Employing a qualitative thematic analysis, this study applies Syd Field's three-act structure, Todorov's equilibrium model, Roland Barthes' visual semiotics, and the principles of selective verisimilitude in biographical film. The subjects range from military valour (Maj. Mukund Varadarajan) and entrepreneurial vision (Capt. G.R. Gopinath) to political power (J. Jayalalithaa) and international sporting achievement (Muttiah Muralitharan). The findings reveal that each film employs a distinct visual and narrative grammar; however, all share a tendency toward hagiography—selectively erasing biographical complexity to conform to the heroic arc. This necessitates a rigorous understanding of the mechanisms and ideology underlying Tamil biopics for any engagement with the histories they claim to represent.

Keywords: Tamil Biopic, Screenplay Analysis, Narrative Structure, Characterisation, Historical Accuracy

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. Tamil Biopic

A feature-length film based on the life of a real individual or composite of known historical individuals, narrated through cinematic means for a public audience. This study includes films with both directly named biographical subjects and fictionalised representations where real identities are deliberately concealed.

2. Screenplay Analysis

The critical examination of a film's written and performed dramatic structure, encompassing act divisions, scene construction, dialogue patterns, narrative techniques, and the sequencing of events. This study employs screenplay analysis to explore mechanisms of selection, compression, reconstruction, and invention of biographical source material within the Tamil commercial cinema tradition.

3. Narrative Structure

The formal arrangement of events, conflict, and resolution within a film narrative. For this study, narrative structure encompasses the protagonist's biographical arc, placement of the inciting incident, plot reversals, handling of biographical time compression, and the restoration, inversion, or refusal of equilibrium at the film's conclusion.

4. Characterisation

The portrayal and presentation of real individuals in a biopic screenplay through cinematic devices such as framing, lighting, camera technique, and symbolism. In this study, characterisation refers specifically to how personalities, strengths, and human dimensions of biographical subjects are rendered through visual elements rather than solely through dialogue.

5. Historical Accuracy

The degree of adherence to documented biographical facts in the portrayal of a subject's life events, relationships, and experiences. This study analyses the extent to which filmmakers balance documented historical information with the demands of compelling screen narrative.

I.INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the most captivating forms of storytelling known to us today. Its ability to transport audiences into other lives and experiences is unmatched among popular media. The biographical film—or biopic—has carved out a uniquely significant space within the cinema, defined by its position at the intersection of history and narrative, fact and fiction. It seeks to interpret and represent the life of an individual through cinematic storytelling. When done well, a biopic transforms one person's singular journey into something universally relatable.

Tamil cinema's history with biographical films is long-standing and sophisticated. From politically charged biopics of the 1990s to recent films honouring military personnel, athletes, and entrepreneurs, the genre has displayed a consistent skill for balancing narrative drama with cultural resonance. Unlike other film types, Tamil biopics are shaped by a unique cultural, social, and political backdrop that determines who gets depicted on screen—politicians who shaped a state, cricketers who broke records, soldiers who sacrificed their lives, and visionaries who refused to accept limits.

The screenplay forms the foundational architecture of any film. In a biopic, it carries an additional burden: the imperative to reconcile compelling storytelling with honest and respectful representation of a real person. Every inclusion and exclusion in a biopic screenplay is a decision that shapes public perception of a historical figure. This study analyses four significant Tamil biographical films: *Soorarai Pottru* (2020), *Thalaivii* (2021), *Amaran* (2024), and *800* (2023). Each film differs in its narrative approach and thematic concerns, yet all grapple with common questions of biographical authenticity versus cinematic construction.

1.1 Background of Study

Tamil cinema has a longstanding tradition of engaging with social, political, and cultural themes, reflecting the evolving dynamics of Tamil society. Within this landscape, biographical films have emerged as a distinct genre seeking to humanise and contextualise the lives of noteworthy individuals. *Soorarai Pottru* (2020) narrates the journey of an entrepreneur who revolutionised affordable air travel in India. *Thalaivii* (2021) offers a biographical account of J. Jayalithaa,

whose life traversed cinema, politics, and personal sacrifice. *Amaran* (2024) explores themes of loyalty, identity, and sacrifice through the story of Major Mukund Varadarajan. Collectively, these films illustrate the evolution of Tamil biopics as a medium that reflects socio-political realities and engages with cultural memory.

