



FRAMING ANTICIPATION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TITLE TEASER VIDEOS OF LOKESH KANAGARAJ FILMS

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Abstract: In today's cinematic marketing landscape, title teaser have emerged as powerful tools that build anticipation, shape audience expectations, and introduce the tone of the film well before its release. These title sequences, often rich in symbolism, stylistic detail, and narrative suggestion, set the tonal foundation for the audience's cinematic experience. This research investigates the aesthetic, semiotic, and strategic dimensions of title teaser from three iconic Tamil films—Vikram, Leo, and Coolie, all directed by director Lokesh Kanagaraj. Through a close textual analysis, the study examines recurring stylistic threads such as colour palette, typography, sound design, and embedded narrative cues, positioning them as micro-textual agents of meaning-making. The findings underscore the dual role of title teaser videos as both artistic expressions and strategic audience-engagement mechanisms in the evolving visual culture of Tamil cinema.

Key words: Lokesh kanagaraj, Title teaser, Paratextual elements, Leo, Master, Coolie, Film promotion, Semiotics, Content analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Films have to be introduced. The introduction has to be captivating. The art of captivation is a skill. This artistic and technical method invites and elevates the mood of the audience by setting a tone for the movie. A title teaser is a short-form audiovisual promotional content released by a film's production team to announce the film's title, often before any full-length trailer or motion poster is made public. The typography and the animation used in the film's title sequence often communicate the film's genre and the mood it expects the audience to be in (Yu). David Jerrick et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study among 154 students to examine the influence of trailers, which instigates their desire to watch a particular movie. Over 96% of the respondents have acknowledged the importance of trailers and their effectiveness in converting audiences.

This research paper primarily shall focus on decoding the aesthetic and strategic dimensions of title teaser of the films- Vikram, Leo, and Coolie. Common stylistic threads like semiotics, colour palette, narrative hints, and audiovisual design shall be covered to uncover the techniques used in these movies, which are labelled as micro-textual agents.

Films are celebrated in Tamil Nadu, and every release of a major film star is a festival. Such is the involvement of the audience with the film world, which they aspire to dwell in each moment of their lives. And hence the story of a movie is pre-debated among the audience, which also serves to heighten the anticipation about its storyline. Title design is a precursor that acts in providing a glimpse into the story world, which acts as a powerful paratextual tool in conveying the story and engaging the audience to form a narration in their own mind (M & Selvaraj, 2024). Directors have opted to engage the audience with narrative cues very early on so that they remain engrossed in the possible visual treat and narrative journey of the film through symbols, animation, and even audio (Komalata & Shyi Nian, 2024).

Title Teaser Reveal with Motion Posters

Movie trailers are psychological baits that provide audiences with enough information to motivate them to watch the movie. These trailers are often rich and emotionally stirring, which serve as “free samples” that form quality expectations within the audience. This is a step ahead of the traditional posters and banners that were earlier used to guide the viewers' attitudes that threw implicit cues like tone, style, and genre.

Motion movie posters, also called as “Mosters” use minimal animation, sound design, and cryptic symbols that tease the audience while keeping them looped over their indulgence with what the story would be with respect to the tone, mood, and style even before the release of the movie. Film editors use various combinations to succeed in achieving this, such as visual elements (colours, schemes, character poses, weapons, and locations), motion effects (slow zooms, camera sweeps, sparks, rain, and smoke), sound design and background scores (dark, energetic, or sinister), and typography and taglines (such as "Bloody Sweet" in Leo).

The audience has imagination. Komalata et al. (2024) published about the exceptionally powerful impact of visual storytelling, where 90% of information transmission occurs through visuals, as the content that is presented as videos is processed over 60,000 times faster than text. The emotional response evoked through the presentation helps in educating and guiding the audience and basically shapes and sets the mood and atmosphere within a fraction of a second (Vijaykumar & Bhandar, 2024). This is utilized by the filmmakers during their film promotions by using proper storytelling tools with the aid of color palettes, lighting, motion, and audio cues, which generate curiosity and indulge the audience's imagination.

While analyzing the creation of director Lokesh Kanagaraj through the works of Joseph Gorden et al. (2021), the stylistic and promotional strategies of the filmmaker are quite evident and visible through the consistent use of visual motifs, narrative structures, and promotional events, which are suggestively revealing. This can be seen through the high-impact teaser reveals, which were consistent in the Lokesh Cinematic Universe (LCU) (Bae & Kim, 2019).

The titles of Lokesh Kanagaraj's shows reveal clarity and consistency in short promos. This has enriched the experience of the audience by amplifying their engagement. This is in alignment with the branding cues systematically rendered by the director. And according to Archer-Brown et al. (2017), this is a very effective method to handle, as the audience is more likely to enjoy the movie if they feel that they understand what the movie might be as conveyed through the trailer. These audiences are likely willing to pay a proxy for buying the tickets, which arises from the clear path of understanding.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The “Digital First Strategy” is an approach utilized by film marketing teams to target their audience way more effectively and precisely to sell their product, unlike other traditional media, which bursts the information to a larger audience with minimal segregation. This helps them to prioritize digital platforms and tools to promote films, leveraging social media, online content, and digital campaigns to build anticipation and reach audiences way more effectively than their traditional media.

Film marketers consistently build anticipation and trust, which is vital for scheduled reveals and countdowns (Castillo et al., 2021). According to Schreiner et al. (2025), social conversation peaks around planned title teaser videos or countdown posts, which were counted through daily tweets using official hashtags. The audience also engages through YouTube comments on trailers and premieres during live or scheduled releases. Google Trends also reflected a spike in the volume of searches related to a particular movie during the time of release. These behaviors are generally categorized as communication, participation, and search, and they work interlaced and reinforce each other, which helps in forming a dynamic cycle. Often these spikes are correlated with box-office performances, which are often studied from the financial impact of the movie.

