

Sarasavi Cineru
In Collaboration with Film Freaks

Presents

Akasa Kusum (Flowers of the Sky)

Malini Fonseka
Nimmi Harasgama
Dilhani Ekanayake
Kaushalya Fernando
Samanalee Fonseka
Jayani Senanayake

Produced By
HD Premasiri
A Sreekar Prasad
Prasanna Vithanage

Written and Directed by
Prasanna Vithanage

KEY CAST

Sandhya Rani	-	Malini Fonseka
Priya	-	Nimmi Harasgama
Shalika	-	Dilhani Ekanayake
Mallika (Rani's Sister)	-	Kaushalya Fernando
Bunty	-	Samanalee Fonseka
Leela	-	Jayani Senanayake

KEY CREW

Director	-	Prasanna Vithanage
Writer	-	Prasanna Vithanage
Producers	-	HD Premasiri A Sreekar Prasad Prasanna Vitanage
Executive Producers	-	Nimmi Harasgama Abdullah Hameed
Line Producer	-	Iranthi Abayasinghe
Director of Photography	-	MD Mahindapala
Production Designers	-	Sujeewa Paranaheewa Shermila Fernando
Film Editor	-	A Sreekar Prasad
Original Music	-	Lakshman Joseph de Saram
Sound Mixer	-	A. Lakshminarayanan
Make Up Designer	-	Ebert Wijesinghe

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Sandhya Rani (Malini Fonseka) is an ageing film star who was once the darling of the silver screen. Having lost fame and fortune in a changing world, she now lives quietly in obscurity. She ekes out a living by renting out a room in her home to the film and television stars of today to satisfy their illicit sexual desires.

The popular young film star, Shalika (Dilhani Ekanayake), uses this room to carry on an affair with a young actor. When Shalika's infidelity is unmasked by her husband, the scandal and its publicity forces Rani into the limelight again.

In the spotlight once again, Rani is suddenly forced to come to terms with a dark secret of her past – a secret she thought she had buried forever. As she confronts the demons of her past, she journeys in search of a truth she abandoned long ago...

LONG SYNOPSIS

Sandhya Rani is an ageing film star who was once the darling of the silver screen. Having lost fame and fortune in a changing world, she now lives quietly in obscurity. She ekes out a living by renting out a room in her home to the young film and television stars of today to satisfy their illicit sexual desires.

The popular young film star, Shalika, uses this room to carry on an affair with a young actor. When Shalika's husband discovers this, the scandal and its publicity forces Rani into the limelight again. Having left her husband, Shalika moves in with Rani and persuades her to join her in acting in a television soap opera. Sandhya Rani's adoring fans are overjoyed as she returns to the public gaze. As she encounters her past again, the darker side of her rise to fame is revealed.

Her daughter, Priya, whom Rani was forced to abandon when Priya was a just an infant, is now an attractive young woman who works as a hostess in a Karaoke night club. But she is also three months pregnant and infected with HIV. Priya constantly watches her mother acting on television. Priya is bitter about her childhood abandonment and without meeting her face-to-face, Priya makes it known to her mother that she still exists and that Rani is responsible for her present plight. But this only makes Priya more lonely and depressed as she realizes she is hurting her mother. Rani's guilt at what she did to her daughter in her rise to fame, drives her to search for Priya and seek forgiveness. But the form of her eventual forgiveness is not what she expected.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE - Prasanna Vithanage

I have heard somewhere that a filmmaker should make at least one film on his profession. I realized how difficult a task that was as I was writing 'Akasa Kusum.' My two previous films were issue-based movies that tackled Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict; I focused my camera at how this war had affected us as people. This time around, I decided to turn the camera on my world, the world of filmmaking.

This happened as I began making the story of Sandhya Rani a cinematic reality. In making a film about a film personality, and turning the camera on one's self, could I be completely honest in revealing the innermost facts about ourselves, the same way we do when pointing the camera at others?

Rani's character has shades of Sri Lanka's celluloid prima donnas, since the time movies began here. They were the objects of our fantasies and the creators of our dreams. But when they reached a point where they were unable to fulfill our intangible needs, they were discarded – replaced by a younger, more stimulating model.

With her portrayal of Sandhya Rani, the queen of Sri Lankan cinema Malini Fonseka brought a heightened sense of reality to the film, culled from her four decades of experience in cinema. She took the role and made it personal, intimate and autobiographical – colouring it with shades only she could bring.

What I finally saw on the screen challenged me more than I dare to admit. The reality that I sought to create on screen had taken a life of its own, becoming darker and scarier. The reasons for this, I am only beginning to discover. And I have a feeling it will take some time.