1.2 Research Questions

(i) What techniques are employed in Tamil biopic screenplays to narrate the life stories of real persons? (ii) How are real events modified and adapted through the screenplay form in Tamil biopic movies? (iii) How do narrative devices such as montage serve to depict significant incidents from a subject's life in Tamil biopics?

1.3 Objectives

(i) To examine the narrative structure of screenplays in Tamil biopic films; (ii) to analyse how real-life events are adapted into screenplay form in Tamil biopics; (iii) to study how screenplay tools such as montage, framing, and visual symbolism are used to tell biographical stories.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study analyses the narrative structure, cinematic techniques, and thematic concerns of selected Tamil biopic films in their representation of real-life personalities and historical events. It examines how concepts of heroism, leadership, sacrifice, and social change are constructed through these parameters, and assesses the influence of Tamil biopics on public perception and collective historical memory.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for both academic inquiry and practical understanding of Tamil cinema's role in cultural representation and historical narration. By focusing on biopic films, the research illuminates how cinema functions as a powerful medium for preserving history, shaping political narratives, and reflecting societal values. The findings offer insights into the ethical and artistic challenges facing filmmakers when portraying real individuals, including issues of authenticity, dramatisation, and audience reception. The study also provides a framework for future filmmakers and scholars

interested in biographical storytelling within regional Indian cinema.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Indranil Chakravarty (2022) examines the creative challenges of constructing a biopic screenplay where biographical evidence is scarce. Drawing on Rosenstone's conceptual model of historical knowledge in fictional narratives, Chakravarty investigates the nature and function of fictional invention in biopics, arguing that screenplays make creative use of limited evidence to reconstruct biographical subjects. This work is directly relevant to understanding the selective inventions present in Tamil biopics where documentation of subjects' private lives is incomplete.

2. Michael Bentham (2022) proposes that biopic screenwriting can constitute a legitimate form of academic research output, offering a working definition of narrative fiction filmmaking as methodology in which *mise-en-scène* operates as a core reflective strategy. This framing supports the analytical approach of the present study, which treats each film's visual grammar as a meaningful system of expression.

3. Maria Hinterkörner (2021) investigates the screenwriter's craft in blending historical fact with fictional invention to create compelling character arcs. Her concept of 'the great scene that never happened' has direct relevance to the constructed emotional climaxes present in all four films under analysis. Adam Kyle Spellicy (2021) further extends this discussion by examining the music biopic as a genre that reinvents itself through the lens of folk horror, suggesting that generic hybridity can revitalise biographical filmmaking.

4. Thomas S. Freeman and David L. Smith (2019) approach biographical films as biographical documents, arguing that the inaccuracies present in biopics are not incidental but frequently illuminate the cultural and ideological motivations behind a film's production. This insight is crucial for understanding how Tamil biopics construct heroic narratives that align with particular political and cultural agendas.

5. Sonia Amalia Haiduc (2019) focuses on the melodramatic mode in biopics, arguing that emotional authenticity is produced through melodramatic construction rather than factual fidelity. This

perspective is particularly relevant to *Thalaivii*, which employs melodramatic excess as a primary mode of biographical representation. Seema Rani, Shivani Sharma, and Rajesh Kumar Sharma (2023) examine the literacy and media effects of Hindi cinema biopics, demonstrating how biographical films create public understanding of historical figures and inspire audiences through the dramatised presentation of individual lives.

2.1 Research Gap

Although Tamil cinema has attracted considerable scholarly interest, most existing research focuses on socio-cultural themes, music, and the star system, rather than the craft of screenplay writing within the biopic form. When studies of Tamil films have been conducted from a biographical perspective, they have typically adopted sociological approaches analysing social representation rather than examining how the films themselves are constructed as dramatic and visual texts. Furthermore, the four selected films—*Soorarai Pottru*, *Thalaivii*, *Amaran*, and *800*—are relatively recent productions for which dedicated academic analysis is lacking. No existing research addresses the screenplays and visual aesthetics of these four films comparatively under a unified analytical framework. This study addresses that gap.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis grounded in Film Studies, Narrative Theory, Visual Semiotics, and Biographical Criticism. The research design is a cross-case comparative study, treating each film as a separate unit of analysis before synthesising results across the corpus. The four films—*Soorarai Pottru* (2020), *Thalaivii* (2021), *Amaran* (2024), and *800* (2023)—are examined under four thematic parameters: Screenplay Structure, Colour Palette, Narrative Construction, and Characterisation. The interpretive framework acknowledges that meaning in film arises from the interplay of filmic codes, cultural context, and audience positioning. Each film is treated not merely as entertainment but as a cultural text actively negotiating between historical fact and cinematic construction.