The audience who are engaged in YouTube are strong influencers of early-stage performance around the release of the movie (ADIGÜZEL, 2021). While in terms of Facebook, the engagement builds more consistently after the release of the movie. The marketing team is also considering transmedia marketing strategies where story fragments are carefully crafted and released in a timely manner across different platforms. Since the sole purpose of the campaign is to engage the audience and increase their participation well ahead of the release of the movie, acts like time-coded teasers and countdowns are implemented, as they have the ability to increase anticipation.

Movie titles also act as a stronghold packed with suggestive messages and intriguing information that entice the audience to the screen. Petersen et.al. (2019), in their study, noted the impact of titles on box office success. While Finsterwalder et al. (2012) state that the suspense built with the release of these titles conceals information that arouses curiosity and becomes a pivotal point in discovering the audience and also becomes a promotion of films with minimal budgets. The importance of suspense is realized through the fact that it builds suspense and maintains cognitive arousal, and hence the filmmakers opt to provide repeated exposures while craftily maintaining the uncertainty (Chun et al., 2020).

The audience requires strong resonance to make the content trending and worthy of their time. This has become evident with factual data that quantitatively summarizes the cryptic hashtags that maintain trending status (Jansen et al., 2021). At the turn of time, filmmakers are increasingly trying to find out ways to intrigue audiences to promote their films. Titles like Vikram, Leo, or Coolie withhold information about the movie and allow the audience to speculate and provide opportunities for discovery. Cryptic sounds and images also engage in priming the emotions of the audience, as the key information about the story and the screenplay are systematically withheld.

The title teaser videos is now celebrated as a festival that enthralls the audience, spiking their curiosity, and sets the tone for the movie. It gives a glimpse of the film's thematic universe, signals, and cinematic style, which strongly resonates with the select audience to whom it is directed, while turning a glimpse into a hugely appreciated celebration (Bae & Kim, 2019). The participation of the audience begins even before the release of the movie when they begin to create conversations among themselves. This enables the audience to remember the title and its release date well ahead of the release.

Research Objective

- To analyse the title teaser videos of film- Vikram, Leo, and Coolie, examining their stylistic elements, commonalities, and cultural implications.
- To identify thematic and stylistic consistencies in the title teaser videos.
- To evaluate how these title teaser videos reflect the director's cinematic signature.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to systematically analyze the title teaser videos of Vikram, Leo, and Coolie to uncover the thematic, stylistic, and cultural elements to understand the collective cinematic signature of director Lokesh Kanagaraj. Content analysis, which is a qualitative and interpretive method, identifies the patterns, motifs, messages, and stylistic elements within media texts (Krippendorff, 2013). This allows the researcher to structurally approach the objective in a systematic, objective, and reproducible manner that dives deeper into the content of the title teaser videos.

The films selected for the purposeful sample of the title teaser videos are Vikram (2022), Leo (2023), and Coolie (2025). These films were all directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj, whose venture has had prominence and popularity within Tamil cinema, creating a consistent and significant amount of stir through framing among the audience even before their release. The selected videos were obtained from verified online sources.

The content of the videos will be analyzed with the aid of a thematic, stylistic, and cultural framework. While the thematic analysis will interpret and reveal the core message and motifs, like violence, revenge, fate, chaos, and justice, stylistic analysis will incorporate visual style, such as colour schemes, lighting, and camera movement. It will also include the typographic treatment the title receives to intrigue the audience. The study also implies cultural analysis where concepts like Tamil culture, cinematic traditions, and superstar iconography are understood the way they are revealed through the titles. Frames from all the teasers are systematically captured, along with the associated motifs, messages, colour schemes, camera movements, and sound design elements.

4. TITLE TEASER ANALYSIS

Each movie is analyzed based on the cinematography, semantics, and cultural context and then set against each other to find the commonalities among them. This helps to understand and uncover the signature of Lokesh Kanagaraj in each title teaser video. The year mentioned along with each film title refers to the title teaser year not film release year.

VIKRAM (2020)

(Refer: Appendix- Table 01)

Frame 1: 00:04 - 0:20 | **Introduction** - Establishing Mood and Hero

Cinematography: The frame has chiaroscuro lighting with strong contrast with a predominantly darker frame. A ray of light pierces through and creates a silhouette of the lead character. Chiaroscuro lighting is a cinematic technique often imposed to represent moral conflict, power struggles, and transformation within a character or the story. The hero is going through inner turmoil. His resolution is yet to be ascertained. The darker side suggests the moral compass deflects doubts and uncertainty, while the brighter side suggests the mind's resolve to do the right thing. This has been the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Semantic: The character has a huge inner conflict, which is represented through the shadows. And the piercing ray of light showcases hope, renewal, justice, and the eventual triumph of moral order. The character is at a turning point after his corresponding conflict with difficult choices and responsibilities. His struggles are juxtaposed visually to communicate his poised emergence as a dominant and decisive force.

Cultural Context: Silhouette is often used as a mass cinema motif representing a hero as a solitary warrior who is on a mission to combat the flawed world and set things in order. Here the representation is in alignment with the iconography frequently used in South Indian cinema.

The movies from South India often carry on their shoulders the story of a lone warrior who is pitted against the flawed, unjust world often represented by an antihero character. These heroes are typically larger-than-life, solitary, and symbolically represent justice or resistance to injustice. The hero's introduction through the silhouette resonates with the collective imagination of the masses, who can relate to their own inner struggles, disappointments, losses, dejection, and hope for justice.

