



## **A Study of Poetical Aesthetics of Dir. SUMATHY RAM's VISHWA THULASI**

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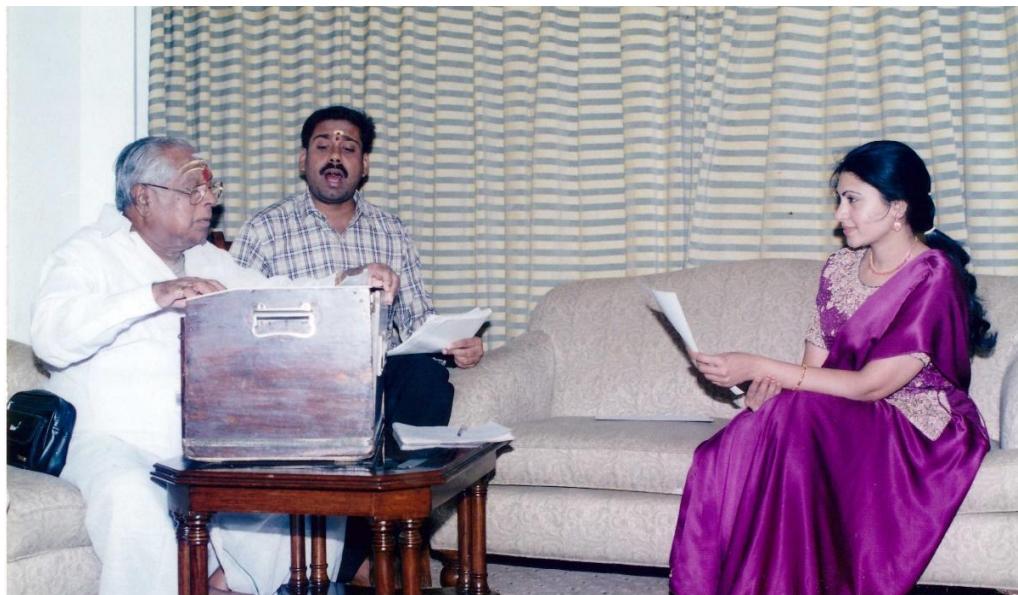
Tamil Nadu, India

Dir. Sumathy Ram's *VISHWA THULASI*, a Tamil movie, was released in 2004 and featured veteran actors Mammootty and Nandita Das as the main protagonists. *Vishwa Thulasi* won the Tamil Nadu State awards for Second-Best Film and Best Choreography-2004. The film also won the prestigious Gold Remi-Award for Best Musical Composition, and the Gold Special Jury Award for Best First Feature at the 38<sup>th</sup> Worldfest-Houston International Film Festival in Texas, USA. The film per se, was suggested to this author by her diligent professor way back in 2005. He considered the film to be a quintessence of cultural aesthetics. Prof. V. Sankarasubramanian, a Vedic scholar and Sanskrit expert, clarified to her that each scene in the film had its own significance and manifestations. He showered encomiums on this brilliant work of art. With her mentor's unrelenting support and guidance, she meandered through the world of *Vishwa Thulasi*. Since then, the author has watched the film more than thirty times, and it has become an integral part of herself. What made the film a must watch for her was its brilliant portrayal of cultural ethos and traditions of Tamil Society. Plethora of beautiful moments and aesthetic innuendos made the film worth watching and enjoyable. Above all, the mesmerizing and soulful music by the stalwarts Mellisai Mannar M.S. Viswanathan and Maestro Ilaiyaraaja elevated the film to divine level. All of Dir. Sumathy Ram's original song-lyrics were instrumental in shaping the story of *Vishwa Thulasi*.



1.1 Dir. Sumathy Ram with the legendary MSV

The film's source was an interesting story. As a matter of fact, the journey started when Dir. Sumathy Ram met Mellisai Mannar M.S. Viswanathan with her anthology of poems titled *Vishwaragam*. MSV, the melody king, had a profound appreciation for her poems, which led to his creation of long-lasting and memorable melodies.