3.1 Qualitative Narrative Analysis

Qualitative Narrative Analysis examines the ways in which films create meaning through storytelling choices rather than mere factual presentation. Soorai Pottru follows a hero-led storyline emphasising personal ambition and populist struggle. Thalaivii employs a dual-timeline structure to dramatise both personal and political transformation. Amaran adopts a linear, emotionally grounded approach that humanises military conflict. 800 structures its narrative around the procedural validation of its protagonist's legitimacy. Across all four films, real-life events are selectively adapted, with certain themes amplified and others minimised, revealing the ideological choices embedded in biopic construction.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The study applies two primary theoretical lenses. Auteur Theory is used to examine how directorial sensibility shapes the biographical representation of

each subject, allowing identification of the thematic preoccupations and visual signatures that give each film its distinctive character. Feminist Film Theory is applied specifically to Thalaivii to analyse how gender politics structure both the film's representation of Jayalalithaa and the cinematic techniques employed to render her authority legible on screen.

3.3 Thematic Analysis of Selected Films

Four films were selected on the basis that: (i) the protagonist is a verifiable real person or historically documented individual; (ii) the film either explicitly positions itself as biographical or is received as such by popular and critical opinion; and (iii) sufficient biographical documentation exists to enable comparison between historical record and cinematic representation. Table 1 below presents the thematic analysis across the four films.

Film	Screenplay	Colour Palette	Narrative Structure	Characterisation
Soorai Pottru (2020)	Dramatic confrontations between protagonist and institutions. Emotional moments timed to create audience alignment with protagonist's ideology.	Warm earthy tones reflect grounded ambition; corporate blues evoke exclusivity. Lighting shifts from natural to harsh as tension rises.	Rising stakes following a hero's journey template. Biographical details compressed for narrative momentum.	Protagonist as anti-establishment rebel. Supporting characters offer emotional validation. Antagonists are faceless institutions rather than individuals.
Thalaivii (2021)	Bold dramatic style with musical numbers and passionate speeches driving narrative. Dialogue is declarative rather than naturalistic.	Film-industry segments are saturated and theatrical; political sequences adopt a restrained symbolic palette. Costume signals identity transition.	Sharp contrast between entertainment world and political arena. Two-timeline structure highlights emotional resonance across life phases.	Subject presented across multiple identity phases. Morally ambiguous decisions rooted in political pragmatism. Gender and power are foregrounded.
Amaran (2024)	Minimalist style emphasising interpersonal dynamics. Silence and pauses carry narrative weight equivalent to dialogue.	Documentary-style naturalism throughout. Military settings appear stark and repetitive; domestic scenes warmer but understated.	Linear chronological narrative. No dramatic over-resolution. Ending acknowledges the permanent cost of loss and sacrifice.	Protagonist depicted as both heroic and fully human. Supporting characters, especially family, carry significant emotional weight.
800 (2023)	Balances personal biography with sporting achievement. Conflict arises from racial discrimination, institutional doubt, and civil war backdrop.	Realistic earth tones (brown, green, blue). Warmer shades for family sequences; cooler, desaturated tones for controversy. Pitch greens represent aspiration.	Chronological structure allowing observation of character development. Flashbacks used sparingly for emotional reinforcement.	Multi-layered portrayal: humility, perseverance, and emotional intelligence. Character proven through procedural validation rather than ideological declaration.

3.4 Metric Analysis

Metric analysis in this study denotes a methodical approach in which films are assessed through standardised qualitative criteria, enabling systematic comparison across the corpus. Parameters include Narrative Intensity, Emotional Depth, Protagonist

Proactiveness, Socio-Political Context, Ethical Conflict Complexity, Underdog Factor, Realism, Mass Appeal, Inspirational Value, and Narrative Consistency, each rated on a Low/Medium/High scale. Table 2 presents the metric analysis results.

