

= Balu Mahendra =

Balanathan Benjamin Mahendran ( 20 May 1939 ? 13 February 2014 ) , commonly known as Balu Mahendra , was a Sri Lankan cinematographer , director , screenwriter and film editor , who worked in various Indian film industries , primarily in Tamil cinema . Born into a Sri Lankan Tamil household , Mahendra developed a passion towards photography and literature at a young age . He was drawn towards film @-@ making after witnessing the shoot of David Lean 's The Bridge on the River Kwai ( 1957 ) in Sri Lanka . A graduate of the London University , he started his career as a draughtsman before gaining an admission to the Film and Television Institute of India ( FTII ) to pursue a course in cinematography . Mahendra entered films as a cinematographer in the early 1970s and gradually rose to becoming a film @-@ maker by the end of the decade .

Making his directorial debut through the Kannada film Kokila ( 1977 ) , Mahendra made over 20 films in all South Indian languages and two in Hindi . He was one of the earliest film @-@ makers in Tamil cinema to introduce realism and helped revitalise the industry . At the tail end of his career , he established a film school in Chennai which offers courses in cinematography , direction and acting . Following a brief phase of poor health , Mahendra died of cardiac arrest in February 2014 .

Widely regarded as an auteur , Mahendra wrote the script for his films , handled the camera and edited the film himself apart from directing . He was the recipient of six National Film Awards ? including two for Best Cinematography , three Filmfare Awards South , and several state awards from the governments of Kerala , Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh .

= = Early life = =

Mahendra was born in 1939 into a Sri Lankan Tamil family in the village Amirthakali near Batticaloa , Sri Lanka . Born to a professor father , he did his schooling at Methodist Central College and St. Michael 's College , Batticaloa . As a teenager , he was drawn towards films by his class teacher . It was during this time he happened to see Bicycle Thieves ( 1948 ) and Battleship Potemkin ( 1925 ) . When he was at the sixth grade , he got an opportunity to witness the making of David Lean 's The Bridge on the River Kwai ( shot in Sri Lanka ) during a school field trip . Inspired by Lean 's personality , Mahendra determined to become a film @-@ maker .

Right from his childhood , Mahendra was interested in fine arts and literature . Upon completion of school , he joined the London University and graduated with a bachelor 's degree ( honours ) in science . After his graduation , he returned to Sri Lanka and worked in Colombo as a draughtsman in the survey department for a brief period during which he edited a Tamil literary magazine titled Thyen Aruvi . In Colombo , he worked as an amateur drama artist with Radio Ceylon and got acquainted with the Sinhala theatre groups .

Mahendra 's passion for cinema prompted him to leave for India and join the Film and Television Institute of India , Pune in 1966 . He had to take up cinematography as he could not gain admissions to other disciplines . At the institute he was exposed to world cinema as he got an opportunity to watch films made by François Truffaut and Jean @-@ Luc Godard , both associated with the French New Wave movement . In 1969 , Mahendra graduated from the institute with a gold medal .

= = Film career = =

= = = Debut as cinematographer = = =

As a fresh graduate from the FTII , Mahendra 's early attempts to enter Tamil cinema were unsuccessful . He got his first break as a cinematographer in 1971 in the Malayalam film Nellu . Ramu Kariat , the director of Nellu , was impressed by A View from the Fortress , Mahendra 's diploma film at the FTII . Though the filming of Nellu began in 1971 , production delays postponed its release for three years . Meanwhile , Kariat signed up Mahendra for another film titled Maaya

which released in 1972 . However , P. N. Menon 's Panimudakku ( 1972 ) got released before Maaya , thus becoming Mahendra 's first release . He continued to work in Malayalam films such as Sastham Jayichu Manushyan Thottu ( 1973 ) , Kaliyugam ( 1973 ) and Chattakari ( 1974 ) .

