

Paper

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Notes on *Veli* (The Open)

The following is a collection of notes, scribbled at various times over a month and a half, though recently given shape and form, on *Veli* (1997) by Bala Kailasam and Sashikanth Ananthachari, a film on the river Kaveri.

By way of introduction, here is a short passage with which the film begins:

“On a long bus journey from Madras, I was witness to a strange performance...

The driver of the vehicle, at some late hour of the night, started playing a handpicked selection of old, popular love songs from Tamil films. One song led to the other and as the performance unfolded, I realised that the various singing voices were in effect one ‘Voice’.

The ‘Voice’ was a way of seeing, a perception.

The ‘Voice’ was a scream spread across the journey.

On a different journey, this time to shoot the river Kaveri, to speak about our relation to our environment, we found that the river had already been constructed for us,

as an object of beauty...

as a commodity of use...

as divinity...

To us the question was;

What was the river prior to all construction?

During the course of our shooting the two journeys overlapped.

The ‘Voice’, a way of seeing, due to our proximity to it, also became our perception alongside which, the unnameable river flowed.”

If the notes don’t seem to cohere, it is because the film itself refuses to cohere. How *Veli* approaches the river Kaveri is how this text attempts to approach *Veli*; what brings the two together, at some unknown level, is the ‘Voice’.



Waves curve and glide in bursts of foam. At some places, gnarly roots have lodged themselves deep in-between the rocks, themselves the product of millions of years of sedimentation. A bird pierces through the whiteness above, splitting it in two. Below, the percolated rocks teem with life, with tiny figures that move, bend and gesticulate.

The fluidity of water, the dense albeit pervious firmness of stone and hill, and beyond that the uncloven space of the sky. Surface, movement, and space.

Pools of light shimmer across the delicate surface. The depths of the river - its mythic murmur and maritime rumble - are something to be inferred, imagined into existence. Meanwhile, the still water moves, while movement retains its fluid stillness.

Light spreads, scatters, refracts. This is how time congeals, makes itself felt.

— My first viewing of *Veli* was bookended - quite fortuitously - by two other films by the same filmmakers: *Kelai Draupadai* by Sashikant Ananthachari, film on the Draupadi Amman Mahabharata Koothu Festival in Tamil Nadu, and *Vaastu Marabu* by Bala Kailasam, an equally poetic documentary on the continuity of the *vaastu* tradition in Indian architecture and sculpture. Both films revolve around a certain epic tendency, be it of a living performative tradition or of (poly-narrative) iconographic traditions. It might be helpful, as a starting point, to think through and along with *Veli* with this idea of the epic in mind.

What renders an epic narrative epic is the interpolation of the viewer/listener into the narrative. The formal language of the epic is one of digression, dispersion, and polyphony, of interpretations and resonances recursively spilling over into each other. In the Mahabharata Koothu festival, for over twenty days and almost twenty hours a day, the Mahabharata is narrated as a story, performed as a ritual, and also enacted as theatre (*koothu*). There is endless self-referencing and repetition involved. Each mode brings to the epic its own unique manner of elaboration, often resulting in varying evocations of (oftentimes the same) episodes, events, and characters. The entire village, over the course of the festival, is transformed into a performance space, and the villagers themselves begin to live the Mahabharata, both individually and collectively (as Sashikanth memorably remarked, ‘by remembering the epic, one also tends to remember oneself’).

Similarly, in *Vaastu Marabu*, another strand of the past interpolated into the present: that of the art of the *Vishwakarmas*, the holders of the architectural and artistic heritage of India. Here, once encounters a dense profusion of myth, poetry, temple architecture, iconography, iconometry, and metaphysical rumination, each

freely inter-mingling with the rest, in turn having a direct bearing on the lived religiosity of everyday life. It would be worthwhile then to treat the epic as a flexible metaphor of life, where the onus to create a whole — a truth or meaning— out of the necessarily fragmented narrative falls squarely on the listener/viewer.

