

THE ROLE OF LONG TAKES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CINEMA

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Abstract—The long take is one of the most significant cinematic techniques used to represent time, space, and reality. Unlike rapid editing, long takes allow events to unfold continuously within a single shot, creating a stronger sense of immersion and realism. Contemporary Indian filmmakers have increasingly adopted long takes to enhance narrative depth, character engagement, and observational storytelling. This paper examines the role of long takes in contemporary Indian cinema through selected case studies and theoretical perspectives. The study argues that long takes are not merely technical achievements but powerful storytelling devices that influence audience perception and emotional engagement (Bazin, 1967; Tarkovsky, 1986).

Index Terms—Long Take, Cinematography, Realism, Contemporary Indian Cinema

I. Introduction

Editing has traditionally been considered one of cinema's defining characteristics. However, many filmmakers have challenged the dominance of rapid cutting by employing long takes, in which the camera observes action over an extended duration without interruption. Long takes encourage audiences to engage actively with the frame and experience cinematic time more directly (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

In contemporary Indian cinema, long takes have become increasingly visible, particularly in independent and regional films. Directors and cinematographers use them to create realism, preserve spatial continuity, and establish emotional intimacy between the viewer and the subject. This research investigates how long takes contribute to cinematic expression and narrative structure in recent Indian films (Brown, 2016).

II. Background

The history of long takes can be traced back to early cinema, where technical limitations often resulted in extended uninterrupted shots. Later filmmakers such as Orson Welles, Miklós Jancsó, Theo Angelopoulos, and Andrei Tarkovsky transformed the long take into a deliberate artistic choice (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

In India, the increased use of digital cameras and stabilization technologies has enabled filmmakers to experiment with long-duration shots more freely. Contemporary films increasingly employ long takes to emphasize realism, duration, and spatial continuity rather than relying solely on montage-based storytelling (Brown, 2016).

III. Case Studies

1. All We Imagine as Light (2024)

Shot along the ghats and narrow lanes of Varanasi, Masaan frequently uses natural light to capture the location's cultural and emotional texture. Soft morning light, warm evening tones, and reflections from the river contribute significantly to the film's atmosphere. Minimal artificial lighting is used, allowing the city's natural environment to shape the visual identity of the story.

2. Court (2014)

The film employs extended static shots that allow viewers to observe legal proceedings without dramatic manipulation. The minimal use of editing creates a documentary-like realism and encourages critical observation of social structures (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

3. Kumbalangi Nights (2019)

Several sequences rely on uninterrupted camera movement and long takes to maintain emotional continuity between characters. These shots strengthen the audience's connection to the environment and interpersonal relationships (Brown, 2016).

IV. Analysis & Results

The analysis reveals several significant functions of long takes:

A. Realism

Long takes preserve the continuity of space and time, allowing events to unfold naturally without fragmentation (Bazin, 1967).

B. Audience Immersion

The absence of frequent cuts encourages viewers to remain engaged within the cinematic space, producing a stronger sense of presence (Tarkovsky, 1986).

C. Emotional Depth

Extended shots allow actors to perform without interruption, resulting in more nuanced emotional expression and character development (Rabiger, 2020).

D. Spatial Awareness

Long takes maintain the integrity of locations and help audiences understand relationships between characters and their environments (Brown, 2016).

V. Discussion

The increasing use of long takes in contemporary Indian cinema reflects a broader movement toward realism and observational storytelling. Rather than functioning solely as technical demonstrations, long takes contribute to narrative meaning by emphasizing duration, atmosphere, and character presence. Advances in

digital cinematography have made these techniques more accessible, allowing filmmakers to experiment with time and space in innovative ways (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

Furthermore, long takes challenge conventional editing practices by encouraging viewers to engage more actively with the image. This aligns with Bazin's advocacy for realism and Tarkovsky's conception of cinema as a temporal art form (Bazin, 1967; Tarkovsky, 1986).

VI. Experience & Reflection

As a cinematography student, I have become increasingly interested in the relationship between time and image. Through my own filmmaking practice, I have observed that long takes encourage patience and attentiveness from both the filmmaker and the audience. Rather than directing attention through editing, the camera allows viewers to explore the frame independently. This approach has influenced my understanding of cinematic rhythm, particularly in projects that rely on static compositions and observational imagery.

VII. Conclusion

Long takes have emerged as an important stylistic and narrative device in contemporary Indian cinema. They enhance realism, strengthen audience immersion, and provide filmmakers with new ways to represent time and space. Through films such as *Court*, *The Disciple*, and *Kumbalangi Nights*, long takes demonstrate their ability to support emotional depth and visual authenticity. As Indian cinema continues to evolve, the long take is likely to remain a significant tool for filmmakers seeking to explore duration, observation, and cinematic realism.

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