

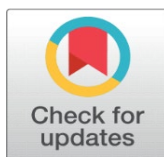
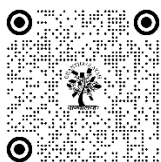


# WHAT DOES THE DMK'S 2021 ELECTION CAMPAIGN SONG FOCUS ON? : A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

Methods to convince voters are continuously evolving since the inception of elections. Contesting political parties have used every possible media from posters to short videos to approach and impress voters. With creativity paving ways to innovative campaign strategy and methods, studies focusing on them are gaining momentum. Campaign songs play an engaging role in this campaign communication strategy in the state of Tamil Nadu. Initially, campaign songs were written to create awareness of parties' name, symbol, and ideology among the illiterate population. With time, the focus of the songs has shifted to party leaders. The 2021 Tamil Nadu election witnessed the release of campaign songs by state and national political parties. Thanks to social media, these songs had massive reach on social networking sites among people of all age groups. In this context, this paper aims to analyze the official campaign song released by the state political party DMK for the 2021 Tamil Nadu election based on the multimodal discourse analysis informed by Visual grammar.

**Keywords:** Campaign Song, Multimodal Analysis, Discourse, Election, Propaganda

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The action of voting retains the essence of democracy in the current political milieu. India is a democratic nation which allows people to elect their representatives once every five years. Political parties at national, state, and local (regional) levels participate in this election either directly or implicitly. There is always a tough competition for any position, be it from an independent candidate or from an alliance. Caste, economy, and geography play a vital role in the elections. Because of the toughness in the process, every election brings in a unique approach to attract and impress voters. Methods to convince voters are continuously evolving

since the inception of elections. Contesting political parties have used all possible media from posters to recent Instagram reels to connect and engage with voters. Modernisation and globalisation have also impacted the campaign methods and the introduction of new media technologies have started replacing the traditional methods on a world level. Yet, the impact and influence of political meetings and personal contacts remains the same in Tamil Nadu.

With creativity paving ways to innovative campaign strategy, studies focusing on them are gaining momentum. Though campaign songs are becoming common now, in Tamil Nadu's political sphere, the focus and the medium used by these songs are seeing a major shift in the last 15 years. Research on the songs which are specifically created for election purposes and with the involvement of political consultants were hardly done. In the 2021 election, only DMK released a full-length video song officially for campaign purpose, whereas AIADMK released video snippets with tagline. Hence the researcher chose DMK's official campaign song which gained many views in YouTube. In this study, the researcher uses Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar analysis approach to establish the relationship of the symbols used in the song and to find out the focus of the song and how it benefits the campaign purpose.

## 2. TAMIL NADU'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

**1) Oral Medium:** Since the time of the Justice party, public speaking and public meetings were considered as effective campaign methods. Initially these methods were not used for electoral purposes rather to create reform and build a sense of belonging towards the people. Social justice, self-respect and non-brahmanical ideology were taken to the public through these meetings. This has created a long-lasting impact among the people who were majorly uneducated. Oratory skill existed among almost all the major political leaders of Tamil Nadu.

For Example, DMK leader Annadurai (Anna)'s speech at Robinson park during the inauguration of DMK party, Anna's parliament speeches, Anna's speech on naming Madras presidency as Tamil Nadu had found their place aptly in history. Kumari Anandhan, Tha. Pandian, Anbazhagan, Nedunchezian, T. P. Sittrasu, M.G.Ramachandran, Kalimuthu, Valamburi John, Veeramani, Arulmozhi, Periyar Selvan, Mathukoor Ramalingam, Nandhalala, Tamizh Selvan, Ela. Ganesan were some of the great orators in Tamil Nadu political sphere.

**2) Print:** Tamil Nadu political party leaders also published newspapers and magazines (eg. Murasoli by M. Karunanidhi, K.A Krishnasamy's Thennagam, Periyar's Viduthalai and Kudiyarasu, Aringa Anna's Dravida Nadu etc.) to spread their thoughts and ideology to the newly educated youth population in Tamil Nadu. These print media function as mouthpieces for the political parties even today.