CO-PRODUCER'S NOTE - A Sreekar Prasad

I first met Prasanna eight years ago, when I edited his film 'Death on a Full Moon Day'. I was amazed by how he could convey a story that happens in a short time span, very effectively within 75 minutes. Then we collaborated on 'Ira Madiyama'. It was a much more challenging work for me because it was multi-storied, where the stories run in parallels. Though it was scripted, it was interesting because we changed a lot during the edit, mainly the positioning of the scenes. In a multistoried narrative when you switch on from one story to another running parallel, the emotion has to have a completion, if it doesn't happen then it keeps bothering you each time you watch it... So we had to change the positions accordingly and it worked well for us.

Working with Prasanna, I think our wavelength matches well. We are able to communicate well with each other and we believe in similar things. What attracts me towards his way of filmmaking is the simplicity he could achieve. The emotions that are conveyed in his films are minimalist. I also like his sense of dialogue, they are very little but effective. With all these good experiences with him, it was a very easy choice to co-produce with him the moment the opportunity came as we believed in similar kind of cinema.

And the moment I heard the script of 'Akasa Kusum,' I was attracted to it as it was about the film industry and it had a very universal flavour to it. It gave me great pleasure to do something that I believe in. I also wanted to explore new areas for Prasanna, including releasing it in India.

Prasanna Vithanage – Writer/Director/Co-Producer

Born in 1962, Prasanna Vithanage's opus of five previous films has made him one of Sri Lanka's leading filmmakers with a worldwide critical and popular reputation. He began his career in the 1980's as a theatre director. He translated into Sinhala and directed Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man" in 1986 and Dario Fo's "Raspberries and Trumpets" in 1991, before setting out as a filmmaker in 1992. While also devoting serious time and effort to the education and training of young people in the art and business of filmmaking, Vithanage returned to his theatrical roots in 2006 when he combined two short plays of Dario Fo ("The Virtuous Burglar" and "One Wore a Suit and One Wore Tails") into the hugely popular Sinhala play "Horu Samaga Heluwen" which ran to nearly 150 performances islandwide. Vithanage also produced Uberto Pasolini's "Machan", the international co-production, which debuted to great applause at the 2008 Venice International Film Festival.

HD Premasiri – Co-Producer

One of the leading book publishers in Sri Lanka, HD Premasiri has produced two previous films, "Pavana Ralu Viya" (1993) and "Biththi Hathara" (1987). Premasiri, a lifelong film enthusiast, continues to take his love of literature and cinema seriously, being an ardent supporter of film-based literature through his publishing company, Sarasavi Publishing.

A Sreekar Prasad – Film Editor/Co-Producer

One of India's most prolific and accomplished film editors, A. Sreekar Prasad has edited more than 300 Indian feature films across the length and breadth of India, in a multitude of the country's languages, including Tamil, Hindi, Nepali, Bengali and Assamese. He also has worked for India's most eminent directors, including Mani Ratnam, Santosh Sivan and Shaji Karun. Prasad tried his hand at film production for the first time in 200, making his first feature, the English language "Dejavu" under the banner of his company Film Freaks. He has editing offices in Chennai and Hyderabad and has won the Indian National Award for excellence in film editing six times.

MD Mahindapala – Director of Photography

Considered one of the finest cinematographers Sri Lanka has produced, Mahindapala's entry into feature films was a late one. Being involved with the Government Film Unit on many documentaries and other films for most of his career, he entered the world of feature films with Sudath Devapriya's film "Tharanaya", in 1992. He began his fruitful collaboration with director Prasanna Vithanage on "Anantha Rathriya (Dark Night of the Soul)" in 1993 and collaborated with him on "Purahanda Kaluwara (Death on a Full Moon Day)", "Ira Madiyama (August Sun)" and "Akasa Kusum."

Lakshman Joseph de Saram – Original Music

Lakshman Joseph de Saram is a solo performer, concert master, chamber musician and composer and has been engaged in virtually every aspect of music since he made his concert debut at the age of 13. A winner of the prestigious Sarasaviya Award for Best Music Score for his work on Boodee Keerthisena's Mille Soya, he also composed the music for Vithanage's "Ira Madiyama," and shared a credit with British composer Stephen Warbeck on Uberto Pasolini's "Machan."

Malini Fonseka – Sandhya Rani

With a career spanning over four decades, **Malini Fonseka** is undoubtedly the queen of the Sri Lankan cinema. Making her acting debut in 1967, she has starred in more than 150 feature films to date – not including television and stage appearances. Having worked with Sri Lanka’s finest directors, she has won accolades both locally and internationally. Apart from her acting career, Fonseka also has produced and directed dramas for television. Her acting career continues without a break, with appearances in many films and tele-dramas to this day.