To talk of *Veli* in such a context is to ponder on the question of how cinema itself through its workings can generate an epic sensation, epic both in terms of scale as well as structures of signification. It demands from the receptive watcher a mode of viewership primarily imaginative in nature: to inscribe themselves into the narrative and thus complete the filmic experience (a process that would involve a *ripening* of the film as much as of the viewer).

— To think of *Veli*, ostensibly a film on the river Kaveri, in epic terms is to begin with an inherently cinematic question: what does it mean, in the absence of narrative strictures, to film water, or to cinematically experience water? On one level, it is to move away from everything solid and defined —objects, shapes, bodies— towards what one may call a less figurative visuality and aurality. It is to bring a certain indeterminacy to the forefront of experience, a fluidity that escapes all rigid binaries (an apt example would be how surface and depth, foreground and background, become inseparable, constantly reproducing each other). To talk of water, or in this case rivers, is to also evoke the notion of deep geological time, of the vast evolutionary history of water bodies, and consequently of the liquid/molten origins of the planet (the Kaveri basin as formed in the Early Cretaceous period, almost a hundred million years ago).

Another way to look at it would be to consider water as evoking the very archival history of cinema; for instance, how both early cinema and its most immediate predecessor, analog photography, relied heavily on the materiality of water for the processing of images. It is also no coincidence that three of the ten Lumière films publicly screened for the first time —*L'arroseur arrosé* (*The Sprinkler Sprinkled*), *La pêche aux poissons rouges* (*Fishing for Goldfish*), and *Baignade en mer* (*The Sea*)— were somehow related to water. In the element of water, characterised by incessant flow and change, was found perhaps a reflection of the uniqueness of a medium capable of capturing both motion and time.

It is also impossible, in the Indian context, to discuss a film on a river and not in the same breath evoke that master chronicler of rivers, Ritwik Ghatak. And yet, it is not the mythic or even the symbolic dimension of rivers from his films that has stayed with me, but rather the rhythmic. I have in mind a particular sequence from *Subarnarekha*, of Abhiram and Sita talking a walk in the forest, a scene that in all actuality has nothing to do with water per se, but which nevertheless has remained etched in my mind over the years. Abhiram recounts to Sita the autobiographical story of his novel, and as he's done talking, Abhiram begins to gently sway from side to side. Ghatak cuts to Sita, and quite wondrously, she too begins to sway, her body rhythm intuitively matching that of Abhiram's. There is something about this lyrical motion that has always brought to mind the susurrations of waves, and at the same time the evocation of a singular mood/mode of attention, an aesthetic attunement that is in some sense fluid, floating, *liquid*.

It is precisely in these senses that the liquidity of *Veli* is to be engaged with: the fluid, the material, the geological, and the rhythmic, each of which has an influence on the ways in which we organise temporality and spatiality, and perhaps even subjectivity.

— It would be remiss to attempt to talk of the Kaveri and not mention one of the great travelogues of the 20th century, *The Eternal Kaveri* by T. Janakiraman and P.G. Sundararajan (Chitti), a deeply sensuous and evocative account of a journey along the Kaveri ('the river of life'). Traveling across South India —in a

journey uncannily similar to what the filmmakers' seem to have undertaken— Chitti and Janakiraman re-live a dazzling melange of myths, incidents, and historical events, all the while straddling multiple timelines and temporalities (“This constant bondage to the artificial concept of a twelve-hour day was incongruous against a background of timeless and ageless monuments and no one realised this more than ourselves”). Here is a delightful summation of the Kaveri from the closing pages of the book:

“How many festivals, how many legends, how many folk songs based on the Kaveri! Water comes from any tap. But when it runs along a river like the Kaveri, what wonderful images it assumes, what sounds it produces as music, what structures it creates in temple form, how it flowers into poetry and percolates your very being! How many Siva *bhaktas* from the days of Thirumoolar, how many musicians from the days of Tiruppanazhwar! But the Kaveri predates them all. She continues to flow. Measured against this scale of eternity, why should we ache at the measure of our meagre achievement?
...Learning, poetry, worship – all of them arise from her waters time and again.”