### 1.2 Dir. Sumathy Ram with the legendary MSV

Around fifteen songs had been recorded at Karthik Music Studios. These songs which were formerly intended to be brought out as an independent album were later adapted for the film with a few songs left out. After listening to the musical version of the poems, the director realized that a story revolved around those songs and that was how *Vishwa Thulasi* was born.

This author had already published two research articles on *Vishwa Thulasi*. The first one titled “Sethu Madhavan’s *Maruppakam* and Sumathi Ram’s *Vishwa Thulasi*- A Comparative Study of Cult Classic Tamil Movies.” in the JETIR Journal, Volume 6, June 2019. The second paper entitled “VISHWA THULASI: A Classic Film by Dir. SUMATHY RAM- A Film-Study on Cultural Perspectives and Narrative Techniques.” in the IJCRT Journal, Volume 12, Issue 9 September 2024. The second paper happened after the first paper was spotted by Dir. Sumathy Ram, an Indian-American film director of *Vishwa Thulasi* who lives in Texas and is lauded as a filmmaker, screenwriter, poet, lyricist, and music producer. Dir. Sumathy Ram reached out to the author and generously supported her in the article by providing primary and secondary resources like newspaper articles and photographs and literally guided her in chiseling out the paper. During one of their meaningful discussions, this author suggested that a separate research paper could be written on the songs and music of the film.

Dir. Sumathy Ram's consent and guidance allowed this author to discover the aesthetic sensibilities behind the poetic lines in her film songs. Dir. Sumathy Ram gave all the original lyrics for the songs and her translation versions of the haiku songs, as well as the translation versions of the long songs by Georgina Singh.



1.3 Recording in Progress - MSV with his Team

The author also requested her colleague Dr. V. Jaya Poornima, Head and Associate Professor, Department of Tamil, Mangayarkarasi College of Arts and Science for Women, Madurai to review the songs - diction, tone, figures of speech and content. She has remarkably done the review by comparing the songs with *Thirukkural* and other songs of Sangam literature. The four songs penned by Maestro Ilayaraaja (*Engu Piranthathu, En Maname, Kanavilavadhu, Thulasi*) were aesthetic and serene. However, the focus here is on the anthology of poems titled *Vishwaragam*. The goal of this article is to reveal the intricate and aesthetic details of the songs written by Dir. Sumathy Ram, who helmed the classic *Vishwa Thulasi*, with the support of Tamil and Music scholars.

Poetry is one of the firstborn genres in literary history. Its earliest examples go back to ancient Greek, Tamil and Sanskrit literatures. Despite this long tradition, it is harder to define than any other genre. Poetry is closely related to the term “lyric,” which derives etymologically from the Greek musical instrument “lyra” (“lyre” or “harp”) and points to an origin in the sphere of music. The term “poetry,” however, goes back to the Greek word “poieo” (“to make,” “to produce”), indicating that the poet is the person who “makes” verse. The various forms of poetry are lyric, ode, sonnet, elegy, idyll, epic and ballad. *Vishwa Thulasi* comprises most of the forms mentioned above with a special focus on lyric and ode.

The list of songs to be analyzed:

1. *Kannamma Kanavillaiya* (ode)
2. *Aayakalaigal* (lyric)
3. *Mayakkama* (lyric)



1.4 Dir. Sumathy Ram is immersed in MSV's music

#### 4. *Nizhalin Kathai* (ode)

The list of haikus to be analyzed:

1. *Jyothi Nee*
2. *Kanmoodi*
3. *Thagam*

*Kannamma Kanavillaiya* - the master stroke of MSV and SPB celebrated as one of the finest songs of the 2000s decade, S.P.B. 55 (Film Music-Special-Tribute – Tamil Deepavali Malar 2020 – The Hindu). The original four-page article by V. Chandra Mohan and V. Ravi Kumar is a special tribute front feature on the Tamil edition Diwali Malar 2020 of The Hindu publications to commemorate SPB's outstanding contribution to Indian Film music. This article cited and rated “*Kannamma Kanavillaiya*” as one of the 10 best songs of SPB from the decade 2000. Anand Aravindakshan, the title winner of Super Singer 5 sang the song in the semi-finals in Star Vijay. SPB with teary eyes appreciated Aravindakshan and told him that the song had brought back the memories of the legend MSV and the way he taught the song. The song by Aravindakshan is available in YouTube with 5.8 million views and 1180 comments praising the song. Most of the commentators seem to be men. Amma in Tamil denotes mother. Kannamma in a sense have touched the sensitive chord that is why so many men could connect with the song. Dir. Sumathy Ram firmly believes that the goal of a poem or song is to make the reader or listener empathize with its content. The translation of the song is given below:

My dear...my treasure!  
Lost your dream? What I see  
In your eyes...that

I see tears!