Nimmi Harasgama – Priya

Nimmi Harasgama was born to Sri Lankan parents, but grew up in the UK, where she cultivated her love for acting and performance from an early age. For her first Sinhala-speaking film role, in Prasanna Vithanage’s “Ira Madiyama (August Sun) (2003), she won Best Actress at the Las Palmas Film Festival in 2004. Having done her BA (Hons.) in Drama, Theatre Arts from Goldsmiths College in London, Nimmi was also awarded a scholarship to participate in an Acting in Film Workshop at the New York Film Academy. She now divides her time between London and Colombo. Most of Nimmi’s acting work has been on the English speaking stage, both in Sri Lanka and the UK. She also serves as an executive producer on “Akasa Kusum”.

Dilhani Ekanayake – Shalika

Dilhani Ekanayake made her debut in the 1988 film “Dedunne Samanaliyak,” which instantly catapulted her to stardom in Sri Lanka, a status she enjoys to this day. One of the country’s most popular commercial film stars, Ekanayake proved she was a serious actress in Asoka Handagama’s debut, “Me Mage Sandai (This Is My Moon)”. Ever since, she has been mixing more commercial fare with serious roles, with her powerful turn in Sudath Mahadivulwewa’s “Sudu, Kalu Saha Alu” winning her Best Actress at the Sarasavi Film Awards.

Kaushalya Fernando – Mallika

Kaushalya Fernando is an award-winning Sri Lankan stage, screen and television actress. A drama teacher at the Lanka Children's and Youth Theatre Foundation, Fernando is also an award-winning theatre director. Her film career began in 1996, with the lead role in director Asoka Handagama's "Sanda Dadayama (Moon Hunt)." She went on to win international acclaim for roles in Satyajith Maitipe's "Boradiya Pokuna (Scent of the Lotus Pond)" in 2003 and Cannes-winner Vimukthi Jayasundara's "Sulanga Enu Pinisa (The Forsaken Land)" in 2004. In 2008 Fernando appeared in "Fallen from the Sky", Jayasundera's 2nd film and "Akasa Kusum".

Jayani Senanayake – Leela

Since her debut in 1997, **Jayani Senanayake** has proven herself to be one of Sri Lanka's finest actresses. A three-time Best Actress winner at the State Drama Festival, Senanayake is today involved in theatre, television and film. Recently she played vastly different roles in Asoka Handagama's controversial "Aksharaya (Letter of Fire)" and "Full Monty" producer Uberto Pasolini's Sri Lanka-set caper comedy "Machan."

Samanalee Fonseka – Buntty

Coming from one of Sri Lanka's most famous acting families, **Samanalee Fonseka** was exposed to the world of cinema at a very early age, through her legendary aunt, Malini Fonseka. Making her acting debut at age 6 in Dinesh Priyasad's "Paaradise," she has been acting in television, theatre and film ever since. Prolific as an actress, Samanalee starred in a string of films and tele-dramas in the past year, including the popular soap Olu and the award-winning tele drama 'Rala Bindena Thana.' She also was in Senesh Bandara Dissanaiké's "Heart FM," Prasanna Vithanage's "Akasa Kusum" and Boodee Keerthisena's "Children of a Silent Age."

CREDITS

Line Producer
Iranthi Abeysinghe

First Assistant Director
Daminda D. Madawela

Hair Stylist
Lalith Dharmawardene

Costume Designer
Sandhya Jayasuriya

Choreography
Shan Perera

Cast

Sandya Rani - Malini Fonseka

Priya - Nimmi Harasgama

Shalika - Dilhani Ekanayake

Bunty - Samanalee Fonseka

Mallika (Rani's Sister) - Kaushalya Fernando

Leela - Jayani Senanayake

Young Sandya Rani - Saduni Fonseka

Eric (Shalika's Husband) - Mohamed Adamaly

Udith - Pubudu Prabath

Film Actress - Upeksha Swarnamalini

Film Actor - Suraj Mapa

Studio Boss - Nadaraja Sivam

Villain - W.M. Chaminda

Young Vijitha - Hirunni Malsha Pathirange

- Rawini Anuradha
- Kaushalya Mendis
- Prasadini Athapaththu
- Hashinika Karaliyadda
- Deliya Chandramali
- Sujeewa Dilmini
- Pabasara Madushani
- Hansani Jayaweera
- Gayani Kanchana
- Jayamini Aththanayake
- Thakshila Mendis
- Harshi Perera
- Manusha Perera
- Saumya Hansini