Nellu , shot in colour , won the Kerala State Film Award for Best Cinematography after it was released in 1974 . Mahendra had continued successes with films such as Prayanam ( 1975 ) and Chuvanna Sandhyakkal ( 1975 ) , both fetching the state award for best photography to him for the second consecutive time . Between 1971 and 1976 , he worked in about 20 films ? mostly in Malayalam ? as a cinematographer . The following year he made his directorial debut with Kokila . Made in Kannada , the film was a " triangular love story " . In addition to a Best Screenplay award from the Karnataka government , Mahendra won his first National Film Award for Best Cinematography for the film . The film was both critically acclaimed and commercially successful . It was equally successful in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu and has the distinction of being the only Kannada film to complete 150 days in Madras ( now Chennai ) as of 2014 .

= = = Entry into Tamil films = = =

Despite being a Tamil , it was not until 1978 he worked in a Tamil film when he signed up as the cinematographer for J. Mahendran 's directorial debut Mullum Malarum ( 1978 ) . Apart from handling the cinematography , Mahendra involved himself in other aspects such as screenwriting , casting , editing and direction in the film . After completing Mullum Malarum , Mahendra decided to work on his second directorial venture , this time in Tamil . He named the film Azhiyadha Kolangal ( 1979 ) , which according to him was " partly autobiographical " . Inspired from the 1971 American film Summer of ' 42 , Azhiyadha Kolangal was a coming @-@ of @-@ age film that dealt with the story of three adolescent boys who are in the awakening of sexuality . Although it was controversial for its theme , it was a box @-@ office success . During this time he did the cinematography of K. Vishwanath 's Telugu film Sankarabharanam ( 1979 ) which turned out to be a major critical and commercial success .

Mahendra 's third film as director Moodu Pani ( 1980 ) was loosely based on Alfred Hitchcock 's 1960 film Psycho . Moodu Pani saw Mahendra collaborating with Ilaiyaraaja for the first time ; Ilaiyaraaja was Mahendra 's regular composer since then . In 1982 , Mahendra made Moondram Pirai which had Kamal Haasan and Sridevi in the lead . The film told the story of a school teacher who looks after a girl suffering from amnesia . It had a 300 @-@ day run in the theatres and was labelled a " blockbuster " . The film fetched two National Film Awards including an award for cinematography for Mahendra . The same year he made Olangal ( 1982 ) which marked his directorial debut in Malayalam . Inspired from Erich Segal 's novel Man , Woman and Child , the film was a critical success . At the end of the year , Mahendra won two Filmfare trophies for directing Olangal and Moondram Pirai .

In 1983 , Mahendra entered Hindi cinema with Sadma , a remake of Moondram Pirai , with Kamal Hasan and Sridevi reprising their roles . Mahendra received a Filmfare nomination for Best Story and became a well @-@ known director with the Hindi audience with the film . The same year , he worked as the cinematographer of the Kannada film Pallavi Anu Pallavi , Mani Ratnam 's debut film . During this time , he made his second film in Malayalam titled Oomakkuyil . Unlike Olangal , Oomakkuyil failed to create an impact among the audience .

= = = Mainstream cinema and tryst with art film genre = = =

During the mid 1980s , Mahendra concentrated on mainstream films . The first of which Neengal Kettavai ( 1984 ) was labelled an outright commercial picture . Later Mahendra noted that he made the film with a sole intention to prove critics that he could make commercial films . The following year , he collaborated with Rajinikanth to make Un Kannil Neer Vazhindal which turned out to be a commercial failure . He then worked on the Malayalam film Yathra ( 1985 ) with Mammooty in the lead role as a forest officer . Made with " artistic values " the film earned ? 1 @.@ 9 million ( equivalent to ? 20 million or US \$ 290 @,@ 000 in 2016 ) and was the highest @-@ grossing

Malayalam film that year . By this time , he declined an offer to direct the Kannada film Malaya Marutha ( 1986 ) . As a director who is known for making intense films , critics were surprised when he made Rettai Vaal Kuruvi ( 1987 ) , a full @-@ length comedy film . Closely based on the 1984 American film Micki and Maude , the film is regarded as one of the best comedies ever made in Tamil cinema during the decade . The film would serve as a base for his future films Marupadiyum ( 1993 ) and Sathi Leelavathi ( 1995 ) which explored similar themes .

