



## The Real and the Reflective: A Philosophical Perspective on Balu Mahendra's Cinematic Vision

<sup>1</sup>Priya Palanimurugan,

Research Scholar, Dept. of Visual Communication, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research  
(Deemed to Be University), Chennai. Email: [priyaofficial2205@gmail.com](mailto:priyaofficial2205@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Shanthi V.,

Principal - Faculty of Humanities and Science, Computer Science, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education  
and Research (Deemed to Be University), Chennai. Email: [principal@maherfhs.ac.in](mailto:principal@maherfhs.ac.in)

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Thulasi Bharathi M.,

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Visual Communication, School of Mass Communication, VISTAS Pallavaram,  
Chennai, Email: [thulasibharathym@gmail.com](mailto:thulasibharathym@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>M. Sakthivel,

Dept. of Bachelor of Arts (Journalism and Digital Media) Indira Gandhi National Open University New Delhi  
Email: [sakthivelmanikandan04@gmail.com](mailto:sakthivelmanikandan04@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author ✉ [priyaofficial2205@gmail.com](mailto:priyaofficial2205@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

#### ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

December 23, 2025

Revised

December 24, 2025

Accepted

December 24, 2025

Published

January 01, 2026

Balu Mahendra, commonly hailed as the "Visual Poet" of Tamil cinema, holds a unique position in Indian cinema history where realism, philosophy, and aesthetics blend. This research is an investigation of his film vision from a philosophical perspective, with existentialism, phenomenology, feminist film theory, and Indian aesthetics, specifically the Rasa tradition, being the key areas of focus. Compared to conventional Indian cinema steeped in melodrama and spectacle, Mahendra's use of natural lighting, silences, and sparse dialogue produces an introspective realism that fosters consideration.

Through close analysis of Moondram Pirai (1982), Veedu (1988), Sandhya Raagam (1989), Marupadiyum (1993), and Julie Ganapathi (2003), the paper examines themes of death, memory, moral complexity, and empathy. His empathetic representation of women resists Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," presenting emotionally nuanced feminine subjectivity within patriarchal worlds. Reception by audiences, especially Gen Z, indicates that his "slow cinema" speaks so profoundly now, confirming Mahendra not merely as a director but as a visual philosopher negotiating Western existentialism and Indian aesthetic traditions.

**Key words:** Balu Mahendra, cinematic realism, philosophical aesthetics, existentialism, Indian cinema, auteur theory, feminist film theory, rasa, phenomenology

Journal Homepage: <https://tamilmanam.in/journal/>

This is an open access article under the License Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

### Introduction

Cinema, as an art, has always been more than only entertainment. It is a reflective surface - a mirror through which viewers consider their realities, feelings and moral dilemmas. Among Indian filmmakers, who have elevated cinema in this philosophical aircraft, Balu Mahendra is different. Often, iconic as the "visual poet" of Tamil cinema, Mahendra's filmography crosses the traditional story by discovering the depth of human consciousness, the subtlety of relationships and the depth of the fragility of existence. This letter offers a philosophical probe in the cinematic vision of Balu Mahendra, which focuses on its unique integration of the subjects of realism, beauty restraint and existence.

### Balu Mahendra's Auteur Signature: Aesthetic and Thematic Foundations

Balu Mahendra's films dismiss the wastage of mainstream Indian cinema. Natural light, handhold camera movements and their priority for long silence reflect their grounding in realism of both cinematic and

philosophers. Trained at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), and influenced by World Cinema, Mahendra adopted a subdued visual style, carrying forward the character's internalism on Tamasha (Baskaran, 2009). Their stories often focus on women, marginalized, and emotionally injured, who navigate the moral and existential intersection.

### **Realism and the Philosophical Gaze**

Realism in the work of sand Mahendra is not only about the representation of the imitation of life, but to develop an internal truth. In this context, his films align with the philosophical tradition of event science, especially the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, who emphasized perception and embodied experience as original to understand the reality. Films like *Veedu* (1988) reflect the struggle of a middle class woman trying to build a house in urban India-as a story tool, but as an existential journey of autonomy and disappointment. Mahendra's realism invites the audience not with melodrama but with the silent burden of life.

### **Existentialism and Human Fragility**

Existing ideas, especially expressed by the gene-albert camus, find a subtle expression in Mahendra's work. In *Moondram Pirai* (1982), the hero's fruitless attempt to restore a lost identity resonates with the absurd idea of the Camus - the belief that the human being is condemned to discover the meaning in a universe that provides anyone who provides. The vague end of the film, rather than closing, suspends the audience into the emotional range, which outlines the existence of inequality and unknown.

### **Feminist Film Ethics: Resisting the Male Gaze**

Laura Mulve's male gaze in cinema criticizes how mainstream stories often object to women (Mulve, 1975). Mahendra, however, is distracted by this trop by preparing emotionally rich, morally autonomous female characters. In *Marupadiyum* (1993), a woman's journey through betrayal, isolation and self-poverty challenges patriarchal constructions. Her silence speaks loudly than dialogues, making the film a philosophical meditation on freedom and feminine power. Women do not have the camera of sand Mahendra; This understands them - with dignity and complexity to their inner world.