Are you tied up?

Am I the one disturbing you, my dear?

Tell me dear...

Could you not come to me?

With your words...

Why don't you bring the spring to me, dear?

Kannamma is a classic ode that starts with a rhetorical question. Ode is exalted in subject-matter and elevated in tone and style. Neither the theme nor its treatment can be trivial or undignified. The poetess is serious both in the choice of her subject and in the manner of its presentation. Kannamma is the muse of Mahakavi Bharathiyar. She is a symbol of women's liberation. The song is titled Kannamma for it instigates Thulasi to come out of her shackles. In a long-distance relationship if the love is not consummated, the girl undergoes a type of disease called 'pasalai' - love sickness. What spells the lady is physical sickness but the man is tormented by mental sickness. Manikavasagar elaborates about men's mental sickness in "Thiruammanai" a chapter in *Thiruvasagam* thus:

காட்டாதனவெல்லாங் காட்டிச் சிவங்காட்டித்  
தாள்தாமரகாட்டித் தன்கருணைத் தேன் காட்டி  
நாட்டார் நகைசெய்ய நாம்மேலை வீடெய்த (6)

Manikavasagar admits that after being circumscribed by the God, Shiva, his lotus feet and honey compassion, he has always been in an elated state which has become a source of ridicule by fellow men.

*Aayakalaigal* – a lyrical tribute to feminine perfection. The lyric appeals more to the heart than to the intellect, or, to be more precise, its appeal to the intellect is through the heart. Of all the creations of God Brahma, the most perfect and incredible creation is woman. The only creature who is self-sufficient without imperfections. This song beautifully describes the physical perfection of Thulasi from head to toe. '*Pathathi Kesam*' is a Sanskrit term employed to the description of gods, goddesses, or royals. *Aayakalaigal* depicts the lissomness of the lead lady.

Is she the source of the

Art of Creation? ...

For the creator Brahma!

As He Picked up the sixty-four arts

Of creative essence...

She takes form

&

All her beauty springing up from the sixty arts!



1.5 Dir. Sumathy Ram with the legends MSV and SPB

Her eyes are like blue sky, her love-soaked voice is akin to nectar, the sculpted nose offers her a painting like look. The dimpled cheeks have turned crimson with coyness. The slender neck and elegant hands, the supple breasts, tender midriff, dancing legs, the untouched femininity that has never witnessed a trace of light. This particular number is a concoction of similes, metaphors and metonyms with beautiful, adept comparisons. If one is attentive, the sixty-three beauty aspects have been explicitly mentioned in the song, except for the sixty-fourth, which is concealed by Thulasi's subtle display of a mole on her bosom. In this song from head to toe, a woman's beauty is presented in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

Apart from Kaviarasu Kannadasan's *Azhage Azhagu* song from Kamal Haasan's *Rajapaarvai* 1981, no other song has used this '*Pathathi Kesam*' technique with such acumen. In the song, *Azhage Azhagu*, while describing the beauty of his ladylove, the hero, a blindman tells her that he doesn't know one particular part of her body. '*Oru Angam Kaigal Ariyaathathu!*'. During our discussion about this paper, Dir. Sumathy Ram came up with a beautiful line to replace the original from a feminine perspective. "*Oor Angam Enn-Kai-Thoda-- Nee-- Vidaadhadhu!* (You have prohibited me from touching a particular part)", which adds dignity and grace to the young lady's character. This author considers it as a great fortune to have been associated with such a meticulous poetess.