- Karaoke Customers
- Prasad Sooriyaarachchi
 - Sanjeewa Disanayake
 - Kumara Thirimadura
 - Chamal Ranasinghe
 - Sampath Karunarathna
 - Amil Depal
 - Saman Abeysiriwardene
 - Thushra Chinthaka
 - Susantha Pradeep
 - Dinesh Ravindra
 - Shanal De Silva
 - Denuwan Samadhi
 - Thisara Imbulana
 - Thilanga Bandara
 - Chandrasena Wedage
 - Prabath Weerasinghe
 - Sanath Kumarasiri
 - Dasun Pathirana
 - Kokila Wijesena
 - Bibishana Kurera
 - Aloka Sampath
 - Sisira Gamini
 - Kumara Ranepura
 - Wasantha Hetharachchi
 - Jehan Sri Kantha
 - Sarathchandra Rathnamalla
 - Rumesch Suranga
 - Saman Peiris
 - Asanka Pradeep

- Karaoke Bouncers
- Subash Chandana
 - Susil Wijesekare

- Nilanka Mendis
- Ruwan Samantha

Waiters - Shalitha Vipul
- Sanjeewa Upul
- Prageeth Ekanayake
- Nalin Sanjeewa

Security Guard - Premachanda Hettiarachchi

Clark At The Post Office - Vijitha Bandara

Priya's Baby - Chamodya Disanayake

With

Dinesh Kumara - Karundasa Pathirathna

Piyal Ileperuma - Premalal

Benadict Alphonso - Chandana Oshada

Sanjaya Naulla - Mohemed Ramlan

Malindra Madusanka - Niroshani Samanthika

Isurika Janani - Padma Priyangini

Manjula Padmanjali - Nimal Alwis

Gunarathna Hapuarachchi -Thushakrika Raigart

Neranda Dinuka - Pradeep Lakshan

Lassantha Maduranga - Buddika Hasitha

Pithchei Selvaraj - Udeni Dammika

Vini Dayawansa - Dinusha Madumathi

Maheshika Maduwanthi - Jerry Larsan

Shashikala Abeykoon - Dineth Navodya

Tiran Aminda - Sanika Gunathilaka

Sumeda Sangeeth - Shamika Diloshani

Suranga Gunathilake - Sunil Kariaewasam

Thushara Prageeth - Ravindra Kodagoda

Martin Perera - K.P.G. Sani

Siri Adimal - G.S.De Silva

Nevil Kumara - Mahesh Padma Kumara

Samantha Manjula - Sureka Mihirani

Nirmal Maduhka - Kulasinghe Abeyrathna

Suman Irangani - Jayatissa Athulasiri

Nimal Kumara - Kaniuit Anthony

Neranjani Dilrukshi

Crew

Second Assistant Director - Aruna Thilakarathne

Stunts - Kumara Ranepura

Assistant To Director - Prasad Pereira (Sri Lanka)
 - Mamallan (India)
 - Viswamithran (India)

Assistant Editor - Bavan. S

Negative Handling - S. Sundar
 - Thamizh Mani

Audiography - Trinity Digy Labs

Audiography Assistants - T. Ramesh
 - R. Ravichandran

Dialogue Recording - Ruwan Sri Walpola (Exten Studio)

Make Up Assistant - Sumeda Sangeeth

Wardrobe - Suranga Gunathilake

Assistant Hair Stylist - Sugeeshwara Mohattiaracchi

Continuity Girl - Jeewanthi Manik

Casting - Upamali Nuwarapaksha

On Location Dialogue Recording - Sujith Perera

Making Of “Akasa Kusum” Documentary - Upali Gamlath

Production Manager - Manjula Perera

Set Dressers - Ajith Hathwalla
- Upul Liyange
- Gamini Jayasinghe

Painter - Manoj Priyantha

Construction Crew - Lionel Waththage
- Asanka Pradeep
- Thilak Aranayake
- Hirantha Prasannajith Gamage
- Nimal Alwis
- Danushka Karunathilake

Grip & Lighting - Magic Lantern Ltd.