**3) Visual Media:** Cinema Tamil Nadu political parties' use of cinema and drama as communication tools are highly recognised and studied. Screenplay, dialogues, and songs written by Annadurai, Karunanidhi, Murali Maran, M G Ramachandran, M R Radha and Kannadasan made an inevitable mark on people's minds. Eg. Parasakthi, Ulagam Sutrum valiban, Ninanthathai mudipavan, Netru Indru Nalai, Engal veettu pillai. Adimai Pen, Nadodi mannan remain as masterpieces in Tamil political cinema.

- 4) **Drama:** Vandikara Magan, Oruiravu, MR Radha's Rethakaneer, Uthayasuriyan were the major dramas written and performed by the party members to spread awareness on the party ideology.
- 5) **Posters:** Wall posters, cutouts, banners, flyers, image cutouts, flags poles are part of the poster culture prevailing in Tamil Nadu politics. Started with wall painting and as technology grew, litho printing in Chennai and Sivakasi paved the way to wall posters. In later times, Flex and cutouts started dominating the political sphere. This remains as a major communication tool till now. These posters were designed with the face of the leader with some context, details about the events, faces of the local incharge, and words that praises the leader and the party. Number of posters and number of flags resonates the power of the party in local as well as the centre level. [Gerritsen \(2014\)](#)
- 6) **Electronic media:** In the 1960's, All India Radio gave spots for political leaders to talk to people during elections. The leader or any other senior member or good orator of the party would give a talk about the party and their manifesto for that election. Eventually the importance of these talks declined, and campaign songs are broadcasted continuously as advertisements for the parties.
- 7) **New Media:** Now with the involvement of major political advertising and strategist organisations, well-structured and scheduled campaigns are conducted. Since 2014, Tamil Nadu political campaigns have reached the new media platform and use Facebook, Instagram, Website, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn with well curated content in form of ads, blogs, songs, and videos. After 2016, every party and even individual member of the party has a separate IT wing to disseminate information on social media platforms.
- 8) **Campaign songs:** Nelson Mandela said, *Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics.* Campaign songs play an engaging role in this campaign communication strategy in Tamil Nadu. Initially, campaign songs were written to create awareness of the parties' name, symbol, and ideology among the illiterate population. With time, the focus of the songs has shifted to the party leaders. With the involvement of political strategy/advisor teams in the election process and the dissolvment of leader image to the focus of individual candidates, songs were written and made for individual candidates too (Eg: Avadiyin Mannan Evaro for AIADMK Minister Pandiarajan and Kovai gethu song for S.P Velumani). The 2021 Tamil Nadu election saw the release of campaign songs by state and national political parties in various formats. Thanks to social media, these songs had massive reach on social networking sites among people of all age groups.

Political campaign songs in Tamil Nadu political history have changed its course over the time. As the political ideology of dravidian parties had shifted from 'Non-braminism, Tamil nationalism and Dravidianism' to just 'non-Braminism and Dravidianism', the core idea in these political messages has also experienced a major transformation. [Narayan \(2018\)](#). In early days, songs representing the party ideology were written and incorporated in films. Now, campaign songs are becoming a negative campaign tool for the opposition party and positive campaign tool for the current ruling party.

### 3. TAMIL NADU ELECTION 2021

After a huge turmoil in Tamil Nadu political history with the demise of two popular leaders, Tamil Nadu faced the 2021 election with much expectation and sound political strategy teams on both side (Prashanth Kishore's IPAC for DMK and Sunil Kanugolu's Ace Election Strategist for

AIADMK). With a strong IT wing and tremendous groundwork, both parties with its alliances faced the election.

### 4. THEORETICAL PICTURE WORK

#### 4.1. MULTIMODALITY

Multimodality is a phenomenon that starts with the notion that every discourse has multiple semiotic resources that constructs, represents, and defines meaning. Multimodality focuses on the similarity and difference between these modes in construction of meaning.