Towards the end of the decade , Mahendra made two low @-@ budgeted films ? Veedu ( 1988 ) and Sandhya Raagam ( 1989 ) . While Veedu focused on the life of a lower middle @-@ class urban woman and her struggle to build a house , Sandhya Raagam dealt with " old age " . At the 35th , Veedu won two National Film Awards ? including one for Best Regional Film ? and Sandhya Raagam won the Best Film on Family Welfare two years later . According to Mahendra , both the films were a tribute to his mother and father respectively . He named these two films as his best works as they were made with fewest mistakes and compromises .

In 1992 , Mahendra made Vanna Vanna Pookkal which was produced by S. Dhanu . The film had a 100 @-@ day run and won the award for the " Best Regional Film " at the 39th National Film Awards . During this time M. Night Shyamalan , then a newcomer , approached Mahendra to be the cinematographer for his directorial debut Praying with Anger to which he refused . The next year , he remade Mahesh Bhatt 's Arth in Tamil as Marupadiyum . Mahendra made the film as he felt it was close to his personal life . He then came up with a full @-@ length comedy Sathi Leelavathi in 1995 which was produced by Kamal Haasan . The following year , he made a comeback in Bollywood through Aur Ek Prem Kahani , a remake of his Kannada film Kokila . He then made Raman Abdullah ( 1997 ) ? a remake of the Malayalam film Malappuram Haji Mahanaya Joji ( 1994 ) ? which deals with a friendship between two friends belonging to different religions . The film 's shoot became the epicentre of a dispute that arose between the Tamil Film Producers Council and Film Employees Federation of South India ( FEFSI ) . It was reported that members of FEFSI had stopped the filming of Raman Abdullah as Mahendra was engaging outside cast members in the film . This led FEFSI to go for an indefinite strike which affected to the delaying of several Tamil films . The film received negative reviews and failed at the box @-@ office .

After Raman Abdullah , Mahendra took a break from films during which he made Kathai Neram , a television series based on different short stories , mostly by Sujatha . It was aired in Sun TV during the early 2000s .

= = = Final years = = =

Following a five @-@ year sabbatical , he returned with Julie Ganapathi ( 2003 ) . The film was based on the psychological thriller novel Misery by Stephen King . According to Mahendra , Julie Ganapathi was made on the lines of his previous films Moondram Pirai ( 1982 ) and Moodu Pani ( 1980 ) . A review from Rediff.com stated , " Balu Mahendra has kept the flag of sensible cinema within the commercial format once again in his latest offering Julie Ganapathy " and rated the film as one of the best thrillers ever made . In spite of being a critical success , the film turned out to be a commercial failure . For his next film Adhu Oru Kana Kaalam ( 2005 ) , he decided to cast Dhanush in the lead role . Initially he stated that the film to be an extension of his 1979 film Azhiyatha Kolangal . However , he ended up making a different film . The film was loosely based on his own Malayalam film Yathra released in 1985 . When asked about the difference between the two films , he said " Yat [ h ] ra was the love story of two adults , this is the love story of two adolescents . " Shobha Warrier of Rediff.com wrote that the film was " extremely disappointing " .

In 2007 , he started a film school named " Cinema Pattarai " in Chennai . The institute offers courses in disciplines such as cinematography , direction and acting . After a brief hiatus from films , he made a comeback through Thalaimuraigal ( 2013 ) , which marked his acting debut . Apart from acting , he also scripted , directed , edited and served as the cinematographer of the film . The film was about the relationship between an ageing man and his grandson . The film received positive response with Mahendra 's acting being well acclaimed . Malathi Rangarajan of The Hindu stated , " If Mahendra 's aim was to make a film that can compete on a global level , Thalaimuraigal is a

concrete step in that direction . " Despite being critically acclaimed , the film was a commercial failure . At the 61st National Film Awards , it won the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration .

= = Personal life = =

Mahendra was married thrice . He was first married to Akhileshwari with whom he had a son . His relationship with actress Shoba ended in 1980 after she committed suicide following their marriage . Upon Shoba 's death , the media speculated that it was not a suicide and further added that Mahendra was responsible for her death . In 1985 , a case was filed against him and Akhileshwari as they were " illegally " staying in India ; both suffered four months of imprisonment for illegal immigration . However , the court after a few months dismissed the plea saying that his stay had " enriched " the Tamil culture as he had made significant contributions to Tamil cinema . Following that , Mahendra wrote a series of " sentimental musings " in the Tamil magazine Kumudam under the title Shobavum Naanum ( Shoba and me ) . Their relationship was later explored in the 1983 Malayalam film Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback by its director K. G. George . However , when the film was released , Mahendra in an interview said that he has nothing to do with the film and has not discussed about it with George . In 1998 , he married another actress Mounika and declared their marriage publicly in 2004 .

Following a heart attack on 13 February 2014 , Mahendra was admitted to Vijaya Hospital in Chennai where he was declared dead after six hours of cardiac arrest . Shortly after the news of his death , members of the Indian film industry posted their condolences in Twitter and Facebook . The Tamil film fraternity mourned the death and paid homage to him at his " film school " in Saligramam , Chennai , and decided not to work on the following day as a sign of respect . The last rites of Mahendra were performed at Porur crematorium on the same day .

= = Style and legacy = =

As a photographer , Mahendra was inspired by the works of French New Wave cinematographers such as Néstor Almendros and Michael Chapman . Among his contemporaries , he admired the works of Ashok Kumar . Mahendra believed a " well @-@ photographed movie is that which is very close to the script " . As a film @-@ maker , he claims himself as belonging to the realistic way of story @-@ telling devised by Satyajit Ray and Vittorio De Sica . Mahendra was drawn towards realistic cinema after watching Ray 's Pather Panchali ( 1955 ) . He is credited as being one among the earliest filmmakers to bring " naturalism " in Tamil cinema in the 1970s . He usually photographed , scripted and edited all his films . His films were characterised by strong " visual appeal " and minimal number of characters . A majority of his films centre on the complexity of human relationships and are known to portray women as strong characters . Although influenced by realism , his films Moodu Pani , Rettai Vaal Kuruvi and Julie Ganapathi heavily borrowed from American cinema .

Mahendra was equally praised for his cinematography and directorial finesse . Described by the media as " one of the finest cinematographers of Indian cinema " , he was among the first to pioneer innovative colour in South India . Subrata Mitra , the cinematographer of Ray , presented a viewfinder to Mahendra acknowledging his talent . Fellow cinematographer Madhu Ambat described that it was Mahendra who gave " fame " to those cameramen who came out of the FTII , and further noted that he was one of the few film @-@ makers who effectively used romantic realism . Lauded for usage of " natural lighting " , Mahendra was considered as " one of the few filmmakers in Tamil who believes in telling a story visually " . Kamal Haasan described that he was one of the few directors who balanced between art and popular cinema . As a film @-@ maker , he inspired contemporary actors and film @-@ makers such as Mani Ratnam , Kamal Haasan and Sripriya , He has mentored next generation film @-@ makers including Bala , Ameer , Vetrimaaran , Ram and Seenu Ramasamy . Cinematographers like Santosh Sivan , Ravi K. Chandran , Natarajan Subramaniam and K. V. Anand have taken inspirations from him . The negatives of his acclaimed

films ? Moodu Pani , Veedu , Sandhya Raagam , Marupadiyum and Sathi Leelavathi ? are lost .

= = Awards and nominations = =

= = Filmography = =

= = = As director = = =

= = = As cinematographer only = = =

= = = Television = = =

Kathai Neram ( 2000 )