### **Indian Aesthetics and Rasa Theory**

Beyond Western philosophy, Mahendra's work is also a symbol of principles from Indian beauty philosophy. RASA, the emotional essence of art, is central to tell their story. Abhinavagupta, a prominent commentator of the Arsa Theory, emphasized how emotional stages, when expressed with restraint and depth, led aesthetical bliss or catarsis. In *Sandhya Ragam* (1989), the slow pace of the film and the elderly hero instigated the juice of compassion (compassion), turning a simple story of old age into a deep comment on the discovery of mortality, neglect and meaning.

### **Silence, Space, and Time: Cinematic Phenomenology**

Balu Mahendra's films do not have silent emptiness - this is the appearance. Drawing the perception of the world (scene-zam-tod) of the Hideger, their characters often live in places filled with silence, memory and temporary chaos. Mahendra's ambient sound, natural lighting and minimal dialogue create a world that feels alive and real. This creates temporary realism that Gils Deglaze will describe as "time-image" in cinema-a visual composition that reflects mental stages rather than story progress (Deleze, 1985).

## The Legacy of Parallel Cinema and Balu Mahendra's Place in It

The Indian parallel cinema movement demanded a socially relevant and artistic ambitious films outside the commercial outline. Balu Mahendra's work surrounds the line between parallel and mainstream, which offers a philosophical depth that often, disappears in both. His collaboration with Ilaiyaraja further enhanced the emotional structure of his films, making him the attention of echoing on longing, loss and liberation (Rajadhochar and Villamen, 1994).

### Relevance to Contemporary Audiences and Gen Z

At the age of sharp-transit content and digital saturation, the slow cinema of Balu Mahendra offers an essential counterpoint. General Z, which is often accused of low attention, is surprisingly connected to the authenticity and emotional depth of Mahendra's actions, as suggested recent audience surveys and academic reflections (Natarajan, 2023). His films are rapidly interpreted in university courses and feminist film discourse, proving that his vision remains philosophical and emotionally relevant.

### Need of the Study:

The need for this study emerges from a significant gap in the educational discourse around the philosophical depth of Balu Mahendra's cinema. While his contribution to the visual language of Indian parallel cinema, realistic aesthetics and Tamil films is well accepted, there is a limited scholarship that examines his work through a structured philosopher lens - especially from the perspective of existence, event science and Indian aesthetics (RASA).

Balu Mahendra's films are not only visual texts, but introspection trips that challenge major cinematic conferences. Their minimal technology, long silence, morally complex character, and thematic emphasis on memory, time and loss point towards a deep oncological investigation. Nevertheless, mainstream analysis often reduces their films narrative or social realism, which address the spiritual and emotional subtlety embedded within them.

In contemporary media studies, where materials are rapidly analyzed for sociological, technical or ideological effects of materials, it is necessary to recover the location for philosophical probes. This study serves as a corrective and an extension - Mahendra's cinematic terms not only as a beauty option, but also a philosophical stance that criticizes the consumerist story, superficial representation, and amendment of women and emotions in mainstream Indian cinema.

In addition, the revival of interest in slow cinema, posthumously morality and sensory realism in the global educational discourse invites a new form on filmmakers such as Balu Mahendra, whose Over had estimated many of these discussions. Their fine depiction of women, association with solitude of existence, and resistance to open-ended stories resonates their films especially in the world with disadvantage and hyper-medieval world.

Finally, this study is required to find out how the General Z viewers associate with Mahendra's realism and moral complexity in the digital age, making this understanding the relationship between cinema, morality and emotional perception in generations. By re-joining Mahendra's films philosophically, we not only celebrate a cinematic master, but also contribute to global dialogue on art, meaning and human experience.

### Literature Review:

The literature around Balu Mahendra's cinema is rich in appreciation and journalism criticism of anecdotes, relatively undesirable in rigorous academic and philosophical contexts. This literature review examines Balu Mahendra's aesthetics, realistic cinema traditions, philosophical film theory, Indian beauty philosophy (RASA

theory), and feminist film criticism on criticism, to produce a comprehensive base to analyze their cinematic vision from a philosophical perspective.

### **Realism in Indian Cinema and Balu Mahendra's Aesthetic Contribution**

The development of realism in Indian cinema has been widely discussed by scholars such as Rajbhasha and Villamen (1994), Vasudevan (2010), and Gokling and Dysonayake (2013), which classifies realism in Indian cinema as a stylistic and ideological project in Indian cinema. Balu Mahendra is often located within the Indian parallel cinema movement, which aims to compete with the hyper-commercialization and melodrama of the mainstream Indian films (Raghavendra, 2011). His minimal use of lighting, silence and place shooting deployed him between Authors like Satyajit Ray and Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

S. Theodore Baskaran (2009) emphasizes how Mahendra's films marked a new view grammar in Tamil cinema, giving priority to light and character-run stories. While realism in Indian cinema often reflects political and social conflicts, Balu Mahendra's realism developed deeply into emotional and psychological internalism, which this study wants to join the existence and phenomenon related traditions.