Another remarkable feature of the song is the rhyme scheme and rhythm. The words '*Thayagamo*', '*Kanirasamo*', '*Sithiramo*', '*Kungumumo*', '*Suyamvaramo*', '*Visithiramo*', '*Paravasamo*' bear testimony to the lyricist's command over Tamil language and what is even more astounding is the alliteration at the end of each word. Interrogative words are inserted throughout the song to enhance the musicality. The chorus in the song also poses questions on her ethereal beauty at the end of the charanams (verses). The ladies ask rhetorical questions that obviously answers affirmative:

Is she a progeny of Parvathy, Lakshmi or Saraswathi? Or

The damsel whose aura that enchants the universe or

Is she just a delusional effervescence of youth?

*Mayakkama* – The beauty of this song relates to the love stupor or trance experienced by lovers. *Anthi Mayakkam* denotes the intoxicating feeling experienced by lovers in the twilight time.

Are you intoxicated?

O! Darling!

Your intoxicated ness...

Is it the intoxication of love?

Or

Is it the oscillation of dual shades of twilight?

It is the intoxication

Of

Twilight & Love

My dear!

During the Sangam period (300 BC to 300 AD) in Tamil Nadu, it was considered impolite for a woman to express her feelings towards a man. The poetess has done her duty by adhering to cultural norms. Thus, Thulasi and Vishwam comply with cultural norms by calling each other 'Thozhan' and 'Thozhi', respectively. An enthusiastic fan of MSV wrote an article on MSV Times.com and expressed his generous appreciation for this aspect of the song:

Consciously avoiding modern sensual words like 'Vaseegara', 'Kalaaba Kaadhala' and addressing the lovers as friends or comrades, Sumathy has brought out more closeness of gentle intimacy between the lovers, than using debasing words. The famous lyricist Kavignar Kannadasan had once mentioned that the "lover has hidden her love due to shyness". Taking this one step further, Sumathy Ram had written that the "lover has merged her love with shyness".

Tiruvallur calls it '*Pozhudu Kanduirangal*':

காலை அரும்பிப் பகலெல்லாம் போதாகி

மாலை மலரும்இந் நோய். (1227)

When translated it sounds:

Budding at dawn and growing all day long

This disease blooms by evening.

The entire song is written in a conversational tone. In a friendly manner, the lover asks and his beloved replies. The song's essence is characterized by the poetic exchanges between the two lovers. Furthermore, the article on MSV Times.com mentions:

As this song evolves, the lover states “Lost my life (to her) and filled my heart with love”. In answering to him, she states “Upon wearing the wedding garland, I was happily surprised”. In continuation, the lover concludes saying that “I gracefully embraced her and led a life of fulfilment”. It is rather astonishing to know about the poetic prowess of Sumathy who had written all the songs of the film.

MSV had very much admired her poems and that is the reason he had come up with such memorable tunes. The apt voices of Sreenivas and Sujatha had indeed reduced the actual age of actors Mammootty and Nandita Das and had transported them to their teenage years. Further, Sujatha mesmerizes with a hissing tone. Placing Sreenivas’s voice under the mellifluous voice of Sujatha was a master stroke by the melody King. As the song continues to the charanam all the lines end with rhyming words of “Thean”, the composer, had skilfully adapted and fused the background music of his own immortal song ‘*Silar sirippaar*’ from the film ‘*Paava Mannippu*’, using a different type of instrument.

The word ‘*தென்*’ has been repeated twenty-two times in the song. ‘*தென்*’ refers to honey. The entire song is akin to a soothing honey that balances the emotional upheaval of agony and ecstasy encountered by lovers deeply in love.

*Nizhalin Kathai* – This contemplative song captures the emotions of Vishwam with utmost poignance. It’s not typical for men to disclose their innermost thoughts to others. In this ‘Story of Shadows’ number, the moment that stands out is when he blossoms and freely shares his deep emotions with Thulasi without any reservations.

Listen my dear!

This is the story of the shadow

Stop a while, the Real one!

The source of the shadows

Stop a while my dear!

This is the story of the shadow

Stop a while, the Real one!

Yours and mine...our paths

Are crossing for ever

Your pain is reflected in my eyes

For you to see!