Frame 2: 00:20 - 0:40 | Rising Action - Clue Based Story Introduction

Props: The frame is filled with weapons of range, like guns, chains, and other armaments placed strategically. It serves as a crucial clue in establishing the intention, the power of the character, the danger it faces, and the preparation it has done to handle the situation. The character has decided the fate of himself and of those he deliberates to receive. The intentional and organized arrangement of the weapons resonates with the mass cinema motif. According to Pugalendhi (2025), the warrior who is solitary and with weapons is seen as a cinematic blend of power, danger, vulnerability, and fate. This technique is often used in Tamil cinema to draw the emotions and loyalty of the viewers.

Cinematography: A low-angle shot is used to introduce the main character in Vikram's title teaser video, which is a striking cinematic technique to show dominance. This is often chosen to well-establish the dominating figure of the protagonist, who has the power, control, and moral ascendancy (Sarría, 2015). This technique in Vikram portrays the protagonist as a formidable, dominant figure within the moral landscape of the story. This is one of the cinematic signatures of Lokesh Kanagaraj, a style that he frequently used to depict a strong character with dramatic camera movements and framing strategies to aid character transformation and story progression. It is a cue to the audience that the protagonist is not a vulnerable or passive character and is ready to confront the injustice in front of him directly. This is also demonstrated through the array of weapons displayed alongside him, ranging from swords to guns, which reinforces the notion of preparedness and eventful force (Pugalendhi, 2025).

Cultural Context: The low-angle shots, close-ups of weapons, and shadow-heavy lighting used in the title teaser videos of Vikram construct the notion that the protagonist is ready for a showdown through force. The posture, gaze, and mise-en-scène of the protagonist in Vikram symbolize a burdened man and a lonely figure awaiting to deliver justice to the unjust world. This is a visual signifier of power and justice.

The director, Lokesh Kanagaraj, has used the traditional archetype where justice is considered as a personal mission and is restored through the means of violence to attain balance (Pandian, 2015). Extending on this ground, the weapons are shown as an extension of moral duty through the movement of the camera, which lingers on traditional and modern weapons to symbolize the action for a righteous cause. Kanagaraj's films deal with violence as a measure to uphold justice. The film, Vikram, is no exception, as its teaser has

elements such as color choice, sound, and design in every frame contributing to an impending and inevitable conflict that shall be driven by the hero.

Placement: Lokesh Kanagaraj has his signature in each of his creations. Here, the framing is a consistent and deliberate cinematic choice that positions the protagonist in the center of the frame. This makes him the moral compass with which everything else will be measured, and it determines the accepted form of justice, revenge, and resolution. The central placement is a classical cinematic composition that is used to show the transformation of the central character, which he or she eventually undergoes during a rising action. It also embodies the vigilant justice motif, which is commonly used in South Indian cinema to showcase the dominant figure that stands as a solitary protagonist who has every intention of standing against the chaos, corruption, or moral downfall.

Frame 3: 00:40 - 1:20 | Suspense and Rising Stakes

Props: The props used in a frame reveal serve a dramatic and cultural function within the narrative context. They are enriched with profound semiotic significance.

- **Gold Chains:** Symbolizing power, prestige, and control, this element, heavily intertwined, resonates with the notion of entrapment, which is literal and metaphorical. This gives a glimpse into the protagonist's world, which is assumed to be forged by a world of crime, revenge, or justice (Biswal et al., 2020).

- **Locks:** The classical cinematic representation of a solitary hero battling a flawed moral order is a represented motif that is frequently illustrated in South Indian films. As applied, the frames in *Vikram* show the struggling protagonist standing against the oppressive forces, symbolically presented alongside chains and locks, showcasing his fate locked in place.

- **Weapons:** These are the visual representations of the manifested mindset of the protagonist, who has decided to destroy and resolve whatever stands in their way. The choice of weapons, whether guns or knives, resonates with iconography that symbolizes the power of resistance, justice, or retribution.

- **Food:** Director Lokesh Kanagaraj has a very unique way of storytelling, using food as a metaphor to exemplify the inner conflict and external cover used by his protagonists. The concept of duality is expressed with precision. Detailed soundscapes like stirring, chopping, and pouring intensify the viewer's engagement with the scene and foreshadow tension. Both the characters, Leo and Vikram, do not prepare food to nourish; rather, it is a concealed layer of their identity. While Vikram's food scene is rooted deeply in Tamil culture, Leo's preparation resembles a modern and global lifestyle context. Director Lokesh has again used the mundane, everyday activity like cooking to express the deeper character of his main characters.

Cinematography: This close-up shot shows the face of a man who has the expression of a battling hero. It is combined with dramatic light and added depth to his expression that shows internal conflict. There is total control over the situation, and chaos has not set in. Lights, bold and intentional, lit the face of the protagonist from one side only, which created a contrast of light and shadow, as used in the Rembrandt lighting technique. Ambiguity is maintained, suggesting a divided conscience and the weight of a violent path chosen.

Semantic: The hero must fight his own inner turmoil and primary conflicts even before he starts his war with external enemies. The visible enemies, such as gangsters, corrupt systems, and other elements, are easier to handle than those that are within his own self—his own conscience, doubts, and temptations. The opening shot is in a quiet, dimly lit environment. The protagonist wears a haunted look on his face. There is minimal sound to sustain the environment. The *mise-en-scène* and the conscience are contradictory, showcasing a conflicted conscience. This means that what he is about to do will cost him terribly in his moral sense.

Cultural Context: South Indian movies often show heroes who struggle with flaws and yet are righteous. His portrayal is not glorified for attaining perfection but for the path taken to attain it in a corrupt world. Here Lokesh Kanagaraj removes the traditional formats of monologues rendered by the protagonist about good and righteousness and replaces them with acts of concealed sacrifice. Hero is often framed in tight, intimate shots, which clearly show the inner conflict in him. The director has also chosen a color palette to emphasize loneliness, grit, and retribution rather than glory or fame, along with sound that contributes to amplifying the mood and the situation.