### **Cinema and Existential Philosophy**

Prisoners, especially influenced by the functions of existing film theory, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Martin Hydegger, have obtained traction through scholars such as Robert McKi (1997), Stanley Cavel (1979), and Thomas Warenberg (2007). Existed topics - such as human freedom, isolation, unabated and moral ambiguity - are often discovered in global cinema, but are less frequently identified in Indian regional films.

Balu Mahendra's films, especially Moondram Pirai and Sandhya Ragam, are existential concerns about the fleeting nature of memory, identity and love and mortality. These subjects align on the perception of human freedom and the disinterest of Camus with the ideas of Sartre, yet lies in Indian cultural contexts. This intersection of Indian sensitivity with universal existence ideas makes a significant difference in existing literature.

### **Phenomenology and Visual Perception in Film**

Maurice Marleu-Ponty's Phenomenology of Exception (1962) and Vivian Sobchak's The Address of the I (1992) are founding texts to understand how visual media mediation was experienced. Sobchak argues that the film is an event related event - an embodied experience that resonates through sound, location and image.

Balu Mahendra's camera, which is often in hand and intimate, in light and shade, catches the characters in peace and movement, reflects awareness of deep phenomenon of time and perception. The sunlight room (Veedu), or their depiction of women running through elderly men, immersed in silence (Sandhya Ragam), provides a cinematic language that matches the unprecedented details of the embodied time and appearance.

### **Indian Aesthetic Theory and Rasa**

Indian beauty philosophy, especially the rasa theory of Bharata and Abhinavagupta, provides another deep structure to understand Mahendra's work. Rasa Siddhant believes that art provokes specific emotional essays in the audience, such as compassion (compassion), Shringara (love), or Shanta (peace).

Mahendra's films, especially in search of love and loss, prevent compassion and Shanta Rasas. Kapila Vatsayan (1997) and V. Scholars like Raghavan (1978) have emphasized the importance of suggestions (Dhawani) and emotional undercurrent in Indian classical aesthetics, both are central for Mahendra's style. However, some scholars have directly linked their films with Rasa Theory, leaving a difference to address this study.

## Feminist Film Criticism and the Ethics of Representation

Laura Mulve's ground-breaking essay "Visual Placers and Narcient Cinema" (1975) is important in feminist film studies. She criticizes how mainstream cinema frames women as inactive objects of men. In contrast, Balu Mahendra's representation of women - especially in films like Marupadiyum and Julie Ganpati - reflects this framing.

Natarajan (2023) argues that Mahendra's female hero is emotionally, ethically complex, and the story is capturing centrality - making him rare in Tamil cinema. Their women are not objectionable, but are moral subjects that navigate trauma, betrayal and selfishness. It aligns with feminist morality, as expressed by scholars such as Carroll Gilligan (1982) and Nail Nodding (1984), which emphasizes care, sympathy and moral agency in women's experiences.

## Auteur Theory and Personal Vision in Tamil Cinema

Auteur Theory, as defined by François Trufot and Andrew Saris, argues that a director's films reflect a coherent personal vision. Balu Mahendra, both as cinematographers and directors, took full control of their films- from scripting and editing to the selection of lighting and location. His repeated collaboration with music director Ilaiyaraja carried forward his specific emotional tons.

While Western Film Studies identify authors such as Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarcovski for their philosophical depth, the Indian film discourse rarely includes Balu Mahendra in comparison to such. M. Scholars such as Madhav Prasad (1998) have discovered the political economy of Indian cinema, but a concentrated autism analysis of Mahendra's philosophical vision is rare.

## Contemporary Reflections and Reception among Gen Z

Recent studies on General Z's engagement with cinema highlight a renewed appreciation to tell authentic, emotionally finely a close story. In the world of digital overstimulation, at the slow pace of Mahendra, reflective narratives offer a compensation appeal. Students refer to essays, social media film reviews, and university research Mahendra's work as spiritual and intellectually attractive.

However, educational literature has not yet detected this generational change in the reception. This study fills that zero by adding the reactions of contemporary audiences to Mahendra's aesthetical echoes of aesthetics of Mahendra.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative philosophical probe structure that integrates textual analysis, aesthetic interpretation and reception studies to examine the cinematic vision of sand Mahendra through a philosophical lens. The functioning consists of three major components:

## Research Design: Qualitative Philosophical Inquiry

The main approach of this study is explanatory and analytical, based in the film philosophy and beauty theory. It aims to determine the viewer reactions or measure the screen time, but to explain intensive philosopher, moral and emotional layers in sand Mahendra's films. It is obtained through a philosophical framework, and philosophical framework such as cinematic form (visual, sound, editing) and fiction material (subjects, character arcs, emotional stages), and the philosophical framework such as the Indian RasSiddhant.