Also revolving around Kaveri are its well-known origin legends: of Lopamudra fashioned into existence by Agastya, their eventual marriage, Lopamudra being trapped in a *kamandala* by a jealous Agastya, and finally Ganesha's overturning of it, resulting in the bountiful flow of Lopamudra and her tears as the river Kaveri. As is the case with such storytelling traditions, there are multiple versions of the legend, each one getting further entangled with other myths: for instance of Kaveri as Brahma's daughter Vishnumaya, who would later become Lopamudra (further connecting this version to the *Samudra Mathan* episode).

To thus talk of Kaveri is to necessarily confront this vast immensity, an astonishingly rich heritage of music, art, literature, architecture, devotion, and myth. How does one capture, let alone experience such immensity? It is here that we can once again go back to the epic tendency, to an imaginative bringing-forth of resonances, memories, and associations by the viewer, evoked in turn by the specific modalities of cinema. A quick illustrative example: a long sequence of everyday sights and sounds of the Kaveri (wide shots of the river and its banks, people floating by on coracles), and then a sudden aural intrusion: a far-away sound of a *nadaswaram*, slowly increasing in intensity, juxtaposed and placed in counterpoint to the image, evoking — in a flash— a sprawling history of temple rituals, prayers, and festival processions (interestingly, the wood of the *nadaswaram* is said to be of the *aacha* tree, a species supposedly said to exist since the times of the *Rāmāyanā*, and which also plays an important part in the *Vāli* episode, an example then of an instrument *materially* linked to one of the epics). It is in these affective gaps between image and sound, and the possible meanings they give rise to —through the language of allusion and evocation— that the film primarily unfolds, both in its filmic structure as well as in the viewer's mind.

— Such a mode/mood of evocation also plays a part in the formal construction of *Veli* as a whole. Most, if not all shots, unfold in long takes, through what is known as ‘plan sequence’. The usual tricks of trade in documentary cinema —voiceover explanations, interviews, the presence of a narrator— are entirely done away with, replaced here with an immersive sensorial engagement with the world at hand. What such long takes do, apart from imparting a spatio-temporal continuity to the filmed object, is imbue each sequence with an *imbricatory* value.

One of the very first sequences in Sashikanth's *Kelai Draupadai* starts with a long take: a closeup of the actor Jayakumar playing Draupadi, entreating Rama (her brother in folk traditions) to protect her. The camera slowly zooms out, until Draupadi is seen standing on top of a hill, and gradually begins to pan to the right, capturing the entire city laid out before it. Later, the camera will retrace its movement, until it once again

frames Draupadi standing against the miniature backdrop of the city. Here, there is an imbrication of Draupadi (worship) with the wider region, both now inextricably intertwined with each other. A similar *suturing* takes place in *Veli*, where different aspects of the Kaveri —its ebbs and flows, the journey from Talakaveri to its eventual merging with the Bay of Bengal at Poompuhar, the life (human, animal, vegetal) that flows along its banks, and the material culture it has given rise to— are linked together under the continuity of the long shot. What the long shot does is also lend a certain obduracy to what is filmed, a haptic *is-ness* arising from image-sound combinations freed from the strictures of sequential narrative, be it the is-ness of water, the is-ness of rocks, or even the tree-ness of swaying coconut trees swaying (a quote by D.W Griffith, which the filmmaking duo Straub-Huillet were especially fond of, comes to mind - ‘What modern movies lack is the wind in the trees’).