Sound: Crafted with choices of instruments, the soundtrack of Vikram is a symphony playing a central role in advancing narrative cues, even before the characters engage in conversations. The rising orchestra score, interspersed with metallic clinks, ambient rumble, and heartbeat-like percussion, builds an ambience of suspense and yet clearly conveys the notion that tension is being built up slowly and a sense of growing threat and uncertainty is evident.

Frame 4: 01:20 - 2:00 | Climax - Hero Prevails

Cinematography: The protagonist rises in dim lights and is surrounded by people with food served. The character moves through the frame with deliberate calmness. The camera slowly tilts upward, which covers him in the frame entirely with a complete upright, which is not merely stylistic but a visual metaphor. His composure is calm, but there is chaos around him, which is represented by the scattered metal, low-lit room, and overlapping sound. The teaser begins with a cluttered foreground, dark tones, and partial occlusion but transitions to an upright posture and full and frontal lighting on the face, which is a visual arc of the classical “return of the hero” trope.

Here Lokesh Kanagaraj adds his signature by maintaining the aesthetic dark and subdued, representing power without darkness. The protagonist is gradually isolated from the chaotic background with the help of lighting, which creates a chiaroscuro effect. Now the protagonist is the only character that is lit in the frame. This represents the idea that the protagonist has crossed the mental threshold and has his decisions with clarity in his mind. The environment is in disarray; close-quarters lighting; the hero is framed through vertical movement (which often arises from a seated position or from a crouched position); and a controlled and delayed reveal of the face are some of the signatures found in these frames.

Semantic: In Vikram, the director has visually enriched the frames with motifs that are nourished with his signature. The protagonist rises from darkness, symbolizing a ritual of renewal that has a purpose. The reassembling of weapons implies a ceremonial yet deliberate and inevitable return. His mind is clear and concise, which is symbolically spun by asking the character to emerge from the shadows. The systematic and calculative arrangements of weapons show the mind in a calm and not erratic state, awaiting to give a measured form of retribution. The protagonist also dons a calm expression, signifying the suggestion that he is determined and certain.

Cultural Context: Tamil cinema has been laden with the stories of just heroes who have evolved over the period of time. Lokesh retains this blueprint but has it filtered through realism, restraint, and psychological complexity. The protagonist in Vikram is not on a personal vendetta but rather returning to correct failures in the system that have deep personal and public consequences. He does not indulge in heroic dialogues but rather does calculated moves and plannings. There is pure solemnity in his action, which shows an evolution in the character of Tamil heroes, who now believe in the triumph of good over evil through stylized violence justified as a form of dharma against adharmam.

His calm demeanour while cleaning his weapons shows his solemn dedication and purification before action. The character is not provoked but walks slowly into the frame, showing complete control and preparation.

Framing: The entire frame is dominated by the protagonist. Lokesh uses central framing, close-ups, symmetrical composition, and tight aspect ratios to make the protagonist visually and symbolically inescapable. It is around this character that the axis of the story will revolve. No other character, other than the protagonist, competes to share space in the frame. The hero is in focus, and the background is dimly lit and out of focus, which eliminates the distractions, creating a psychological tunnel that invites the viewer to share the situation of the protagonist, his focus, burden, and mental agony. There are no wide, ensemble shots to intentionally compress the space around the protagonist. The camera moves from eye-level to a slightly low angle when the protagonist dons his vest, which showcases him as a towering figure standing tall above everybody. The slow zoom-in creates the effect of ascension, which symbolises the visual resurrection.

Lighting: The lighting is an integral part of the mood-setting tool, which prepares the mind of the audience, setting the emotional tone while encoding symbolic meaning. This can often be seen when a mass hero is introduced on the screen or during a moral turning point illuminating the character's moral arc (Brown, 2022).

The overall lighting features a gold tint when the protagonist is made fully visible to the audience. Here he walks up to the audience and opens a weapons compartment, standing up. Now, gold is often symbolically associated with purity, power, and renewal. Here the protagonist is not becoming a hero but reclaiming power.

In multiple frames, the protagonist has a soft glow over his head, creating an aura. The gold backlight makes the background slightly overexposed while keeping the face of the protagonist clear but with a controlled shadow. Mythically approaching the frame, the protagonist is the light bearer in the overwhelming darkness.

Lokesh Kanagaraj often uses the soft golden and orange lighting during key moments to show character transformation, often paired with slow camera movement, minimal dialogues, and heightened sound design. His use of light is not for illuminated decoration but rather a declaration of ethical clarity and readiness to act.

Frame 5: 2:00 - 2:22 | Title Display – Final Impact

Cinematography: The title of the movie “Vikram” is designed in textured steel, bold, jagged, and rusted. There are sparks flying across the screen as the title emerges, and the background is a dim, smoky warehouse. Decoding the metaphor, “steel” refers to strength and durability, reminiscing the legacy of Vikram, a film shot in 1986. The sparks refer to the reawakening of justice. It can be interpreted as a visible cue to witness calculated justice and not mindless, chaotic, reckless revenge.

Semantic: The teaser has dim lighting, sounds of clinking chains, gun loading, and distant echoes while the camera lingers on symbols of violence like weapons, prison-like gates, and silent corridors. All these elements visually symbolize the chaos that has prevailed over the world and the awaiting of the return of order.

The protagonist does not use dialogues to deliver on his introduction; rather, he is found in action—preparing weapons and donning gear to be ready for an oncoming onslaught. It is symbolically shown that the protagonist is prepared and not emotional. His mind is balanced.

Cultural Context: The title acts as a bridge between two generations, the older generation from 1986 that witnessed the first release of Vikram and the curious current generation that has the opportunity to witness an installment that has never been anticipated. Thus, it has become a cultural bridge and a prodigy of storytelling styles.

The title teaser moment was broadcast across various social media platforms, showing different fan-made reaction videos, social media countdowns, and theatre celebrations. The film has now become more than a story; rather, it is a ceremonial declaration.