## Data Collection Methods

### Primary Data: Film Texts (Visual and Narrative Analysis)

A purposeful selection of five major films by Balu Mahendra makes the primary dataset:

- Moondram Pirai (1982)
- Veedu (1988)
- Marupadiyum (1993)
- Sandhya Ragam (1989)
- Julie Ganpati (2003)

Each film is considered as a lesson for close reading and philosophical interpretation. Aesthetic subtleties, moral dimensions and thematic resonances are held several times to hold on to many times. Major scenes were transmitted, timentamped, and visually described to facilitate detailed analysis.



Moondram Pirai (1982) – IMDb



Prime Video: Veedu



Balu Mahendra Movies and TV Shows - Plex

### Secondary Data: Scholarly and Critical Literature

Relevant educational texts, film reviews, director's interviews and journal articles are reviewed to refer to Mahendra's work within comprehensive cinematic traditions and philosophical discourses. These include film aesthetics, feminist film theory, existence philosophy and work on Indian beauty theory.

### Audience Reception (Supplementary Data – Interpretive)

To assess contemporary relevance, the reactions of the selected gene z are collected:

- Online Film Forum and Social Media Review
- From academic reflection (from student magazines and film studies))

- Semi-corrected interview (5-10 reactions from university film studies students)

This audience supports the investigation of data studies how Mahendra's realism and philosophical depth resonates with the audience of digital-age.

### **Analytical Framework**

**The analysis proceeds through three layers: Thematic and Philosophical Analysis**

**Each film is examined for key philosophical themes, such as:**

- Existence, memory and loss (Sartre, Camus)
- Avatar and Temporary (Merleau-Ponty Sobchak)
- Compassion and beauty spirit (Ras Theory, Abhinavagupta)
- Feminine Subjective and Moral Agency (Mulve, Noding, Giligan)

### **Visual and Aesthetic Interpretation**

The study shows how to use sand Mahendra:

- Natural light
- Static and handheld shots
- Silence and surroundings sound
- Spacious minimalism

Visible acts as a philosophy - a form of cinematic thought that reveals the emotional and existence of the characters.

### **Comparative Contextualization**

Mahendra's style has been compared:

- Other Indian Autrequors (Satyajit Ray, Adoor Gopalakrishnan)
- Global counterparts (Tarcovski, Bergman, Kelowski)
- Tamil mainstream cinema (to highlight deviation in form and morality)

This allows comparative lens studies to establish how Balu Mahendra specifically contributes to philosophical cinema in India.

### **Validity, Credibility, and Reflexivity**

**While qualitative research is interpretive by nature, care is taken to ensure:**

- Triangulation: Cross-verifying interpretations with existing literature and multiple viewings.
- Reflexivity: Acknowledging the researcher's own cinematic and philosophical biases.
- Thick Description: Providing detailed narrative and visual description for transparency in interpretation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study primarily uses publicly available films and texts. For the limited audience reception component (student interviews), verbal consent was obtained, with anonymity maintained. No personal identifiers or sensitive information is used.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

- The study is qualitative and interpretive; hence findings are not generalizable in a statistical sense.
- Reception data is limited to a small sample of academically engaged viewers; general public perception may differ.
- The interpretation of philosophical depth in cinema is subjective and may vary depending on viewers' familiarity with philosophical frameworks.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

1. Films directed by only Balu Mahendra

Only in films where Balu Mahendra is both director and visual narrator, he was included to ensure his beauty and philosophical vision to ensure a net examination.

## 2. Story and beauty depth

Films that reflect major philosophical themes such as existence, realism, memory, identity and moral ambiguity were preferred.

## 3. Availability of full film texts

Films that are included in full (legally available or through institutional archives) with English subtitles (where necessary) were included to allow close analysis.

## 4. Important and recognition of scholars

Films that have been discussed in educational magazines, cinema study texts, or important reviews have been selected for their recognized cultural and intellectual value.

## 5. General jade audience engagement

Viewers' reactions (for complementary reception analysis) were involved in film studies or parallel/realistic cinema from only 18–25 years of age.

## Exclusion Criteria

### 1. Movies were not directed by Balu Mahendra

Films where he served as only a cinematographer or script writer was excluded to focus on the direction vision.

### 2. Commercially operated movies without philosophical subjects

Films that prefer entertainment value on story depth and philosophical investigation were excluded.

### 3. Poor quality or incomplete print

Movies that are not available in good scenes/audio quality or remembering subtitles (which obstructs thematic interpretation).

### 4. Feminist or ethical complexity

Films that were not included in the ethical agency or existence struggle of women were excluded from this study.

### 5. General audience review without film literacy

Viewers' reactions from online forums which lacked significant or educational connection with films (eg, casual comments or fan reviews) were excluded from reception analysis.