Crew:

Ariyaratna Perera - Rohan Premchandra

D.H. Idunil Suranga - Anura Thennakoon

Jagath Nandana Withana - Chathuranga Nalin

Rangana Prasad Gunathilake - Mahinda Premalal

Sugath Rupasinghe - W. Premalal Ranawake
- B.M. Dilrukshan

Camera Assistant - Anura Kodituwakku

Videography - Buddika Indrajith
- Kamal Salinda

Generator Operator - Namal Wijerathna

Special Equipment - Film Location Services
- Vision Works

Production Assistants - Priyatha Samaraweera
- Samira Lasantha
- Mohemed Ramlan
- Sarathchanda Rathmalla
- Kosala Lakmal

Assistant Scriptwriters - Mamallan
- Viswamithran

Dolby Mix at Prasad Video Digital

Associate - G. Shivakumar
- Kamakshinathan

Foley Artist - Rajalingam

Sinhala Titles – Prem Disanayake

Visual Effects – Efx, Chennai

Executive Producers
K. Himakumar

Sr. Line Producer
J. Vijaya Baskar

J. Line Producer
Chandra Mohan

Optical
P.R. Mahendran

Orchestra

Violin Cello - Tamara J.Holsinger
Flute - Ruvindar Aungunawela
Violin - Lakshman Joseph De Saram
Voice - Eriko Tokura – Perera

Songs

‘Akasa Kusum’

Lyrics - Upul Shantha Sanasgala
Singer - Saman Nishantha
Music - Ranga Dasanayake

‘Arunelle’

Lyrics - Dee Tee
Singer - Teesha
Music - Born Free
Remix - Dj Lord X
Courtesy - Torana Music Box

‘Young Generation’

Lyric & Melody - Teesha
Music - Gimantha Aponso
Featuring - Noughty Dog & Gimantha Aponso
Courtesy - Torana Music Box

‘Freedom’

Composed By Ashanthi & Ranidu
Lyrics - Ashanthi
Music Arrangement – Ranidu
Vocals & Harmony - Ashanthi & Ranidu
Backup Vocals - Nevanthi
Courtesy - Maharaja Entertainment

Back To The Roots

Composed By Ranidu
Music Arrangement - Ranidu
Recorded & Mix By Ranga Dasanayake
Courtesy - Maharaja Entertainment

Drivers

Aruna Abeynayake - Priyantha Samaraweera

G.A. Indralal - Chanka Perera
Nalin Kanangara - U. Somasiri
E.V. Premchandra

The Producers Wish To Thank:

Uberto Pasolini
Tissa Nagodawithana
Asanka Edirisinghe
Hameedias
Saree Mandeer
Channa Deshapriya
Mr & Mrs. Priyankara
Deepal Gunarathna

English Subtitles - Robert Crusz

Processed & Printed At Prasad Laboratory, Chennai

Prasanna Vithanage (Sri Lanka)

The first Sri Lankan feature film, *Kadavunu Poronduva* (Broken Promise) was made in 1947, just one year before Sri Lanka obtained independence from British rule. During the past six decades, Sri Lankan cinema has made steady progress, winning international awards, while facing numerous formidable social, political, and economic challenges. The ethnic conflict that has engulfed the island for the past 25 years has certainly not helped matters. In 1956, Lester James Peries, who was to put Sri Lankan cinema on the international map, directed the path breaking film *Rekava* (Line of Destiny); this inaugurated the artistic tradition of filmmaking in Sri Lanka. The focus of this short essay is on one of the most important film directors of Sri Lanka, who has chosen to follow the artistic tradition of filmmaking opened up by Lester James Peries: Prasanna Vithanage. He has earned a wide reputation, both nationally and internationally, as a distinguished filmmaker from Sri Lanka.



Prasanna Vithanage emerged as a film director in the 1990s. His first feature film, *Sisila Gini Ganee* (Fire and Ice) was made in 1992. Since then, he has gone on to direct a number of important films, winning national and international awards on the way. His second film *Anantha Rathriya* (Dark Night of the Soul), released in 1995, won eight awards including the award for the best film at the Film Critics Awards sponsored by the Film Critics' Forum of Sri Lanka. It also won the special jury award at the 1997 Pusan film festival in Korea. Prasanna Vithanage's third film was *Pawuru Walalu* (Walls Within). It won nine awards at the Sri Lankan film Critics Award including those for best director and best film. At the 1998 Singapore Film festival, the lead actress of the film was honored with the best actress award. *Walls Within* gained more glory by winning the NETPAC award, the Amiens city award, and the Film Exhibition Award at the 1998 Amiens film festival award in France. Vithanage's fourth film, *Pura Handa Kaluwara* (Death on a Fool Moon Day) was made in 1997. This film was awarded the international film critics award at the Fribourg Film Festival. At the Singapore Film Festival held in 1999, the lead actor of this film was given the best actor's award. *Death on a Full Moon Day* garnered the grand prix at the 1999 Amiens International Film Festival. These numerous

national and international awards that Prasanna Vithanage has won for his films bear testimony to his widespread recognition as a Sri Lankan film director of distinction.