Sound: Mechanical and industrial noises, low-frequency hums, and silence, and the release of tension with a massive orchestral crescendo at the title drop showcase the story arc from chaos and tension to resolution and affirmation.

Teaser Timecode	Sound Element	Narrative Effect
0:00–0:45	Industrial hum, metallic rattles, chain noise	Establishes mystery, surveillance, suppressed chaos
0:46–1:20	Footsteps, silence, single-tone drone	Builds anticipation, emotional isolation
1:21–2:18	Bass swells; slow orchestration begins	Indicates presence of a hero figure
2:19–2:22	Full orchestral hit + spark SFX	Title “VIKRAM” revealed—justice reaffirmed

LEO (2023)
(Refer: Appendix- Table 01)

Director Lokesh Kanagaraj has used similar shots and visual settings across the worlds in his universe. There are quite a few unique things that are imposed on them as well, which shall now be discussed below.

Frame 1: 00:00 - 0:45 | **Introduction-** Establishing Mood and Hero

Visual: The scene opens at Himalayan Café. The time is at dawn, with a golden hour lighting and muted color palette.

Sound: Environmental sounds are used—clinking cups, steam hissing. Footsteps are muted. They are domestic, soft, and unthreatening, which lures the audience into a cinematic bait and switch. The silent, restrained ambience is often used to create a narrative suspense and invites the audience to anticipate an unseen conflict.

Motifs: The “Domestic Calm” motif is embodied here to showcase the everyday, non-threatening, and emotionally natural environment, creating a facade of normalcy. The camera also uses a wide shot and slow push-ins to create a sense of openness, control, and predictability. This is a cue that the character in the frame has a duality, which is one of the signatures of Lokesh Kanagaraj. There is unresolved anger and rage underneath that calmness.

Frame 2: 00:46 - 01:35 | **Rising Action** - Tension on the surface

Visual: The protagonist is shown stirring a cup of hot chocolate, a mundane action, which also symbolizes his expertise in preparing his weapons, which was a switchblade. He performs a repetitive action with care, suggesting that the protagonist follows a routine often performed and is well aware. This showcases that the individual has exhibited a calm surface, but underneath he is suppressing something sinister.

Lighting: The signature of Lokesh Kanagaraj is seen here through the use of chiaroscuro lighting that gradually enters the frame, showcasing soft light mixed with deep shadows to elaborate on the features of the character. One side of the face is lit while the other is dark, and the lighting source, which remains to be at an angle, casts contours across his features. Unlike Vikram, where this was used to showcase secrecy and covert action, here the director uses this method to suggest identity suppression and internal war.

Sound: The frame introduces a new sound element through a low-frequency drone, guiding the audience to a gradual shift in the auditory environment. Hence, there is built tension, a shift in the emotional tone, and a manipulation of the subconscious mind of the audience. The sound becomes increasingly dominant the more the camera remains focused on the protagonist's facial expressions and hand gestures. Lokesh Kanagaraj has opted to narrate his story's turning point through non-verbal, non-musical sound design that slow-burns tension using minimalistic auditory cues, giving an underbelly of tension. This is not seen but felt.

Symbolism: The protagonist is shown as a very precise, calculative individual who must work with time and measurement. His routines are meditative and are carried out carefully and calmly. This is his mask that is associated with domestic peace. He is preparing everything in silence. His actions are mechanical, and he retreats into repetition to manage emotional volatility. This also echoes a larger Tamil cinematic motif where ritualistic acts like cooking, shaving, or preparing often serve as a metaphor for self-control before violence. Lokesh Kanagaraj has used space, action, and mise-en-scène to construct layered identities.

Frame 3: 01:34 - 02:15 | Suspense - The moment of rupture

Lighting: The director has used this element to symbolize the psychological shift of the main character to re-emerge the alter character, which was the suppressed identity. The soft, warm café light is suddenly disrupted by the change of tone, colder, symbolizing an emotional shift. From golden, amber tones, the frame shifts to blue-gray metallic undertones. The light also changes from diffused, soft shadows to harsh and directional shadows. There is a psychological shift, from emotional familiarity to emotional disruption, both representing one face of the dual nature of the protagonist.

Camera: There is a shift in the emotional state of the protagonist, from peace to suspense. The director has utilised the use of rapid cuts, which typically last under a second, which mimics a spike in adrenaline, helping the audience to witness the change in the protagonist. Those are often a resemblance of a trauma call or a flash memory visual, which is a signature of the director in evoking suppressed violence or identity conflict. Frame often shows the eyes of the protagonist, which helps the audience to read the state of the character, which can be anxiety, awareness, or calculation. The "eye" also can be interpreted as the return of the consciousness of the alter character, and that becomes a cue for transformation.

Sound: Key timeframes indicate the change of sounds used to symbolically represent the transition in the scenes.

00:00–00:50 → Ambient sounds: water boiling, cup clinking, quiet café noises.

00:50–01:20 → Low drones, subtle heartbeat rhythms, slightly rising tempo.

01:21–01:45 → Percussive beats rise sharply, accentuated by visual shifts (cup smashing).

01:46–End → Full musical swelling with synthetic drums, rising tension, and title impact.

The presence of drone sounds often creates unrest, like something dark is approaching. Here, the increase in volume symbolically suggests that the protagonist, who is hiding behind a mask or an alter ego, is about to break open.

The percussive sounds, like metallic clangs or muted drum hits, often mimic fight-or-flight psychological reactions to alert the audience. The low thumping beat also resembles a heartbeat, which begins slowly and accelerates as the frame shifts from calm to intense. The audience is not there to just observe the protagonist but to feel what he feels.