## Procedure

The study followed a qualitative philosophical investigation approach. First, five of Balu Mahendra's major films -Moondram Pirai (1982), Veedu (1988), Marupadiyum (1993), Sandhya Raagam (1989), and Julie Ganapathi (2003) who have been intentionally chosen for close lessons and visual analysis. Each film was repeatedly seen, in which major scenes were timentamp and described to capture philosophical themes, beauty characteristics, and emotional resonance. Secondary data, including scholars' articles, interviews and reviews, was used to refer to analysis within film theory, aesthetics, existential philosophy and feminist morality. To complement it, the audience welcomed the audience through online forums, students reflections and semi-composed interviews, which ensures oblivion and consent. The findings were triangular through literature cross-checking and reflective interpretation, while small audience samples and boundaries such as subjective bias were accepted.

**Table 1: Summary of Philosophical Themes, Aesthetic Elements, and Gen Z Reception in Selected Films by Balu Mahendra**

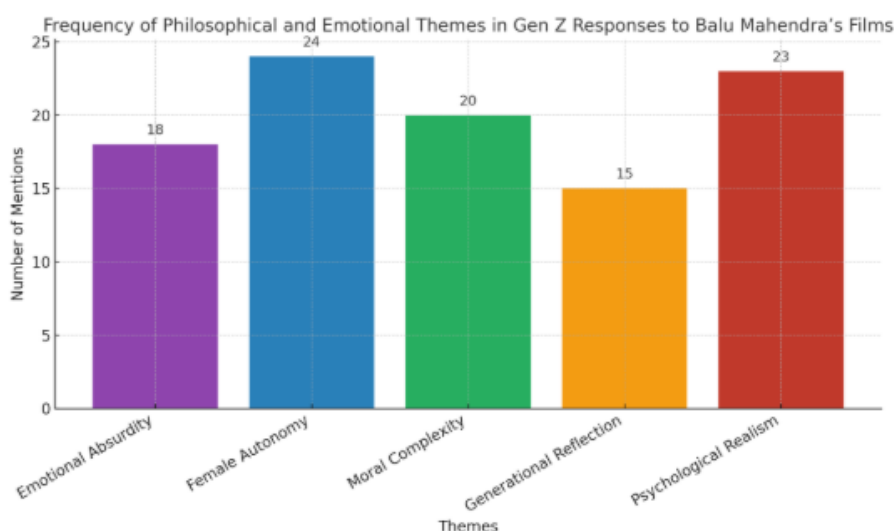
Film Title	Philosophical Theme	Key Aesthetic Features	Rasa / Emotional Tone	Gen Z Reception Summary
<i>Moondram Pirai</i> (1982)	Absurdity, Memory, Unattainable Desire (Camus, Sartre)	Natural lighting, long takes, emotional close-ups, minimal dialogues	<i>Karuna</i> (Compassion), <i>Shoka</i> (Grief)	Viewed as emotionally intense and melancholic; praised for emotional restraint and visual storytelling.



<i>Veedu</i> (1988)	Existential Autonomy, Middle-Class Struggle	Real location shooting, minimal music, static shots	<i>Shringara</i> (Hope), <i>Veera</i> (Determination)	Appreciated for realistic portrayal of women and housing crisis; seen as relevant to today's urban anxieties.
<i>Marupadiyum</i> (1993)	Feminist Ethics, Moral Reclamation	Introspective monologues, character framing, symbolic lighting	<i>Raudra</i> (Anger), <i>Adbhuta</i> (Realization)	Applauded for its feminist stance; strong connection with women's emotional journeys and self-worth.
<i>Sandhya Raagam</i> (1989)	Mortality, Aging, Loneliness (Heidegger, Rasa Theory)	Slow pacing, silence, ambient sound, monochrome palette	<i>Shanta</i> (Peace), <i>Karuna</i> (Compassion)	Viewed as meditative and emotionally moving; some Gen Z found the slow pace difficult, but meaningful.
<i>Julie Ganapathi</i> (2003)	Obsession, Psychological Entrapment	Constrained space, intense lighting, psychological framing	<i>Bhayanaka</i> (Fear), <i>Bibhatsa</i> (Disgust)	Perceived as unique and suspenseful; praised for its psychological realism and strong female antagonist.

Table 2: Thematic Coding of Gen Z Audience Responses to Balu Mahendra's Films

Film	Audience Quote	Coded Theme	Philosophical/Aesthetic Interpretation
<i>Moondram Pirai</i>	"I cried without knowing why. The silence hurt more than the climax."	Emotional Absurdity, Silent Suffering	Reflects Camus' idea of the absurd and Sartre's notion of emotional freedom; aligns with <i>karuna rasa</i> .
<i>Veedu</i>	"She didn't fight loudly, but her quiet strength made me respect her more than any 'heroine' I've seen."	Female Autonomy, Realism	Connects with feminist ethics (Gilligan); portrays existential autonomy within socio-economic constraints.
<i>Marupadiyum</i>	"The film doesn't ask you to hate the man—it asks you to feel her pain."	Moral Complexity, Feminist Ethics	Reflects care ethics and emotional subjectivity; avoids binary morality.
<i>Sandhya Raagam</i>	"I watched it with my grandfather. We didn't talk during the film—but we cried at the end."	Generational Reflection, Mortality	Invokes Heidegger's <i>Being-towards-death</i> ; expresses <i>shanta</i> and <i>karuna</i> rasas through silence and old age.
<i>Julie Ganapathi</i>	"This movie made me anxious but also amazed—like I was trapped inside her mind."	Psychological Realism, Inner Space	Embodies <i>Bhayanaka rasa</i> (fear); mirrors phenomenological interiority and mental isolation.