Vithanage's first feature film, *Fire and Ice* was not a complete success; however, it did foreground some of his features that were to find fuller and more nuanced expression in his later. Among these features are the careful framing of scenes, the mobile camerawork, and the innovative use of the sound track. He has a wonderful cinematic memory on which he draws purposefully. Vithanage was an avid film buff from his childhood. He made it a point to see all locally available films, sometimes more than once. He studied them carefully, paying close attention to style and technique and representational strategies. Some of the western films that had made a lasting impression on him find imaginative reconfiguration in *Fire and Ice*. In this film, the director had sought to anatomize the ramifications of human guilt; this is indeed a theme that finds articulation in many of his other films. He once remarked that in his films, most of the characters come into conflict not with the outside world but with themselves and their inner psyche. This self-diagnosis, it seems to me, is only half true. It is true that he explores the inner lives and the dark subterranean forces that animate human lives with great sensitivity. But it is equally true that he has sought to situate the lives of his chosen characters in specific social formations thereby contextualizing the characters and their inner life. Some of his films leave with us a sense of unrelieved moral anguish because he is keen in displaying the shapes of social disintegration.

Fire and Ice examines the complex emotional relationship between Harris and Annette. Harris Makalanda is an aristocrat and a well-known lawyer. He happens to meet the beautiful Annette at a party. She happens to meet her again and a sexual relationship between the two begins to take shape. She intimates the fact that she does not believe in marriage and is committed to a free life. However, there are numerous road blocks that need to be cleared on the way. Harris is married and has a son. Annette's efforts at obtaining total control of Harris fail and the film ends on a tragic note. Compared with his later work, this film appears to be somewhat immature and mannered in its presentation. However, it does signify the feel for cinema that was to find more purposeful expression in his later efforts.

Vithanage's second film, *Dark Night of the Soul*, also deals with the unbearable weight and intricacies of human guilt. The film centers round the character of Suwisal, who is a lawyer. He had, in the past, committed an atrocious crime against an innocent woman, for which he is seeking redemption through remorse and self-accusations. The story of the film is based loosely on the famous novel by Leo Tolstoy called *Resurrection*. It is to the credit of the director that he has succeeded in dramatizing his story through carefully orchestrated images that radiate a deep humanism. His camerawork, the sound, the lighting, and the pacing and rhythm in the film contribute significantly to the total impact of the film. In *Dark Night of the Soul*, Vithanage tells his story with admirable economy, enforcing a compelling union between image and sound. He displays an openness to the mysteries and uncertainties of being-in-the-world that carries complete cinematic conviction. Prasanna Vithanage is especially skillful in reconfiguring guilt, remorse, melancholia. The emotional honesty that characterizes this movie is vitally connected with its success.

The careful attention paid to the sound track is a feature in this film that merits close attention. Many of the Sri Lankan filmmakers do not seem to recognize the importance of the sound track as a generator of meaning. Just as much as the rich, vibrant, vivid clusters of images vitalize the filmic communication, the complex and persuasive sound track plays a pivotal role in film communication. This is indeed a truth that Vithanage has recognized well; cinema is both a visual and aural medium.

Prasanna Vithanage's third film is *Walls Within*. The film deals with the life of a middle-aged woman named Violet who lives with her two grown daughters. She is separated from her husband. Quite by chance, Violet happens to meet Victor, an old boyfriend. Victor is a sailor and has been away from the island for several

years. He is injured and seeking medical treatment for a knee-injury. As Victor lives alone, Violet invites him to stay with her. An intimate relationship develops between them, and she becomes pregnant. In the mean time, plans are moving forward for her young daughter's wedding. Violet is a practicing Catholic and is overwhelmed by guilt; she is as concerned about divine retribution as with social disapprobation. Violet is a grandmother who is not divorced from her husband. These facts make her situation exceedingly complicated. Her burden of guilt is so heavy that one fears she is on the verge of a mental collapse.

Vithanage has rendered this narrative in vivid cinematic terms, using to good effect the resources of cinema. He deploys with admirable sensitivity darkness and shadows as visual correlatives of Violet's inner gloom. We see in this film how a gifted director is able to invest his created world successfully with far-reaching symbolic resonances.