Symbolism: The director uses flames, metal, and flying sparks to symbolically and visually show the transformation in the protagonist. The fire symbolizes the purification archetype, where fire cleanses and forges a new self. The internal transformation of the protagonist is shown in comparison to the molten metal, which is reshaped under pressure. And the sparks represent the rising aggression and anticipation, which echoes the brewing of violence within the main character.

The protagonist is shown with blood and holding a hammer or club, representing sacrifice, violence, or divine judgment. The protagonist is no longer nurturing but has shifted to destruction. This also indicates the psychological shift of the protagonist, who dons duality. His eyes are often shown without blinking, suggesting that he is now confrontational. He is holding a hammer, an archetypal weapon that represents justice, finality, and force. It is a tool that can be used to build and also to destroy and punish.

Frame 4: 02:16 - 02:30 | **Climax** - Declaration of Identity

Visual: Here the director is inviting the audience into the narrative space by framing the protagonist's stare at the camera directly. In Tamil cinema, the direct gaze is often used in climactic, hero-defining moments. The gaze is aggressive, challenging, and dominant. It also announces the arrival of the alter ego into the space, which shall henceforth be the judgmental hand against the evil forces. The heartbeat rhythm peaks here which amplifies the gravity of the gaze.

Lighting: The protagonist's face is lit in chiaroscuro style to reveal the duality of the character. The bright side of the face represents the current personality, while the shadow side of the face represents the repressed identity. There is also a sharp contrast that represents the internal division and moral conflict. The director has opted to use brightness and darkness on the same face rather than warm and cold to show competing selves in one body. This dramatic visual representation is in line with the existing Tamil films, which are often used to showcase hero transformation.

Sound: There is a rising percussive beat that is synchronized with fast-paced visual flashes like fire sparks, hammer striking, and blood splattering, which creates a sense of imminent rupture and triggers the adrenaline response in the viewer. A silence is inserted, an audio vacuum where the music is absent momentarily. This space is filled with the protagonist's dialogue, "Bloody Sweet," which is uttered in a calm demeanor. This dialogue is ensured to reach the audience and thus the vacuum.

Symbolic Act: Here the protagonist is all set to fully inhabit his dual identity, which is sweet and yet violent.

Frame 5: 02:31 - 02:48 | **Title Display and Final Impact** - Declaration of Identity

Visual: The name of the movie appears in a bold metal texture with a lion's silhouette forming in fragmented symbols. The protagonist is forging, which is a repeated motif in the trailer. This suggests that the hero who lives an alter ego life is reforged again through violence, as his identity is not born but rather crafted and hardened. The bold typeface is a visual representation that symbolically means that the protagonist is no longer

in hiding. The lion's fragmented silhouette is printed behind the text. The lion is traditionally associated with courage, kingship, and righteous violence.

Sound: The director has chosen to lead the audience through a phase of resonance with the main character. The bass is used continuously with varying frequencies to increase the visual sake rise. It also represents the inner turmoil of the main character, who is slowly awakening suppressed violence inside him. The metallic sounds are all associated with the inevitable violence. The hammer sound, which can often be heard in Tamil cinema, is often used to represent the brewing and oncoming justice.

Narrative closure: The protagonist is fully revealed to the audience, who establishes the moral posture. By now the audience is well aware of the persona of the protagonist and also about his attitude and trajectory.

There are similarities quite at large across the worlds in the universe of Lokesh Kanagaraj. The similarities are first discussed, and the uniqueness of the world of Leo shall further be discussed below. The director has shown his protagonist to be a mass hero who happens to be re-emerging to the scene after having left their dark, dreary past behind. The event that leads to their re-arising is dramatically displayed visually.

1. Cinematography: Low-angle shots & close-ups: The hero is visually empowered with the use of low-angle shots and emphasizes dominance with close-ups. The protagonists are shown in close-up, focusing on their eyes, expression, and body language. The main character is often center-framed to give the audience the impression that they are the moral axis of their respective narratives.

2. Semantic Layering: The hero is low-lying, symbolizing his past decision to hide away from their dreaded past. But fate has found its way to bring them to the stage where they rightfully belong, like forcing them to man the guard and reminding them of the purpose of their existence.

The protagonist shares a mundane surrounding before rising to the action and implying their capacity to bring the world to order through justice or violence. They are shown prepared and ready to systematically and calculatively deal with the expected evil forces.

3. Cultural Context: The protagonists are shown in solitary, symbolizing withdrawal from the world that they were active in earlier. Now they are still the moral warriors who had earlier stood up against the evil that disrupted the moral order in the world. The same systemic corruption is setting in again, and there is a call for action that can be completed only through their participation and guidance. This is often the code used in Tamil films where the hero is a solitary moral warrior who sacrifices his life and comfort, leaving behind his territorial advantages. They are the vigilantes who are in force and action to restore justice, which portrays them as mass heroes.

4. Lighting: The director has utilized the ability of chiaroscuro, an intense half-shadow and half-light, which showcases ambiguity and the state of internal tension that prevails within the main character. The dark palette symbolizes the world outside the world, which means a system that functions outside the law. The half-lit shots show the inner turmoil of the character who is caught between choices and in the process of negotiation and consistent conversation to strike a common ground. This is not hiding, but rather an understanding that there is a justice in progressive formation.

The half-lit faces of the protagonist also suggest the duality hiding their intentions and their hidden past. Their actions reveal who they were and what they intend to do. The controlled illumination on the protagonist also serves as a means for isolating the main character on the screen to help the audience understand the moral axis. Shadows are often lurking at the corners.

The chiaroscuro effect is often used to showcase the transformation of the protagonist by converting the light from warm tones to harsh lighting. This reveals the layers of inner conflict within the protagonist. The similar lighting principles used across the world in the Lokesh's universe create a language that is visually coherent that allows the viewer to navigate through the inner turmoil and conflict that is grinding within the realms of the main character.