Parameter	Amaran	Soorai Pottru	Thalaivii	800
Narrative Intensity	High	High	Medium	Medium
Emotional Depth	High	High	High	Medium
Protagonist Proactiveness	High	Very High	Medium	High
Socio-Political Context	High	Medium	Very High	High
Ethical Conflict Complexity	High	High	Very High	Medium
Underdog Factor	High	Very High	Medium	High
Realism/Groundedness	High	Medium	Medium	High
Mass Appeal	Medium	High	High	Medium
Inspirational Value	High	Very High	High	High
Narrative Consistency	Medium	High	Medium	Medium

IV. FILM-WISE FRAME ANALYSIS

4.1 Soorai Pottru (2020)

Framing



The director deploys framing as an instrument of emotional continuity throughout Soorai Pottru, using consistent compositional choices to emphasise the enduring nature of relationships amid adversity. Key sequences frame the protagonist alongside figures of personal support in ways that reinforce the film's central argument: that individual ambition, however extraordinary, is always sustained by a web of human bonds. The spatial positioning of characters within the frame communicates solidarity without requiring explicit dialogue, allowing the viewer to absorb the protagonist's emotional situation through visual cues alone.

This approach to framing also underscores the film's ideological position. Maaran is never shown in isolation as a lone genius; he is always embedded within a community of relationships that give his ambitions their human dimension. Even in scenes of institutional confrontation, where he faces faceless systems of power, the framing ensures that his emotional groundedness—the personal stakes—is always visible. The composition insists that this is not merely a story about a business empire but about a man whose identity is constituted by his connections to others.

Lighting Design



Lighting in Soorai Pottru functions symbolically rather than merely functionally. The most significant light appears in the film's final sequences, where a single ray of illumination cuts through an otherwise dark environment. This visual device communicates

the breaking of a mental and emotional roadblock—not a dramatic external event but a quiet internal shift that signals the beginning of a new phase. The director trusts the image to carry the narrative weight without verbal explanation, demonstrating confidence in the audience's capacity to read visual language.

The wider lighting palette of the film tracks the protagonist's psychological trajectory. The early sequences are bathed in warm, natural light that reflects the organic energy of Maaran's original vision. As institutional resistance accumulates and financial pressures mount, the lighting shifts toward a harsher, more directional style that creates deep shadows and higher contrast. This gradual transition from warmth to harshness mirrors the story's movement from idealism to embattled determination, using the visible world to map an interior journey.

Camera Movement



The camera's movement during the cancellation crisis is notably expressive. Rather than maintaining a fixed observational stance, the camera follows the protagonist in a tracking movement that amplifies the physical disorientation of the moment. The instability of the camera—its slight wobble and restless repositioning—mirrors the character's psychological state: confused, afraid, and robbed of the certainty that had defined his entire project. This technique transforms an external business setback into a visceral embodiment of human collapse.

This choice is particularly significant because the scene contains very little dialogue. The camera's movement becomes the primary communicative tool, translating an interior emotional crisis into a physical language that the viewer experiences alongside the protagonist. The director demonstrates an understanding that the most honest representation of extreme anxiety is not delivered through words but through the body and the space it moves through—a principle that elevates the scene from narrative exposition to genuine cinematic experience.

Audience Positioning



The confrontation between Maaran and his wife positions the audience within the emotional field of the argument before revealing its deeper significance. The scene begins as a familiar domestic dispute, establishing the viewer's empathy and frustration in equal measure. When the wife disappears, the rage and pain of the argument evaporate instantly, replaced by fear. This sudden emotional reconfiguration is conveyed entirely through the actor's face rather than through scripted explanation, trusting the viewer to follow the protagonist's emotional journey without narration.

4.2 Amaran (2024)

Framing



The introductory framing of Major Mukund communicates everything essential about his character before a single line of dialogue is spoken. His posture, uniform, and spatial positioning within the frame communicate discipline, dedication, and an interior life sustained by commitment rather than vanity. The director uses physical composition as a substitute for psychological exposition, allowing the audience to construct their understanding of the character through visual reading alone. The frame presents a man defined by service—not as an abstract ideal but as a lived, embodied reality visible in the way he occupies space.

The framing of Mukund throughout the film maintains this language of physical authority while gradually introducing signs of human vulnerability. As the narrative progresses, the tight, controlled framing of

early military sequences gives way to compositions that place Mukund in more intimate, domestic configurations. This visual expansion from the institutional to the personal mirrors the film's thematic argument that the most heroic individuals are those whose extraordinary public commitments are sustained by equally extraordinary private loves.