And it is this is-ness, a singularity that each filmic-event becomes endowed with, that also awakens resonances stretching across vast swathes of space and time. In other words, the places filmed are not merely empty spaces, but places that have gathered things, experiences, histories, even languages and thoughts into their fold. For instance, an astonishing 360* pan of a landscape with hundreds of colourful sarees drying in the sun immediately brings to mind the terracotta vats found in an archeological excavation in Uraiyur (on the banks of the Kaveri), confirming its position as a flourishing trade centre almost two-thousand years ago. Yet another resonance would be the ancient Sangam classification of the five eco-zones/*tinai*s —*kurinji* (montane), *mullai* (pastoral), *marutham* (riverine), *neytal* (littoral), and *pālai* (desertic)— which the course of the Kaveri in *Veli* suggestively seems to evoke. This is-ness is as much a result of the asignifying moments of plenitude in *Veli* as it is of what is referred to as the *photogénie* of the moving image, cinema’s transformative, indeed animistic ability to reveal a side of things invisible to human perception, in this case a depiction of the world (and thought) in its ceaseless mobility.



In the warp and weft of reality, things continually come together and move apart, like an undulating saree in the breeze.

Here, objects and actions have their own varied svabhāva. A blue-horned cow; scattered coconut trees; the gurgling of water; the roar of an airplane; a woman’s inquisitive stare at the camera; and the myriad colours and shapes of fabrics. Here, there is incessant flow, constant movement and change. Bathing; washing; praying; incense; flowers; gatherings; rituals; devotion; mirth; loss. Multiple textures, multiple ways of being-in-the-world, syncopated into one continuous landscape.

The narrative of existence is a narrative of traces and inscriptions.

— To think along *Veli* is also to think through ideas of disjunction and dissonance, especially those that arise by way of its image-sound combinations. Much of the sound in *Veli* is re-created from scratch, lending an almost hyper-realist feel to its design (heightened birdsong, early-morning clamor at a beach, and the aural textures of the river in all its manifestations, from the swish of water on its surface to underwater sounds captured through a hydrophone). To these are added a panoply of non-diegetic sonic intrusions (the *nadaswaram*, an airplane), opening up the filmic image beyond its ‘is-ness’, and in the process continually subverting and creating new meanings.

Equally interesting is the occasional juxtaposition of sequences with songs from Tamil popular cinema of the 50s/60s, modulated as though wafting in and out from far away radios and loudspeakers. On one level, it is a disjunction that structures *Veli* in its entirety: the collision between a popular, commercial, and melodramatic tradition and *Veli*’s own ‘imagist’ tradition of experimental/art-house filmmaking. And yet, upon closer inspection, it is precisely this seeming dissonance that opens up a possible avenue to understanding/experiencing *Veli*’s elaborations. Here is a cursory look at the film’s soundtrack: the song *Gangai Karai Thottam* from the film *Vanambadi* (about intensely longing for, finally meeting, and eventually separating from Kannan/Krishna), *Kaana Inbam Kanindhadhen* from *Sabaash Meena* (a song about rapturous love, in which the whole of nature seems to participate), a snippet of a dialogue from the famous Sivaji Ganesan film *Deiva Magan* (a deserted child pining to meet his real parents), and the song *Kutram Purinthavan* from *Ratha Kannneer* (about remorse for one’s actions and the inability to find peace in life).

Each song here revolves around a deeply felt sense of yearning, anticipation, love and/or loss, a —oftentimes futile— attempt to bridge the distance between oneself and the object of desire. It is precisely this *vipralambha bhāva*, the sentiment of longing-in-separation, that suffuses *Veli*, colouring each of its attempts to apprehend the river Kaveri. In a text written in collaboration with the two filmmakers, Dr. Randall Giles alludes to this very *vipralambha* with the following words - “the distant sound track—most often heard as through a radio or cheap cassette player—gives to the display of life along the river and our experience of its life evidence of this act of naming an unnameable deity. The film is at last about the love of life, and insofar as it occurs, sadness at loss.”