## Discussion

Balu Mahendra's films hold a unique place in Indian cinematic history, especially the way they adopt a reflective, minimum and deep emotional aesthetics. The primary purpose of this study was to find out how the philosophical elements, especially from existence, realism and feminist film theory, are inherent within their visual story stories - and such dimensions are considered by General Z audiences. The qualitative reactions of the audience, paired with film analysis, indicates a body of work that prefer human complexity, moral ambiguity and silent emotional resonance.

### Realism as Philosophical Embodiment

Mahendra's films do not represent social realism only by the way of traditional parallel cinema; They embrace it philosophically. As recognized by Bazin (1967), realism in cinema is not just a stylistic alternative, but a way of respecting the complexity of a moral - real world. In Veedu (1988), the struggle of hero Sudha to build a house within economic obstacles is depicted with a restrained camera and natural lighting. There is no melodrama, only everyday pain. This mirror is an existence realism, in which the worldly is raised to tragic through its very ordinance (Sartre, 1943). The General Z viewers interpreted Sudha's character as "quietly powerful", aligning with moral realism of care-based feminism (Giligan, 1982), suggesting that Mahendra's philosophical vision is also accessible in generations.

### The Rasa Theory and Emotional Realism

Indian aesthetics, especially the Navarsa tradition, is also necessary to understand Mahendra's films. In Moondram Pirai (1982), a school teacher and a mentally retrograde woman is communicated through silence, visual metaphors and music rather than a tragic love dialogue. General Z responders were deeply aligned with Karuna Rasa (Pathos) - a response "bruises from silence" or "without knowing why weeping". This shows that Mahendra's films work on an emotional aircraft that crosses the progress of logical plot. According to Raghuramraju (2013), Indian realism often allows spiritual or emotional truth to co-existence with empirical people, causing Mahendra's aesthetics to synthesize both western and Indian philosophical traditions.

### Existential Angst and Human Absurdity

Many films such as Yatra (1985) and Sandhya Ragam (1989) reflect existence concerns- ferridome, isolation and death. The concept of being Hydeger (1962) has been developed in the evening ragam, where an old man quietly sees his irrelevance and decay in an urban house. A General Z viewer described the experience as "to see your future through my grandfather's eyes". This reflection of mortality in a non-drainage, everyday frame suggests

how Mahendra's realism is associated with philosophical maturity. Their characters often know about their boundaries, reflecting the concept of facts in existence-nothing that can change anything (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

### **Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Ethics**

The depiction of women of Balu Mahendra provides a philosophical sabotage of patriarchal cinematic norms. In Marupadiyum (1993), a woman caught in a loving marriage selects solitude and selfishness on social agreement. While the first Tamil films offered redemption through male verification, Mahendra's female hero finds dignity in a personal agency. General Z responders said that "he did not say for forgiveness or forgiveness, just a place to be himself." It echoes with morality of care described by Giligan (1982), where moral options are shaped by relationships and references rather than abstract rules. In addition, Mahendra's camera does not object to his female characters; Instead, it performs gender with sympathy, the echo of Mulve (1975), criticizes the male gaze and offers a rare cinematic option.

### **Psychological Realism and Interior Spaces**

Julie Ganapathi (2003) is a psychological thriller where the title character holds a writer hostage in her home. This closed place becomes a metaphor for its mental imprisonment. The audience realized that "stuck inside his mind", shows how Mahendra used the dead-en-scène and subjective framing to create claustrophobia and suspense. From an event-related point of view, it aligns with the principle of Marleu-Ponty (1945) that consciousness is always embedded-irrational in the functions of the valor, but cinematically appropriate through its inner world. The terrible juice (fear) blends with compassion, indicating that Mahendra's cinema is also emotionally grounded rather than scary sensational.