Lighting Design



The climactic lighting of *Amaran* is perhaps the most symbolically dense image in the film. Major Mukund is framed against a stark white background while his own figure is partially shrouded in shadow. The use of light and dark in this configuration communicates the threshold between life and death without requiring any verbal articulation. The director's choice to surround the protagonist with both victory—signified by the white of completion and transcendence—and encroaching darkness communicates the irreducible cost of the triumph he has achieved.

This lighting choice also reflects the film's wider chromatic argument. Throughout *Amaran*, light is used sparingly rather than decoratively, reserved for moments of genuine emotional significance. The naturalistic lighting of domestic scenes—soft, diffused, warm—contrasts with the harsh, directional light of military operations to create a visual grammar that the viewer learns to read: warmth means safety; harshness means danger. The climactic lighting, which merges both qualities in a single frame, communicates that the final act is simultaneously a consummation and a conclusion.

Camera Movement



The circular camera movement in the climax sequence carries the full symbolic weight of the film's central argument about sacrifice and legacy. The camera begins its pan around the protagonist and ultimately comes to rest on his wife and child—the circle he began completed by those who carry him forward. The deliberate pace of the pan refuses to rush the viewer through the significance of the moment. When Mukund disappears from the frame mid-pan, the device communicates the sudden rupture of death with an economy that is all the more devastating for its brevity.

The choice of a circular movement rather than a linear one is ideologically significant. A circle implies completion and continuity rather than termination. The camera is not recording an ending but a transition—from one form of existence to another, from the soldier himself to the legacy he leaves in the people who loved him. This is the film's most philosophically complex statement: that death, in the context of meaningful sacrifice, does not conclude a story but transforms it.

Audience Positioning



The most powerful moment of audience positioning occurs when Sai Pallavi, in response to her child's innocent question about the absent father, turns and looks directly into the camera. This act of direct address dissolves the screen barrier and implicates the viewer in the grief being experienced. The child's question—voiced in the uncomplicated logic of someone who has not yet learned that absence can be permanent—creates an unbearable contrast with what the audience knows. The silence with which Sai Pallavi meets that question, and the direction of her gaze straight at the viewer, transforms private grief into a shared experience.

4.3 Thalaivii (2021)

Framing



The framing of Jayalalithaa following her political humiliation after MGR's death is an exercise in visual contradiction. While the narrative context positions her as isolated and rejected—expelled from the spaces of power she once inhabited—the camera frames her as formidable, conferring authority even as the circumstances deny it. Her famous declaration that she will return to parliament only as Chief Minister is rendered credible and inevitable through this framing, transforming what might read as defiance into a statement of destiny that the composition has already affirmed.

This contradiction between narrative circumstance and visual framing is one of Thalaivi's most sophisticated techniques. The film refuses to allow the camera to participate in Jayalalithaa's humiliation. Where the political world diminishes her, the frame insists on her stature. This tension between what the story shows and what the camera argues creates a productive dissonance: the viewer is positioned simultaneously to understand the injustice of her treatment and to recognise her as someone whose eventual return was never truly in doubt.

Lighting Design



The lighting of the scene in which an ally entreats Jayalalithaa to assume leadership of MGR's legacy serves a dual purpose. It illuminates the weight of what is being asked of her—to enter the shadow of a man she loved and carry a political mission that was never originally hers—while beginning to suggest the formidable strength she will need to summon. The lighting is neither warm nor cold, occupying an

ambiguous register that reflects the ambivalence of the moment: it is simultaneously a burden and an awakening, an imposition and an opportunity.

The film's wider lighting design consistently uses illumination to trace Jayalalithaa's relationship to power. During her years as an actress, lighting is theatrical and flattering, emphasising spectacle and performance. As she transitions into political life, the lighting becomes more austere and directional, reserving warmth for private moments and replacing it with a harder, more functional quality in public scenes. This chromatic biography tracks her movement from a world in which appearance was the point to one in which appearance served a strategic function.

Camera Movement



The most distinctive camera decision in Thalaivi is the positioning of the camera within the celebrating crowd during Jayalalithaa's political triumph. By adopting the crowd's point of view rather than an external observational stance, the director democratises the victory: it is not presented as belonging to the leader alone but as a shared experience of the people who placed their faith in her. The camera as crowd member makes a political argument that leadership is validated from below rather than conferred from above—a claim that is consistent with the film's overall hagiographic construction of Jayalalithaa as a popular democratic figure.