— Encountering Dr. Randall’s words anew suddenly give rise to yet another resonance, one involving music, deities, and the cinematic experience. I am reminded here of a lecture by David Shulman, aptly titled ‘How to Put Together a Goddess Out of Musical Scales’. Shulman’s focus here is on the famous *Nilotpalamba Kritis* by Muthuswamy Dikshitar, addressed to the goddess Nilotpalamba of the Thyagarajaswamy temple in Thiruvarur (in the very heart of the Cauvery Delta). The gist, to put it simply, is this: just as it is possible to bring a goddess into being through meditative acts, *mantras*, and images, it is equally possible to rouse a goddess into existence through song, to quite literally compose her into being. In his characteristically erudite manner, Shulman relates the nine *kritis* to different Sanskrit case endings, and ultimately to the human body as it is understood in the *Sri Chakra* school of thought.

The relevant point, interestingly, is that the goddess emerges through the very unfolding of these nine *kritis*, each set to a different *rāgā*. Thus, the second *kriti* (Nilotpalambam Bhaja Re) is set to Ritigowla, while the seventh one (Nilotpalambikayah Tava Dasoham) is set to Mayamalawagowla. One of the key differences between the two *rāgās* lies in the use of the seventh note Ni, which, in Carnatic parlance, is Ni2 (Kaishiki Nishadam) in Ritigowla and Ni3 (Kakali Nishadam) in Malavagowla. It is here that Shulman touches upon a

startling, even wondrous, insight: it is precisely in the oscillation between the two Nis, in the sudden opening up of a gap between Ni2 and Ni3, that the emergence of the Goddess takes place. In other words, this rousing or blossoming happens in what one may refer to as the microtonal intervals (*shruti*) of rāgā music, with each subtle shift evoking a singularly distinct affective state.

The import of this meandering detour is this: to what extent can the moving sound-image evoke such singular moods, aided as they are by the microtonal intentionalities of camera movement, editing, sound, and most importantly duration? To watch *Veli*, or indeed any film relatively freed from the dictates of plot, is to be acutely attuned not just to why things unfold but also the question of how. It is to be aware that a cut, a zoom, a change in the intensity of sound, or a sudden camera movement might not make much difference in terms of narrative, but can, on the other hand, vastly, unimaginably, change our experience of watching a film. Just as a musician can, with the same seven notes, produce an astonishing variety of melodies (and sensations), so too can the techniques of cinema provide a visceral encounter with the textures and intensities of everyday life.

— This in no way is to suggest that *Veli* is a painstakingly measured/calibrated exercise. Rather, one possible way to understand the elaborations of the Kaveri in *Veli* is to go back to one of the key elements of Carnatic music, *manodharma*. Contrary to popular perception, *manodharma* is not limitless improvisation, but rather what one may refer to as informed improvisation (the groundwork for which is laid over years and years of listening and practice). Each rāgā will have its own techniques of elaboration, and yet what remains constant is this play of spontaneity within a given structure. *Manodharma* as a methodology (both of making and watching cinema) thus entails this intricate play of structure and openness, an intuitive anticipation and response—auditory, visual, kinesthetic—in the moment to the ‘randomness’ of an unfolding (as Mani Kaul once remarked - “Instead of organising space to reach the meaning and the thought, I was attempting to place myself in time and let the space ‘become’. Something that is taking shape is difficult to express”). It is a dance between the subject, the mechanical non-human camera, and that which is captured (however fleetingly), as much dependent on the proficiency of the camera-wielder as on the vagaries of a reality out there. An improvisation, in a sense, in which the entire world participates.

— *Manodharma* as an approach might also enable us to approach the interplay between structure and its lack, something that forms the underlying core of *Veli*. The word *veli* itself refers to that which is outside, an outside that goes beyond or traverses a given structure (the English title of the film is ‘The Open’). This unstructured quality in *Veli* pertains as much to space as to time, for at one level it is quite literally the world in all its protean glory unspooling in front of us, to an extent demarcated through constructions in image and sound. This unstructuredness, however, is also what holds each image-sound combination together; it is an absence that is active, even generative. It would not be wholly incorrect to think of *Veli* as a cubist construction, each shifting scene revealing—obliquely, indirectly—an aspect of the Kaveri, each part yearning to achieve a whole that is always out of reach.