Vishwam makes a gentle appeal to Thulasi by describing her as the true presence and confesses that he is only a shadow. Through the song’s poetic lines, the shadow asks the reality to hear his plight. Thus, Vishwam explains why he is feeling down and gives a reason to Thulasi. Salvation is how he ends his explanation by confessing. “உன் நெருக்கம் என் கிரக்கம் தழுவடியோ!” Dir. Sumathy Ram’s feat of creating a single line that reveals his lonely self, the reason behind it, and the solution is truly remarkable. During her contemplation

of this wonder, this author recalls a couplet from the *Thirukkural*. Tiruvallur's couplet indicates that the eyes that embody the oceanic love are deprived of sleep.

படலாற்றா பைதல் உழக்கும் கடலாற்றாக  
காமநோய் செய்தனன் கன். (1175)

When translated it sounds:

The eye that wrought me more than sea could hold of love woes,  
Is suffering pangs that banish all repose.

Vishwam is captivated by Thulasi's love. Vishwam expresses that he couldn't sleep because his eyes were heavy with the agony of unrequited love. The love that blossomed while they were young is still thriving and growing exponentially. Thulasi has always been, and will always be, Vishwam's soulmate.

உன் நெருக்கம் என் கிரக்கம் தழுவடியோ  
என் இறுக்கம் உன்னை இறுக்கும் நழுவடியோ  
உன் நடுக்கம், உன் கலக்கம் கூறடியோ  
கன் உறக்கம் இல்லை எனக்கும் ஏனடியோ?

In terms of poetry, this song combines alliteration, assonance, and refrain. Dir. Sumathy Ram 's mastery in using Tamil's musicality is remarkable. A refrain is a poetic technique that uses repetition of lines or phrases in a poem to underscore a theme or idea. One could listen to the repetition of the word '-adiyo' twenty-seven times. This word marks the end of every line. Interestingly, In Tamil, the term 'Adi' is used to describe the feet of humans. The song sequence features them walking on the seashore. Their feet are the focal point. Additionally, the feet show the metre in which a poem is composed. The feat achieved by the writer using the word 'feet' and the metre 'feet' is highly commendable.

**Haiku-** In the early twentieth century, the movement of imagism continued the tradition of pictorial expression in poetry. The theoretical program of this literary “school,” which is closely associated with the American poet Ezra Pound, focused on the “condensation” of poetry into powerful, essential images. The German word for poetry, “Dichtung,” was considered to mean the same as the Latin “condensare” (“to condense”), thus fitting very well the imagists’ preoccupation with the reduction of poetry to essential “pictures” or “images.” Pound drew on the Japanese poetic form of haiku as examples of this condensing form of poetry. Haikus contain three lines and on a thematic level refer to times of the day or seasons. The haikus in this classic capture human emotions brilliantly.

**Jyothi Nee** – Jyothi means light. Light is essential for lives on the earth. The radiance of the sun is the elixir for all lives. Darkness represents ignorance and light represents wisdom. The paper titled “*VISHWA THULASI*: A Classic Film by Dir. SUMATHY RAM- A Film-Study on Cultural Perspectives and Narrative Techniques.” by this author has defined the poem thus:

The aura of the sequence is enhanced by a haiku ‘Jyothi nee’ sung by Smt. Vani Jairam, a recipient of Padma Bhushan. The meaning of Jyothi is fire. In Hindu mythology, fire is associated with purity and

prosperity. Of the five elements of nature, fire is unique for plenty of reasons. Fire illuminates spiritually and vanquishes all the impurities without changing its nature. Agni always burns in the upward direction no matter in whichever position it is held... To Thulasi, Vishwam is the light of all lights. She has returned to her light after years of lamentations and torments. (291-292)

In *Namashivaya Pathigam*, Thirunavukkarasar praises the light. It is believed that it can eliminate darkness, not just physical darkness, but also the ignorance of human souls:

இல்லக விளக்கது இருள் கெடுப்பது  
 சொல்லக விளக்கது சோதி யுள்ளது  
 பல்லக விளக்கது பலருங் காண்பது  
 நல்லக விளக்கது நமச்சி வாயவே (8)

Following her haiku song's poetic lines, Dir. Sumathy Ram wrote the lines below:

You are the source of my life's light!  
 You are the source of my mystical light!  
 You are the source of my magical light!  
 You are the source of my life's light!  
 You make my eyes sparkle with your light!  
 You are the source of my heart's light!  
 You are the source of my life's light!  
 Your presence is the source of my soul's light!  
 You are the source of my soul's light!