The effectiveness of this technique depends on the contrast it creates with the film's other camera positions. When Jayalalithaa is in scenes of private suffering or political isolation, the camera observes from a respectful distance, preserving her interiority. When she achieves public victory, the camera insists on inclusion, refusing the distance of observation in favour of participation. This oscillation between distance and immersion models the viewer's own shifting relationship to the biographical subject across the film's duration.

Audience Positioning



The scene in which Jayalalithaa declares her romantic feelings to MGR—who rejects her—positions the audience to experience the full vulnerability of a woman whose exceptional public courage does not protect her from the most ordinary kind of pain. This is a deliberate contrast to the political persona that dominates most of the film: here, the future Chief Minister is simply a person whose love has been refused. The director refuses to rush past this moment, allowing the silence following MGR's departure to expand and press the audience into the same emptiness that Jayalalithaa inhabits.

4.4 800 (2023)

Framing

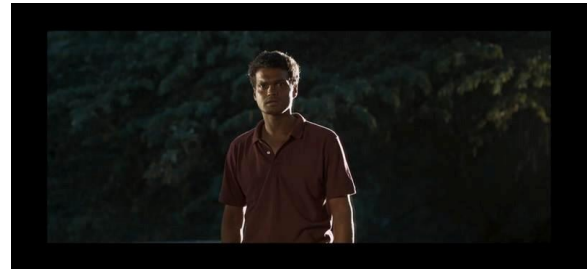


Muralitharan's introduction to the film's narrative is accomplished through a tracking shot rather than a dramatic entrance. The camera follows him through a corridor, communicating purpose, direction, and inevitability without requiring any verbal establishment of his importance. The tracking shot argues through movement that this person is going somewhere significant and that the viewer is compelled to follow. It establishes the film's central claim—that Murali was always destined to be exceptional—through pure cinematic grammar, before the narrative has had the opportunity to demonstrate this claim through events.

The framing of Muralitharan throughout the film is also significant for what it chooses to show and withhold. The director consistently frames Murali in relation to the institutional forces that seek to define and limit him—the selectors who doubt him, the

opponents who challenge his legitimacy, the international bodies that question his bowling action. By positioning him against these forces in the frame, the film makes its ideological argument visually: the exceptional individual persists against the constraining institution, and the frame itself aligns with the individual.

Lighting Design



The scene in which Murali's father asks whether he is Indian or Sri Lankan contains the film's most striking lighting moment. The question is posed under side lighting that divides the frame in half, visually embodying the ethnic and national division being invoked. The formal elegance of this choice—using the position of the light source to dramatise the binary of the question—demonstrates the sophistication of the film's visual language. When Murali answers that he is a cricketer first, the light moves entirely behind him, conferring a quality of affirmation and transcendence upon his declaration.

This shift in lighting transforms the biographical fact of Muralitharan's Tamil Sri Lankan identity into a statement about the capacity of sport to transcend ethnic and national constraints. The director is not simply illustrating a biographical detail; he is making a claim about the power of individual vocation to exceed the categories that political and social structures impose upon people. The light endorses the claim, transforming it from the opinion of one man into something that the film presents as a truth visible to all who can read its visual language.

Camera Movement



The tracking shot through the cricket board meeting room captures collective institutional despondency with a single unbroken movement. The camera's slow sweep across the faces of officials communicates shame, resignation, and suppressed panic without commentary. Each face carries a different emotional configuration—some avoidant, some watchful, some privately resigned—and the tracking shot binds them together into a composite portrait of institutional failure. It is only when the captain enters and declares the need for a spinner that the tracking shot acquires its retrospective meaning.

The continuity of the tracking movement—the refusal to cut between faces—is itself an argument. It insists that institutional failure is collective rather than individual, that the problem cannot be parcelled out to any single official but belongs to the room as a whole. This visual insistence on collective responsibility sets up the introduction of Muralitharan as the answer to a collective problem, establishing from the outset that his significance will be institutional as well as individual.

Audience Positioning



The final scene in which Murali opens his kit bag to find the stump that was originally placed there as an act of mockery distils the entire film's argument into a single object. The stump that was meant to humiliate him becomes, after 800 wickets and a career defined by resilience, the most powerful symbol of his perseverance. The director's decision to hold the shot and allow Murali's tears their full duration argues that the journey deserves to be felt completely before it is relinquished. The audience has carried this stump in their memory since it first appeared in the film; they know exactly what Murali's tears mean without being told.

V. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Cinema communicates meaning not only through words and dialogue but through every visual detail contained within the frame. The camera's movement, the fall of light upon an actor's face, the spatial relationship between characters, and the objects that accumulate symbolic weight across a film's duration—all of these constitute a visual language that speaks to audiences emotionally before it speaks intellectually. All four films analysed in this study demonstrate that the most powerful moments of biographical cinema are frequently those that say the least explicitly while conveying the most profoundly.

The wobbling camera that accompanies Nedumaan's crisis in *Soorai Pottru*, the circular pan that ends on Mukund's widow and child in *Amaran*, the light that shifts behind Muralitharan as he declares his cricketing identity, the direct camera address from Sai Pallavi following her child's innocent question—these are not incidental technical choices. They are the story itself. They demonstrate that the best Tamil biopics understand that cinema's primary mode of communication is experiential rather than explanatory. The viewer does not deduce the meaning of these moments; they feel it before the intellect has time to intervene.

Equally significant is the restraint exercised by the most effective scenes in these films. The circular pan in *Amaran* does not conclude with a montage of the hero's greatest moments. Sai Pallavi does not deliver a speech about grief. Muralitharan cries without melodramatic musical accompaniment. This restraint reflects a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between filmmaker and audience—a trust that viewers are capable of completing the emotional circuit without being explicitly told what to feel. Where lesser biographical cinema would explain its own significance, these films create space for the audience to inhabit it.

The analysis also reveals a consistent tension across all four films between the demands of biographical authenticity and the imperatives of cinematic heroism. Each film selects from its subject's life those elements most amenable to the heroic arc, compresses timelines, simplifies motivations, and minimises the complexity and ambiguity that characterise actual historical lives. This tendency toward hagiography is not simply a failure of artistic courage but a structural consequence

of the biopic genre's dual mandate: to honour real individuals while simultaneously satisfying the expectations of popular entertainment. Understanding this tension is essential for any critical engagement with what these films argue about the historical figures they depict.

Each film also reflects and reinforces particular ideological positions within Tamil society. Soorai Pottru's celebration of entrepreneurial populism aligns with a specific vision of economic democratisation. Thalaivii's portrait of Jayalithaa as a figure who transcends gender constraints while ultimately affirming traditional political values reflects the ambivalence of its political context. Amaran's valorisation of military sacrifice and institutional duty speaks to a moment of heightened nationalist sentiment. 800's insistence on Muralitharan's identity as a cricketer first—above ethnicity, above national origin—reflects the aspirational politics of reconciliation in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan civil war. These ideological dimensions do not undermine the films as artworks; they enrich the analysis by situating them within the cultural moment that produced them.

5.1 Key Findings

Finding 1: Structural Use of Relationship as Emotional Anchor

Across all four films, human relationships function as the primary emotional architecture within which the biographical subject's public achievements are contextualised. The most affecting sequences in each film are those in which professional stakes are rendered inseparable from personal ones—Mukund's military commitments mapped onto his marriage and fatherhood; Maaran's entrepreneurial struggle sustained by his wife's partnership; Jayalithaa's political ambition haunted by the withdrawal of MGR's love; Muralitharan's sporting perseverance rooted in family belonging. This structural pattern demonstrates that Tamil biopic screenplays are fundamentally stories about individuals rather than achievements.

Finding 2: Lighting as Symbolic System

Lighting in these films operates as a consistent symbolic system rather than merely a technical function. Light signals revelation in Soorai Pottru, death in Amaran, affirmation in 800, and ambivalent

power in Thalaivii. This cross-film consistency suggests a developed visual grammar within Tamil biographical cinema in which light functions as a narrator of interior states inaccessible to dialogue. The most significant lighting moments in each film are those in which the quality and direction of light shifts in direct response to a character's psychological or moral transformation.

Finding 3: Camera Movement as Emotional Embodiment

Moving cameras in these films consistently serve to involve the audience in the protagonist's emotional experience rather than position them as external observers. Tracking shots establish importance and purpose. Shaky handheld movement communicates confusion and loss. Circular panning movements embody completion and legacy. Point-of-view shots within crowds democratise political victory. These devices transform the viewer from spectator to participant, dissolving the distance that separates biographical subject from audience and creating the conditions for genuine empathy across historical time.