What is deeply felt then is a chasmic yearning, a longing to capture this (absent) Whole, to conjure the impossible Other (Kaveri) on its own terms, to apprehend what it might mean to ‘be’ the river Kaveri beyond all human constructs. Here, another resonance springs to mind: of the concepts of *dhyaan* and *Dharshan* in Hindu thought. *Dhyaan* is a heightened quality of attention/attentiveness brought to bear either on itself or on the world. *Darshan*, on the other hand, is the important ritual not just of seeing/beholding the deity but also of being beheld by the deity itself. Another way to engage with *Veli* would be to think of it not solely as an

evocation but also an invocation, a *darshan* invocation of Kaveramma (the titular goddess of the river Kaveri) with all the reciprocity such a relationship implies.

To the structure/lack schema (close/open, inside/outside, consonance/dissonance, presence/absence) one could hence add another term: self/world. Just as *darshan* entails a mutual self-constitution of the devotee and deity, there is equally an entwinement, a coterminality, of inner and outer, self and the world, each necessarily imbricated in the other. In Bala Kailasam's *Vaastu Marabu*, Shri V. Ganapathi Sthapati, while musing on *shilpa-kala*, remarks on how the inner quality/essence of the purported art-object is felt, experienced, savoured, and finally given form through sculpture. What takes form in reality is nothing but this savouring; in the end, the sculptor becomes the sculpture (as Coomaraswamy remarks in *The Transformation of Nature in Art*: "the mind 'produces; or 'draws' this form to itself, as if from a great distance. Ultimately, that is, from Heaven...but immediately, from 'the immanent space in the heart'"). Here, the vaulted subject-object distinction is in some sense replaced by a more dynamic and mobile equilibrium. In this collapsing of binaries is a narrowing down of the gap between the experiencer and experienced, a possibility of becoming both witness and that which is witnessed (an inter-subjectivity that goes beyond the human). Conversely, *Veli* then is as much about imaginatively conjuring/apprehending the Kaveri as about being apprehended, indeed constituted by it, in and through the very act of filming.



Everything has its own centre, its own density.

A lone car ride over an interminable bridge. The crispness of dawn renders everything distinct and separate.

The space is suddenly filled by a strange chant. A woman's drone-like hum, followed by the twang of a veena. Notes accumulate, a melody is formed, and a mood evoked. The contours of Sindubhairavi, shifting and wisp-like, are gently coaxed out. Below, the river continues to flow, though it is no longer seen.

The image is stretched, inflected, enlivened, perforated. It is too much to take; the camera is now unhinged and free, galloping after some children as they run towards the river.

Bewilderment, exhilaration, wonder, and play.

— To talk of *Veli* is also to situate the film in a wider tradition and history of ethnographic filmmaking, itself informed by the shifting mores of anthropological theory. What started out as a purely scientific endeavour (ethnographic film as record), and went on to espouse the notion of film as language (a text to be deciphered) has now, in recent years, embraced the turn towards the sensory (film as being able to capture something of the lyricism of lived experience). This turn, which *Veli* could be said to belong to, has also included a widening of the term ethnographic; to speak of the ethnographic now is not to restrict it to the study of a particular people or culture but rather to treat it as a sustained contemplation of place, atmosphere, soundscape, and memory. This, however, does not mean indulging in the sensorial for its own sake. What comes to the fore, at least in *Veli*, is of the sensory drawing from and building upon a common cultural ethos with its own traditions and history, a veritable way of relating to reality (the ‘Voice’).