As a filmmaker, Prasanna Vithanage is deeply conscious of the resources of cinema and how they should be exploited to give added artistic density to his movies. If we pause to consider the sound track in *Walls Within*, we see how music is utilized minimally and a heavy emphasis is placed on natural sounds punctuated by eloquent silences. The house in which the narrative takes place is by the ocean. The sound of the ocean plays a crucial role in the movie. Similarly, the sound of footsteps on the wooden floor and stairs and the sounds of carriages are emphasized so as to counterpoint the emptiness crucial to the meaning of the film. Vithanage's compositions, his intense focus on the human faces, the play of light and shade, all serve to bring out the complexity of the projected experience.

In 1997, Prasanna Vithanage released his fourth film, *Death on a Full Moon Day*. It explores a theme that has become increasingly dominant in the collective life of the island – the ethnic conflict that has engulfed Sri Lanka during the past twenty five years. The movie does not portray the conflict directly. Instead, it focuses on the trauma brought about in the lives of a few chosen people by the ongoing ethnic conflict. The story unfolds in the hallowed setting in the North Central province of the island that is instinct with historical and cultural inscriptions full of patriotism and national pride. The story centers round Wannihamy, an old blind man who is anxiously awaiting the return of his son, Bandara, from the battle field. He refuses to recognize the fact that a sealed coffin bearing the body of his son was brought back and buried. The officers of the army had intimated to him the fact that his son was killed in battle; he, however, stubbornly believes that his son will return alive. His son, Bandara, resolved to join the army with the aim of earning enough money to build a small house and take care of his sister's forthcoming wedding. The contrast between the father's unshakable faith in the return of the son from the battlefield and the brutal realities of life fuels the narrative. *Death on a full moon day* bears ample testimony to Vithanage's talents as a socially aware and conscientious filmmaker who is able to deftly deploy the resources of cinema to communicate compelling human experience that are insightfully situated socially. In this film, water is a central trope; it functions as a metonym signifying the everyday life and metaphorically a transcendental purifying agent. His ability to use tropes of different types to enhance the power of the cinematic narrative deserves careful consideration.

Four years later, Prasanna Vithanage authored his fifth film called *Ira Madiyama* (*August Sun*, 2003). It won great critical attention. This film, once again, focuses on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. As with his earlier work, he deals with the conflict tangentially. What I mean by this is that he has chosen to delineate the impact of the conflict on the lives of a few chosen. The film shows the way it has had a shattering impact on all ethnic groups in the island. An 11 year old Muslim boy is desperately looking for his dog, his trusted companion, while his family is forced out of their home by rebels; a young woman is searching for her husband who is missing in action; a young soldier walks into a brothel to find to his astonishment that his sister is employed there. Through such experiences, the director has sought to call attention to abstract concepts such as identity, dignity, and survivability as they manifest themselves in concrete, and often brutal,

human situations. As in all his films, it is evident that Vithanage's cinematic imagination is closely allied to a powerful moral sensibility.

All five feature films of Prasanna Vithanage that I have referred to display a set of common characteristics: social awareness, the darker side of human behavior, the deft use of sight and sound, flexible camera, and economy of representation. Prasanna Vithanage is among the finest filmmakers in Sri Lanka. He is hugely talented, socially conscious, and animated by a deep critical humanism. The luminous images, the expertly wrought compositions, and the visual ideology make his cinematic works stand out from the general run of Sri Lankan films. Guilt and desire are the two poles that define his cinematic art, and he has explored these complex themes with a remarkable measure of depth, insight, and visual sensitivity while focusing on the ambiguous space they inhabit. It is useful to delve more deeply into his ideas of guilt, desire, and memory and how they inflect human behavior. In a number of interviews that Prasanna Vithanage has given to journalists, he has wondered why guilt plays such a pivotal role in his cinematic imagination. It is his considered judgment that one finds a close linkage between guilt and the vision of the world inscribed in Catholicism. Although he himself is a Buddhist, Catholicism exercised a profound influence on his sensibility. There was a church near his house and many of his close friends attended the services there; he could hear them pray, and this stirred his imagination.

According to Prasanna Vithanage, guilt and memory are uncomfortably linked; guilt is the product of the insidious workings of human memory. Memory presents us with a complex and multi-faceted unity that is composed of personal, social, and cultural memory. It is evident, on the basis of Vithanage's films, that any one of them could generate tensions and anxieties of ferocious proportions. It is also interesting to observe the ways in which Vithanage connects the explosive powers of memory to the current tensions in Sri Lanka. He depicts a nation at war with itself. By doing so, he foregrounds important questions of history, heritage, and tradition. These are filtered through his brooding sense of social justice. It is also interesting to examine the ways in which Vithanage enforces the meeting of the surface of social living with inner vibrations of human desire. The moral dissolution of society that he charts gains greater cinematic force as a consequence.