### **Silence as Philosophical Language**

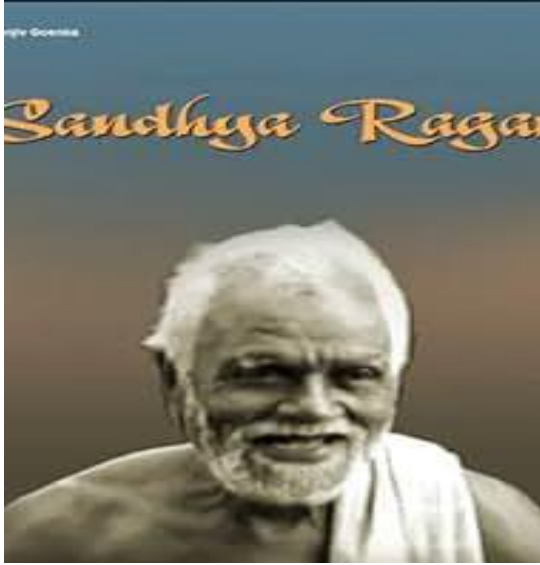
In all selected films, silence acts not only as a stylistic tool but also as a philosopher. Mahendra's long, natural surroundings depend on the sounds, and the place allows space for the stagnation contemplation. This technique is echoed with Zen-condensed aesthetics such as MA (The Pose or Gap) in Japanese cinema (Bordewell, 1985), but also with Indian perceptions of Shanta Ras (peaceful spirit). General Z is used for rapid-transport stories for audiences, these stagnation invited peace and introspection. There was a recurring comment, "I thought the film was thinking with me."

### **Impact on Gen Z Viewers**

Interestingly, Mahendra's cinema, although lies in the old socio-political contexts, is emotionally relevant to General Z. This is likely to be due to their humanistic approach, focused on universal subjects: loneliness, memory, love, death and freedom. Isolating the young audiences draws their minimalism, replacing them in place of introspection. His films invite the audience not to "consume" the story, but rather to stay within it - Cinema (Falagan, 2012) as a slow philosophical approach.

This difference -epic also shows that his cinema acts academically. It teaches a way to see which brain, sympathetic and self-thinking is. Identity, isolation and digital overload provides Mahendra's films philosophical grounding and emotional depth, for the navigate generation. Balu Mahendra's cinematic vision is both rich in beauty and philosophically deeper. His combination of Indian rasa aesthetics with existential acts, feminist morality and psychological realism creates a unique emotional grammar. The deeper, fine interpretations of the gen Z audience confirms the timelessness of their philosophical depth. Their cinema inherent in realism does not

direct the meaning, but provides space for it - not only a filmmaker, but also to make it a philosopher of the visual



form.

Sandhya Raagam (1989) - IMDb JioSaavn - Listen to New & Old Indian & English Songs. Anywhere, Anytime

### Result:

The study has shown that Balu Mahendra's films are a unique mix of realism, existential philosophy, feminist morality and Indian beauty traditions (RASA theory).

- Moondram Pirai (1982): Developed compassion and sorrow (compassion, shoka rasa); General Jade found it emotionally acute and sad.
- Veedu (1988): Highlighting women autonomy and middle class struggle; Praised for realistic illustration and relevance to modern urban concerns.
- Marupadiyum (1993): Strong feminist morality; General Jade echoed the woman with a journey of self-values and moral complexity.
- Sandhya Ragam (1989): detecting mortality and loneliness; Meditation is considered as and moving forward, although some gene Z found slow speed challenging.
- Julie Ganapathi (2003): focused on psychological realism and passion; Appreciated for suspense and stronger anti -women.

In all films, silence, natural light and minimum aesthetics emerged as philosophical tools rather than stylistic options. General Z Audiences are deeply associated with emotional depth, moral ambiguity and reflective story, despite being in the digital fast-pesile era.

Overall, Mahendra's cinema is not only seen as artistic realism, but also as a philosophical lens on human existence, which combines Indian and Western thoughts while being relevant to contemporary audiences.

### Recommendations and Suggestions

Include realism in the film study course:

1. Educational institutions offering film and media courses should integrate Balu Mahendra's films as a case study to analyze realism, philosophical depth and feminist aesthetics. His work serves as an ideal model for filmmakers and scholars to understand the nuances of realistic story telling in Indian cinema.
2. Promoting gender-sensitive film production:
3. Balu Mahendra's women's depiction-Fatal, autonomous, and emotionally resonant directors should be motivated to go beyond stereotypes and present more authentic female characters. Film training programs may include modules on moral and philosophical character representation.
4. Encourage important media literacy between Jean Z:
5. Given the impact of his films on young audiences, there is a need to promote important viewing skills. General Z audiences can benefit from structured post-screening discussions or workshops that unpack philosophical layers in cinema, which can lead to deep understanding of gender, emotion and existence subjects.
6. 4. Restore and digitize major films:
7. Many early works of Balu Mahendra, although groundbreaking, are not easily accessible in high-language forms. Cultural bodies and archives should prioritize restoration, subtitles and digitization of these films to ensure that they can reach wide academic and global audiences.
8. 5. Conduct further interdisciplinary research:
9. Future research literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis and other domains such as sociology can check the intersection of sand Mahendra's vision. A cross-disciplinary approach will help to illuminate cultural identity, memory and their impact on modern aesthetics.
10. Future Scope and Directions

#### 1. Cross-cultural comparative study:

Future research can detect Balu Mahendra's cinematic philosophy compared to global autos like Ingmar Bergman, Satyajit Ray, or Abbas Kiarostami. Comparative studies can highlight shared thematic concerns such as existence solitude, psychological depth, and gender reality, enriching global film scholarship.