Finding 4: Objects as Biographical Summary

The single stump in 800 represents the most powerful use of an object as biographical summary in the four films. Beginning as an instrument of humiliation and becoming a symbol of transcendent perseverance, the stump condenses Muralitharan's entire biographical argument into a single physical artefact. This technique of investing ordinary objects with accumulated symbolic significance is a key feature of visually sophisticated biographical cinema—it creates a form of material memory that the audience carries through the film's duration and which is activated at the moment of greatest emotional intensity.

Finding 5: Point-of-View as Political Statement

The decision to position the camera within the celebrating crowd during Jayalithaa's election triumph constitutes a political and ethical statement about the nature of democratic leadership. By denying the viewer a privileged external vantage point, the director argues that political legitimacy is conferred by the people rather than inherent in the leader. This is the most explicitly ideological camera decision analysed across the four films, and it reflects the degree to which Tamil biographical cinema is always

simultaneously engaged in the representation of individual lives and the negotiation of collective political values.

Finding 6: The Universal in the Biographical Particular

The most resonant moments in all four films achieve their power by rendering the biographical subject's particular experience legible as a universal human experience. Murali's stump speaks to anyone who has been doubted and proved their doubters wrong. Jayalalithaa's unrequited love speaks to anyone who has loved without reciprocation. Major Mukund's final moments speak to anyone who has given everything for a purpose larger than themselves. Maaran's perseverance in the face of institutional resistance speaks to anyone who has refused to accept that the existing order is immutable. This capacity to universalise the particular—to show audiences themselves in the life of another—is the defining characteristic of exceptional biographical cinema and the quality that most consistently distinguishes the best Tamil biopics from their more commercially formulaic counterparts.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tamil biographical films have never simply been recreations of famous individuals' lives. At their best, they capture genuine human emotions—failure and success, love and loss, doubt and determination—and render these experiences cinematically in ways that viewers feel viscerally. While Soorarai Pottru, Thalaivii, Amaran, and 800 differ substantially in their subjects, visual strategies, and thematic concerns, they share a fundamental understanding of what biographical cinema requires: honesty about the human cost of exceptional lives, sophisticated visual storytelling, and the willingness to present individuals in their full complexity.

The screenplays at the centre of these films are not mere assemblies of scenes and dialogue. They are intricately structured emotional architectures designed to carry audiences through biographical journeys that are simultaneously deeply personal and culturally significant. Captain Gopinath's perseverance against institutional resistance, Jayalalithaa's navigation of gender and power, Major Mukund's sacrifice and his family's enduring grief, Muralitharan's refusal to be

diminished by doubt and prejudice—these are not merely stories of famous people. They are stories about the qualities that define human beings at their most significant: resilience, integrity, love, and the capacity for self-transcendence.

The present study also reveals the persistent tendency across all four films toward what might be termed biographical hagiography—the selective erasure of complexity in favour of the heroic arc. This tendency is not necessarily a failing of individual filmmakers but a structural characteristic of a genre that must simultaneously satisfy the demands of popular entertainment and the expectations of biographical authenticity. Understanding this tension, and the mechanisms through which it is navigated in Tamil cinema, is essential for any serious engagement with the histories these films claim to represent.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

The principal limitations of this study include the small sample size of four films, which constrains the generalisability of its findings across the broader Tamil biopic tradition. The analysis is inherently subjective in its interpretation of visual and narrative elements, representing the perspective of a single researcher. The absence of primary sources—interviews with directors, cinematographers, or screenwriters—limits the study's ability to account for intended meaning behind specific creative decisions. Cultural and linguistic barriers may have resulted in the loss of certain nuances available only to viewers fully immersed in Tamil cultural and political history. Finally, as a purely qualitative study, no quantitative data regarding audience reception or box office impact has been incorporated.

6.2 Future Scope of Study

Future research should broaden the corpus to include additional Tamil biopics such as Iruvar and Madrasapattinam, enabling more comprehensive conclusions. The incorporation of audience response research through surveys and interviews would add an empirical dimension to the analytical findings. Comparative studies across Indian regional cinema—including Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, and Kannada biopics—would illuminate what distinguishes the Tamil biographical tradition from others. Further investigation into music and sound design as narrative tools in Tamil biopics would provide a more complete

picture of the genre's cinematic language. Finally, dedicated research into the ethics of biographical filmmaking—the balance between dramatisation and historical accuracy, the responsibilities to living subjects and their families—would address questions that are central to the genre but have received insufficient scholarly attention.

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