Commenting on Prasanna Vithanage's films, Ratnavibhushana and I once made the following observation:

Vithanage's movies are firmly tethered to the world we inhabit, and conform to its manifold dictates. However, the net outcome of his sharply etched experiences is to provoke in us a deep disquiet about the world we move in and how we have chosen to invest it with meaning. Suffering is crucial to the condition of his characters and indeed is an inescapable fact of life. However, Prasanna Vithanage succeeds in transforming that suffering into a modality of clarifying moral ideals. This gives his characterization and dissection of the world an added urgency and meaning. As we stated earlier, memory is pivotal to the narrative discourses that find articulation in his films. His movies dramatize a dark world of space and mystery in which memory temporarily fades into the distance only to surface with added menacing power. (2000)

Prasanna Vithanage, then, is a very important Sri Lankan film director who has generated critical interest both inside and outside Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is important to locate him within the Sri Lankan film industry and culture. The current state of Sri Lankan cinema is not particularly encouraging. Despite the strenuous efforts of a handful of filmmakers such as Vithanage, the industry is faced with numerous hardships. The prevalent social environment, with the continuing ethnic conflict generating much anxiety and confusion, is hardly propitious for the development of a healthy and vigorous cinema. Creativity is at a low ebb, and politics and cinema have got mixed up in an unsavory fashion. The importance of cinema as a vital adjunct of the public sphere is being virtually ignored.

When seen against this backdrop, Prasanna Vithanage inspires some measure of hope. Clearly, he is a talented and dedicated filmmaker who is fighting against severe odds to maintain the vitality and relevance of cinema as a significant art form. He has a sharp visual imagination that emanates from a reflective mind. Reflectivity could be singled out as the ruling virtue of his work. According to him, films are a productive way of thinking about society and how it works and fail to work.

Film historians of Sri Lanka normally identify two main streams that go to form local cinema: the art cinema and popular cinema. The division between the two, to be sure, is not iron clad; the borders between the two categories are porous and they tend to shift constantly. It is evident that there is cross-fertilization between so-called art cinema and popular cinema resulting in hybrid works. However, most film directors and film critics in the island are of the opinion that art cinema has always sought to define itself in opposition to the popular cinema. Identity, after all, is relational and the condition of its possibility is the affirmation of difference.

Consequently, in the eyes of art filmmakers and film critics, popular cinema assumes the form of the constitutive other of art films. The eminent film scholar John Hill (1986) makes the following useful observation: "Art cinema has never simply been a matter of textual characteristics, but has also been allied to a particular system of production (typically, state or television subsidy)." The distinction between art cinema and popular cinema, although tentative and provisional, has played a vital role in shaping the discourse of cinema in Sri Lanka and inflecting its film culture. This conceptual binary runs steadily through the multifarious discussions of film in the island. Indeed the norms of film aesthetics that have evolved over the past 60 years have been molded by the perceived antagonisms between art and popular cinema.

When discussing the disjunctures and dissonances between art cinema and popular cinema in Sri Lanka, it is important to focus on the concept of realism in cinema. This is because popular cinema in Sri Lanka is seen as a violator of realism, while art cinema is perceived to be a staunch adherent of realism. From the very inception of Sinhalese film criticism in the late 1940s, the concept of realism (*thathvika*) became a crucial site of analysis and commentary. Indeed, realism came to be recognized as a defining trait of art cinema. However, in the opinion of most knowledgeable contemporary film scholars and critics, realism is indeed a complex and many-sided concept, and the privileging of an unproblematic and determining external and antecedent reality is highly problematic. Realism is convention-driven as any other representational device in cinema. Too much emphasis on an under-theorized concept of realism leads to a simplified mimetic reflectionism. What is interesting about Prasanna Vithanage ? and he clearly belongs to the art tradition of filmmaking in Sri Lanka ? is that he is constantly seeking to expand and enlarge the boundaries of realism. In films such as dark *Night of the Soul*, *Walls Within*, and *Death on a Full Moon Day*, he has sought to make use of hallucination, fantasy, and poetic enunciations as a way of widening the representational space of cinema. This is indeed a welcome feature.

Professor vimal Dissanayake

www.asianfilms.org

References

- Dissanayake, W., & Ratnavibhushana, A. (2000). *Profiling Sri Lankan cinema*. Colombo: Asian Film Center.
- Hill, J. H. (1986). *Sex, class and reason; British Cinema 1958-1963*. London: British Film Institute.

The film was initiated by the Pusan Promotion Plan 2007