*Kanmoodi* – In this song, Vishwam is searching for Thulasi while keeping his eyes closed. Since Thulasi is present in Vishwam's heart, it's unnecessary for him to keep his eyes open. But Thulasi's eyes are playful as she searches for her soulmate. Her heartthrob is the focus of her lively eyes. The emotional state of the hero and heroine can be represented aesthetically in just four lines with this fine haiku. Dir. Sumathy Ram's translation of the Tamil song into English is shown in the lines below:

As she gently closes her eyes, is the damsel looking for something?  
 Is she gazing at the mirror to feel her trembling?  
 Do her eyes give a fleeting glance while running and playing?  
 Is she enigmatic and has a strong passion for singing and playing?

Chinua Achebe's renowned poem 'Refugee Mother and Child' employs the line 'singing in her eyes', (16) though in a different sense. Eyes are the only means of communication when words fail.

*Thagam* – In this song sequence, Thulasi has mehndi (*maruthani*) on her hands and suddenly has hiccups. She is offered water by Vishwam to quench her thirst. Thulasi sings, 'Thagam Theerthum Ean Thagamagudhu Kanna?' (Even after drinking water, my thirst is still unquenched). He replies, 'Thagam Ennadi Mogam Kolludhu Kanna!' (I am always killed by the enchantment of my love, not by my thirst).



1.6 Dir. Sumathy Ram with the legends MSV and Smt. Vani Jayaram

A quest to quench this thirst is a question---

Despite quenching it, my dear, why is my thirst still present?

Compared to my thirst, yours is insignificant

The enchantment of my love, rather than my thirst, is always killing me.



1.7 Thulasi in search of Vishwam



1.8 Vishwam in search of Thulasi

Dir. Sumathy Ram's translation of the Tamil song into English is shown in the lines above. Anyone who listens to the songs and haikus could be left speechless due to their intensity and depth. MSV's enjoyment of all the poems and his choice to compose music even for haikus is no surprise, even though he has always preferred lyrics for creating complete songs, as the article on MSV Times.Com reiterates it.

The standard of Sumathy's lyrics is such that it invariably makes one feel sad that such writers are rare to find these days in the field of Tamil Cinema. Having mentioned about the greatness of the lyrics,

the manner in which it was filmed is even more tasteful and praiseworthy. She brushed life into her poems for the celluloid, which was evident in every shot and frame on the screen. The selection of costumes, make-up, selective ornaments, art designs and appropriate colour tones, reflects Sumathy Ram's refined artistic nature and without being extravagant, she has aesthetically strewn it well across the film.

According to Wordsworth, the greatest Romantic poet, poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions that are recollected in tranquility. Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) gave his contemporaries a fresh interpretation of what it means to be a creative genius: an artist who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than is supposed to be common among mankind. Dir. Sumathy Ram's poetic style reflects her profound understanding of human nature, as evidenced by her exceptional lyrics in *Vishwa Thulasi*.



#### 1.9 DIR. SUMATHY RAM

An Indian-American residing in Texas, Sumathy Ram is lauded as filmmaker, screenwriter, poet, lyricist, and music producer. Sumathy's latest creative project is a Hollywood movie promoting UNITY in Diversity.

During one of their conversations, this author asked Dir. Sumathy Ram about her current fascination with the style of her poetic songs. Recently, Dir. Sumathy Ram has developed a passion for writing English lyrics that convey stories in different styles, and she is currently working on a musical project with an internationally acclaimed composer who has won three GRAMMY awards. Dir. Sumathy Ram's current partnerships with the most accomplished and great minds in the Hollywood industry make her feel incredibly grateful at this moment. She always feels blessed for the opportunity to have worked with renowned professionals in the industry on her debut project. Upon talking to Dir. Sumathy Ram in depth, this author discovered that when her thoughts or actions align with her heart and mind, she produces exceptional works.

“Harmony between the mind, heart, and resolution makes everything possible.” – *RIG VEDA*

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