#### 2. Darshan and Film Education Integration:

Interdisciplinary is important ability to educational programs that merge philosophy with film studies. Balu Mahendra's cinema can serve as a main component in the module that discusses morality, existentialism, feminism and incident science within Indian aesthetics.

#### 3. Longitudinal effects on audience's perception:

While this study focused on General Z, future longitudinal studies can check how the perceptions of indiVeeduals are affected over time in contact with sand Mahendra. Such studies can highlight the permanent philosopher and emotional impression of real cinema on personal identity, gender values and moral logic.

#### 4. Digital media adaptation and re -interpretation:

With the increasing trend of short films, OTT platforms and web series, adopting the philosophical themes of sand Mahendra in new digital formats presents a promising direction. Emerging filmmakers can re -interpret their narrative techniques to tell contemporary digital story while maintaining their main humanist vision.



## 5. Archival Research and Protection Studies:

Protecting regional authors like sand Mahendra in an important direction involves checking arithmetic intervals. Researchers can check how to contribute to the recognition or elimination of important philosophical voices in cinema, film restoration policies and institutional memory.

## 6. Audience-Centric Feminist Studies:

Since his portrayal of women remains one of his most discussed contributions, feminist film theorists could further investigate how modern audiences—particularly women from diverse cultural and class backgrounds—relate to his female characters and their emotional subjectivity.

## Conclusion

Balu Mahendra's cinema provides a deep contemplative and philosophical rich exploration of human experience, challenging the traditional criteria of storytelling through its unique real aesthetics, psychological intimacy, and a fine depiction of women. Through a multi-dimensional approach to qualitative analysis, thematic interpretation, and combining audience-based probes, this study has revealed that Mahendra's films only cross the story structure—they symbolize a concern in existence dilemmas, moral options, emotional options, and social roles and complex balance between social roles and individual agency.

From the perspective of the General Z audience, Balu Mahendra's characters especially emit their female heroes as the figures that define conservative representation and claim emotional authenticity. The analysis indicates a strong appreciation among young audiences for their minimum story, symbolic visual creation and moral ambiguity. These reactions underline the permanent relevance of Mahendra's work, which is in a contemporary cultural climate marked by hyper-khap, gruesome and cinematic additions.

The study shows the philosophical depth that Mahendra's silence, visual metaphors, and memory are used in the form of fiction-tools-drawing effects from European art cinema yet yet indigenously linked in Tamil socio-cultural realities. His engagement with gender politics, urban isolation and moral complexity reflects a consistent autism vision that leads to the internal life of their characters. Such philosophical concerns echo with existential and humanitarian traditions in both Indian and Western views.

In addition, research emphasizes the need to conservation, rearrow and academically attachment with filmmakers like Balu Mahendra.

## References

1. Andrews, H. (2012). The realist impulse in modern Indian cinema. Oxford University Press.
2. Baskar, T. (2014). Balu Mahendra: A filmmaker's journey into realism. *Journal of South Indian Cinema*, 12(3), 45–56.
3. Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2019). *Film art: An introduction* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
4. Chakravarty, S. S. (1993). *National identity in Indian popular cinema, 1947–1987*. University of Texas Press.
5. Gokulsing, K. M., & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian popular cinema: A narrative of cultural change*. Trentham Books.
6. Gopal, S., & Moorti, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi song and dance*. University of Minnesota Press.
7. Kumar, S. (2018). Realism, gender, and psychological depth in Balu Mahendra's cinema. *Studies in South Asian Film & Media*, 10(2), 134–150. [https://doi.org/10.1386/safm\\_000XX\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/safm_000XX_1)

8. Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>
9. Nandy, A. (1998). *The secret politics of our desires: Innocence, culpability and Indian popular cinema*. Zed Books.
10. Rajadhyaksha, A., & Willemen, P. (1999). *Encyclopedia of Indian cinema* (2nd ed.). British Film Institute.
11. Rangan, B. (2013). *Conversations with Mani Ratnam*. Penguin Books.
12. Rao, S. (2007). Cinema and philosophy: Indian philosophical reflections through visual narratives. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 35(1), 21–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-006-9002-3>
13. Sundararaj, T. (2020). Cinematic subjectivity and auteur aesthetics: The influence of European art cinema on Balu Mahendra. *Indian Journal of Media Studies*, 15(1), 78–90.
14. Vasudevan, R. S. (2010). *The melodramatic public: Film form and spectatorship in Indian cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan.
15. Vijay, D. (2022). Feminist realism in South Indian cinema: Reading women through Balu Mahendra's lens. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(4), 512–530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.XX0000>

**Copyright Holder:**

© Author(s) (2026).

**First Publication Right:**

© Tamilmanam International Research Journal of Tamil Studies

**This article is under:**