COOLIE (2024)

(Refer: Appendix- Table 01)

Frame 1: 00:00 - 0:40 | Introduction - Establishing Mood and Hero

The scene starts in an industrial warehouse. It is presented in a black-and-white aesthetic, monochromatic. The gold objects alone are presented in full color.

Visual: The entire frame is in monochromatic tone while the objects in gold alone are in color, symbolizing the presence of corruption around the world with the presence of enormous wealth. Gold is power and authority. Despite the huge amount of wealth in the form of gold, the warehouse feels empty and unfulfilled, as if it has lost all its purpose.

Lighting: The director has chosen high-contrast and low-key lighting to establish the atmosphere that is morally ambiguous. With dense shadows, the source of light seems diegetic and falls sharply on specific areas to create a hard-edged pool of illumination.

Sound: Sound is minimal in the initial frames, with just ambient noise that sets the industrial tone and creates a psychological tension that prepares the audience for a sudden rupture. Audible spatial emptiness is employed to create an enhanced sense of anticipation.

Symbolic act: The object that once held significance for a reason is now being utilized for a different purpose. Gold, which was associated with wealth, is now turned into a weapon of social change. Lokesh Kanagaraj's signature is visible here, whereby he uses gold that is lying around without the presence of its owners, which is handled by the protagonist to hint at a class revolution theme as suggested by the name of the movie.

Frame 2: 00:41 - 01:30 | Rising Action - Gold Bleeds Power

Visual: The camera moves slowly, tracing from the feet to the torso before framing the face. This is a stepwise reveal typically used to build anticipation for a mass hero entry. Like the other franchise, Lokesh Kanagaraj has used an object, an armband, to symbolically represent the character. There are other signatures of Lokesh as well, such as delayed hero reveal and subdued lighting along with symbolically charged objects, thereby embedding the hero in ordinary objects.

Lighting: The hero is brightly lit while the background is muted or dark to visually isolate the protagonist from his environment. This conveys that the protagonist is larger than the space and commands power. Unlike other Tamil films where the hero is brightly lit and illuminated with soft, golden light, here we have gritty and harsh lighting to make the protagonist feel accessible. The director has made the main character approachable rather than a mass hero and divine.

Sound: We hear the metallic clang of footsteps along with a soft, tribal-like drum rhythm while the environment is still sparse and sonically restrained. This suggests that the protagonist is isolated from the sound field, while his footsteps are the only active sound on the screen, which draws the attention of the

audience. Rhythm intensifies as the trailer progresses, like the sound of a heartbeat, symbolizing the presence of life in a lifeless environment.

Symbolic act: The “Coolie” armband and gold-laden wrist signify the defiance of the working-class protagonist to subdue his self and become a badge of identity and rebellion.

Frame 3: 01:31 - 02:20 | Suspense and Rising From the Shadows

Visual: The protagonist stands against smugglers, prepared to deal violence with violence. Stripped of its conventional meaning, that god means wealth, it is now shown as a weapon of choice, which becomes a survival tool rather than a status symbol. This could also mean a class inversion where the oppressed uses the power of the oppressor to fight back.

Lighting: As the trailer reaches this part, the ambient lighting drops further, intensifying the shadows that engulf the frame. This creates a psychological sense of suffocation as the space around the protagonist shrinks even further. The lighting now focuses narrowly on the wrist of the protagonist, who is wielding a weapon, which signifies that the anticipation is over while he is all set for violence.

Sound: The bass pulses that are now introduced into the frame create low-frequency thuds that mimic a heartbeat. These beats are not musical but rather psychological, which are felt in the chest. The bass pulse is set to simulate the rising blood pressure and adrenaline, demanding a physical reaction from the audience while used as an emotional accelerant.

Symbolic act: Gold is not symbolized as wealth but rather as power. The protagonist yanks the gold chain from the smuggler and weaponizes it against the beholder himself, symbolizing that the protagonist, who is just a lower-class daily wager, is turning against the oppressors using their own power and methods.

Frame 4: 02:20 - 2:33 | **Climax** - Game Changer Strikes Back

Visual: The frame is filled with slow-motion action where the protagonist triumphs over the smugglers. It is now he delivers the dialogue, “Our fathers and grandfathers came and are gone; what is right or what is wrong? Always play. “Oh, you sinner,” they will say, but don’t get it wrong. Whichever path you may choose, do not forsake pleasure. If there is enough food, liquor, and women, then a place in heaven is assured.” The dialogue is in accordance with the visual where the material gold has lost its value. The dialogue suggests sensory indulgence, which is the primary aspiration of the labor class.

Lighting: Harsh industrial lighting to create sharp-edged shadows is implemented with intentional reduction of fill light around the protagonist and the smugglers. The shadow of the protagonist lengthens and thickens to symbolize the growing dominance and imminent transformation, while a deep shadow is deployed to act as a narrative squeeze to show that the character is about to unleash his latent power.

Sound: Deep drum bass and tribal beats slowly intensify, and the protagonist’s movement also synchronizes with the beat. Still, the mimic of a heartbeat continues progressing the emotional condition of the audience, guiding them towards the anticipated catharsis. The end has a whistle blown by the protagonist, which invokes the past, symbolizing nostalgia and bridging the present to the protagonist's past.

Symbolic act: While the protagonist of Tamil cinema wields grand weapons against the villains, Lokesh Kanagaraj breaks this stereotypicality by putting everyday objects into the hands of the hero. This, as a signature, turns simple objects into powerful tools or weapons.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the data that interpret the works of director Lokesh Kanagaraj, who has systematically broken the stereotypical image of heroes in the Tamil movie world, thereby creating his own universe. The heroes are often grand and violent and use weapons to symbolize power and conquest. His weapon of choice is everyday objects, which creates a more intimate and realistic connection with the protagonist.

