

Creating visuals for a vast storyline in **Vaaranam Aayiram**

In *Vaaranam Aayiram*, an army commando is on a chopper headed for a mission when he gets word that his father has passed away. He is devastated by the news, and begins recalling many memorable moments with his father from childhood to the present.

Writer-director Gautham Menon approached R. Rathnavelu about shooting *Vaaranam Aayiram* after seeing his cinematography in the critically-acclaimed and award-winning *Nandha*.

"After I read the script, I knew I would love working on this project with Gautham," says Rathnavelu. "It was a very tough script to shoot. The canvas was wide. The period stretched from the 1960s to 1990s. The story has romance, death, depression, drug addiction, rehabilitation, war, and more. It couldn't be approached with a single visual look."

Vaaranam Aayiram was filmed at locations and on soundstages in and around India with 30 days of additional scenes in San Francisco.

Menon and Rathnavelu agreed that the first half of the film should look very realistic and emotional. They decided on a raw look for the second half with handheld camera work and high-contrast visuals.

Since the story covers several decades, Rathnavelu changed the visual style and look according to the period and mood. "I desaturated the colors for the periods," he explains. "The present love sequence was shot glossy, with lush colors and a telephoto lens, while the father-son sequence had a more neutral tone. We used a cyan-ish tint with very high-contrast lighting for scenes dealing with drug addiction, and more of a blue tone for the rehabilitation. The army and war sequences were shot with a slightly warm tone. Overall, I tried to give a raw sensibility to the film with a handheld camera and a lot of P.O.V shots."

Most of the scenes were shot with a single ARRIFLEX 435 Xtreme, except for a stunt sequence that required three cameras. Rathnavelu used a full set of Cooke S4/i Prime lenses ranging from 12 to 135mm, and an Angenieux Optimo 24 to 290mm zoom lens. He shot the 1960s and 1980s period scenes with wide-angle lenses and used the telephoto for the romance sequence.

Vaaranam Aayiram was captured in Super 35mm four-perf format on KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film. "This story demanded as close to a human-eye look as possible," Rathnavelu says. "I personally feel Kodak negatives are close to that. The 5219 negative provides a true reproduction of colors and great latitude with fantastic contrast range. Some of our night exterior sequences were filmed without any light because I had faith in the stock. The results were amazing and realistic."

Rathnavelu says he used a minimal number of lights in order to achieve a realistic feel. "Even while filming on some

Film Laboratories. "My colorist Muthu was talented and sensible, and he enhanced my work," Rathnavelu adds.

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soundstages I tried to bring lights through the windows rather than being tempted to use overhead soft boxes. A few ARRISUN 4KW Pars and Kino Flos were used. I can't imagine shooting flat; I love contrast."

"Gautham Menon gave me tremendous freedom in deciding the visual look during filming and also during D.I. We both lost our fathers one month before our shoot started, so this is a very personal film for both of us."

The negative was scanned at 2K resolution, and the D.I. was done in a Lustre suite at Prasad EFX in India. The timed digital was rendered back onto film with an ARRILASER film recorder at Prasad



1 A scene from *Vaaranam Aayiram*. Photo courtesy of R. Rathnavelu.