In terms of actual film praxis, there is certainly a bit of Rouch in *Veli*, especially with regard to his idea of the *cine-trance* (Rouch would also famously go on to describe cinema as the ‘Postcard at the service of the Imaginary’, an idea that sits quite well with what *Veli* is attempting to do). And yet, the tradition *Veli*’s observational aesthetic comes closest to is the one espoused not by Rouch but by his contemporary, Robert Gardner. Much like *Veli*, Gardner’s films are lyrical and prone to metaphorical associations, and aimed not at didactic exposition but above all at communicating an experience. In both cases, to affirm reality is not to claim objective mastery over it, in the sense of a positivist notion of a single ethnographic reality. To go back to *Veli*, here there is no totalising takeaway or resolution, a message or learning about the Kaveri that one can walk away with. Rather, what we are left with is a series of moods, fleeting impressions that also reflect something of the inherent ambiguity and complexity of reality, the evocation of which is an integral part of the very process of documentary filmmaking.

— An ethnographic consideration also inevitably raises questions of ethics and representation, and of the colonial origins of the discipline itself. In relation to the previous point—a series of moods evoked, and the recalcitrance of reality maintained— what *Veli* manages to do through its long takes is to grant an autonomy to what appears in front of the camera. Here, the core ethnographic (colonial) impulse—to endlessly classify, enumerate, interpret, *salvage*— is replaced by a more contemplative approach, one in which signification and meaning recede behind witnessing and being. For instance, towards the end of the film, we see long sequences of ritual festivals like the *Aadi Perukku* festival being celebrated. There is no attempt to explain or *enframe*; instead, the continuously moving camera is content merely to present things as they are—rather than represent—in the process maintaining their integrity, truth value, and internal logic (Trinh T. Minh-ha’s frequently quoted line comes to mind, though now in service of a reformulated observational aesthetic: “I do not intend to speak about; just speak nearby”). It is this approach, a phenomenological encounter with the textures of everyday living, that also lends a sense of dignity to the manner in which the communities living with and along the banks of the Kaveri are filmed.

— All of the above ruminations have led to this final point: to rethink the very ontology of the moving image. What is to be contested is the idea of representational realism, that, to put it simply, what one sees/hears is what the filmic sound-image is about. Instead, I wish to espouse a different kind of relationship to cinema: one not predicated on conscious sense-making and pre-determined codes of signification, but rather in terms of affective dispositions and multi-sensorial dimensions of experience. In the language of Sanskrit poetics, not *abhidhā* (denotative meaning) or *svabhāvokti* (naturalist description) but *vyañjanā* (embodied evocative meaning) and *dhvani* (echo, reverberation, resonance, suggestion, and also quite literally sound).

The filmic (sound-)image then is to be treated not as a factual given but rather as an unfolding event of potentialities, resonances, and suggestions, always pointing to something beyond itself. It is evocative rather than descriptive, as much attending to what there is —what is given— as to what isn't, and yet attentive to the sensuous materiality of life, and of a reality out there. It is this reflective vastness of the image that is also somewhat transferred over to the viewing experience, giving rise to a kind of floating and reposeful awareness. Where thought seems to fold back upon itself (*vishranti*), where one listens to the act of listening and watches the act of watching, a feeling I have referred to as the epic sensation ('by remembering the epic, one tends to remember oneself'). It is this reflective vastness that permeates the runtime of *Veli*, an experience during which images and sounds become the fabric of a constantly evolving dialogue bridging nature, culture, documentary, and life.

I would like to (inconclusively) conclude with a quote by Foucault that has stayed with me over the years. Foucault's statement applies primarily to criticism, and yet is relevant for all us writers/filmmakers/artists engaging with each other's works. The question that a viewing of *Veli* raised, and which in a sense prompted this piece of writing, is this: in an age of pre-formed opinions, agendas, and frameworks of intelligibility, how does one encounter a work of art afresh? How does one give oneself over to it, and engage with it on its own terms? How does one enable its elaboration, while maintaining the singularity, indeed the alterity, of the work in question? Here then is Foucault:

"I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes - all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be a sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms."

Perhaps it would invent them sometimes - all the better...

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