Cultural Element	Traditional Mass Hero	Lokesh Kanagaraj's Hero
Weapons	Guns, sickles, swords	Chains, chocolate cups, gas igniters
Sound cues	Orchestral hero themes	Percussive, heartbeat-like sound
Hero entry lighting	Bright, celebratory	Dim, claustrophobic
Symbols of power	Cars, palaces, status	Everyday objects
Representation of class	Usually upward mobility	Grounded in labor-class identity

Element	Vikram	Leo	Coolie
Visual Style	Dark, industrial setting with rapid cuts, light rays, and weapon hiding.	Misty, snow-covered terrain; deliberate, slow-paced frames; , sword making, domestic spaces turning violent.	Industrial warehouse, gold crates, compressed visual space, suffocating shadow play.
Lighting	Low-key, shadows dominate; unpredictable lighting signifies danger and concealment.	Cold, blue-tinted lighting; strong contrast; spotlighted domestic items like chocolate and a rolling pin.	Deep shadows; narrowing light focus on the protagonist; controlled spotlight on chain and gold.
Sound Design	Natural cooking sounds, ammo loading, percussive beats, low-frequency rumbles, chaotic sound layering, "ghost" sound cues, and tactical whispers.	Calm, orchestral layering with rising tension; heavy use of silence, dramatic percussion, and a sharp "bloody sweet" whistle.	Rhythmic percussion swelling, subdued orchestral tension, and a single hero whistle referencing Rajini-era nostalgia.
Wealth, symbolic objects	Masks and tactical gear—symbols of secrecy and protection.	chocolate cup, fire—domesticity turned into violence; duality of personality.	Gold chain—a symbol of wealth, labor, and power—turns into a weapon representing the coolie's rebellion.
Thematic Coreza	Hidden identity, underground justice, personal war against systemic corruption.	Duality of man, hidden violence, identity suppression, righteous rage masked by calm.	Class struggle, weaponizing wealth, and generational shift from complacency to rebellion.
Cultural Layer	Audio-visual decoding aligned, symbolizing the protagonist.	Familial pressure, cultural silence around violence, and domestic symbols carrying hidden aggression.	Rajini's mass hero legacy, labor class symbols, and the gold chain's cultural recontextualization.

Camera Movement	Handheld zooms from cooking to gun, sudden close-ups	Slow zooms and still frames interrupted by sudden bursts of movement.	Smooth tracking; calculated build-up shots focusing on the chain and the crates; compression to induce claustrophobia.
Narrative Cues	Dinner party with hidden arsenal, including the “Ghost Vikram” title	Establishes a man with a dark secret; hints at the LCU through the fire metaphor and Leo's transformation from domestic to violent.	Revisits labour-class struggle; gold smuggling as a backdrop; a rebellion theme using Rajini's cultural history; the LCU link remains to be revealed.
Climactic Impact	Revealing guns from under the table; Audio cues and punches with title	Fire eruption; Leo's transformation solidifies with "bloody sweet" catchphrase; title explodes into frame.	Chain weaponisation; gold crates bursting open; percussion-driven climax with title teaser —minimal grandeur but high cultural resonance.
Cinematic Signature	Layered audiovisual codes, embedded clues to a larger cinematic universe, and antihero glamour.	Sound-controlled suspense, duality visuals, everyday object transformation, and slow-burning intensity.	Cultural object as weapon; grounded rebellion; suffocating visual space; reimagining mass hero entry through the lens of social struggle.

The director Lokesh Kangaraj has encapsulated the notion that outside appearances are deceiving and what lies beneath the surface has to be faced and answered before we can move any further because it always comes back. His choice of heroes has chosen exile and remained out of the real world due to their own conviction, and now they are left with no choice but to re-emerge to clear the problems in the society. This style and approach appeal to the younger and more socially aware audience who are younger and seek authenticity rather than grandeur.

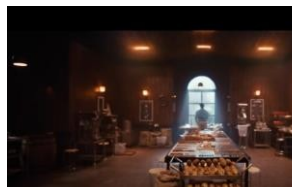
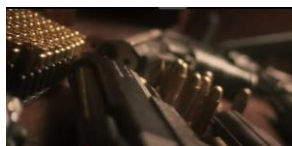
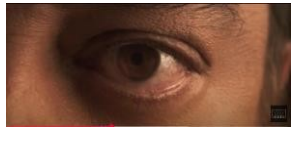
6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study explored the title teaser videos of Vikram, Leo, and Coolie through a semiotic lens, highlighting how these short promotional clips transcend their marketing role to become narrative and aesthetic extensions of the film. The analysis revealed that Lokesh Kanagaraj strategically uses visual motifs, typography, animation, colour schemes, soundscapes, and symbolic imagery to construct a specific mood and genre expectation, while subtly introducing themes and character arcs. These title teasers serve as powerful paratextual devices that engage the audience emotionally and intellectually even before the story begins. Furthermore, they reflect the director's evolving cinematic identity and the broader trend in Tamil cinema where pre-release materials are given as much artistic weight as the films themselves. Further research scholars could extend this form of analysis to title teasers in other regional film industries (like Telugu, Malayalam, or Kannada cinema) to understand how cultural contexts shape paratextual strategies. Future studies can incorporate audience reception analysis to assess how these teasers influence viewer expectations and emotional engagement before a film's release. With Lokesh Kanagaraj now introducing character reveal videos as part of his cinematic marketing strategy, future research can explore these clips as a new form of paratextual communication. These short videos do more than introduce characters — they deepen the narrative lore, hint at character arcs, and connect multiple films within the shared universe. Analyzing these videos

through semiotics and narrative theory can reveal how filmmakers use them to maintain continuity, build fan engagement, and expand cinematic universes even outside the main film text.

Appendix

Table-1

	VIKRAM	LEO	COOLIE
Frame 1			
Frame 2			
Frame 3			
Frame 4			
Frame 5			

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