Eg: Speech = Words + Intonation + facial expression

The research on multimodality started in the 19th century in the field of linguistics. The expansion of the method to other sectors happened later. Initially the multimodality research was only focused on the written or the textual content. Later this space has been extended to the non-verbal and visual arts. MDA studies have evolved from static images to dynamic discourse. Van Leeuwen explains "[i]t originated in the work of [Michael] Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a resource for making meanings" (O'Halloran, K. L.) While Halliday emphasised on the semiotic and social aspect of language, O'Hallaron finds out the help of digital technology in carrying out the multimodal discourse analysis. (ibid)

#### 4.2. SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

In SFL, Halliday states that Language offers a structure, system of choice and sets of options in meaning making. In functional aspects, he emphasises the applicability of language and how it is a part of every aspect of our life. Halliday explains the four metafunctions of language: (a) experiential meaning for constructing experience; (b) logical meaning for establishing logical relations; (c) interpersonal meaning for enacting social relations; and (d) textual meaning for organising the message Halliday (1994). In terms of analysis, Ideation, Interpersonal and Textual are the three metafunctions of language halliday proposed. Ideation is the way the

language represents our experience. Interpersonal is the social relations or the conversation within and outside. Textual represents the form and the way it makes the language cohesive and coherent.

#### 4.3. VISUAL GRAMMAR

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) describe multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event". Communication thus can be conceived as that process in which the product of one or more semiotic modes is articulated *and* interpreted" at the same time Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 20). While SFL is for the textual content, Kress and Leeuwen found the corresponding Picturework to analyse the visual content. They renamed the three

metafunctions as representational, Interaction and Compositional. [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(1996\)](#)

SFL	Visual Grammar
Ideation Interpersonal Textual	Representation Interaction Composition

There are various ways to understand each function of the visual language depending on the context.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This paper analyses the official campaign song released by DMK party for Tamil Nadu state election 2021. *Stalin than vararu, Vidiyal thara poraru - Stalin is on his way/ bringing the dawn of a new era*. The song was released on their website youtube page 'Ondrinaiovom va'. The song is 3.06 minutes long. The song is analysed employing the visual grammar approach of Kress and van Leeuwen [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#). This studies the representation function through the narrative and conceptual aspect. The interaction function is studied by analysing the contact, social distance, attitude, and modality. The composition function is analysed through the information value, salience, and framing.

"They divide the representational meta functions into two processes: the narrative process and the conceptual process. They think that the narrative process involves ongoing actions or events, in which actors are represented by vectors—either real or imaginary, while the conceptual process is related with classification or analysis of participants in terms of their stable and timeless essence, for instance, graphics, diagrams, etc. There are three kinds of conceptual processes: classificational process, analytical process, and symbolic process." [Zhu \(2007\)](#)

According to [Iedema \(2001\)](#), the analysis of dynamic discourse such as videos can be divided into six levels: 1) Work as a whole; 2) Generic stage; 3) Sequence; 4) Scenes; 5) Shot; 6) Picture. The song is studied as a whole to understand the themes present in the song. The visual analysis is done frame by frame [Yao and Zhuo \(2018\)](#).

## 6. ANALYSIS

### Themes

The themes represented in the songs are History, Culture, Landscape, Identity/ideology, Political activities, and Social and political issues.

Theme	Setting
History	Excavations, Leaders of DMK
Culture	Jallikattu and Folk performances
Political and Social Issues	NEET, Jallikattu, Thoothukudi shooting, Custodial death, Agrarian issues
Identity/ Ideology	DMK flag, Secularism through people and landscape, Word like ' Social justice, Equality and Self Respect
Landscape	Beach, Farmland, rivers
Political activities	Speeches, Public meetings, gatherings

The video starts with green farmland and rising sun which is an indication of the agricultural reliance of the major population of Tamil Nadu and rising sun being the symbol of DMK resonates the history - DMK - for the farmers. The montage of five landscapes shown through the visuals of Tea estate, Pamban Bridge, harbour,

and farming represents the existence of all landscapes in Tamil Nadu. The montage of old churches, temples and mosques represent the secularism that exists in Tamil Nadu which contradicts and emphasises the communal violence that happens in other parts of India. The visuals of kids, middle-aged women, old age men, middle-aged men in the video represent the positioning of dmk across all age and gender groups of Tamil Nadu. The visuals of folk dances, bands and traditional music represents the culture of the state and the party's notion of protecting, preserving, and promoting it.

## 7. REPRESENTATION

Kress and Leeuwen in *Reading images: the grammar of visual design* mentions, "Any semiotic mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans. In other words, it has to be able to represent objects and their relation in a world outside the representational system" [Yang and Zhang \(2014\)](#). We will analyse the different types of representation found in the song.

### 7.1. NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION

Narrative representation has a vector and two participants. The vector represents the process. Two participants are connected or interacted through this vector. Among the two participants, one is an actor who actively interacts. Another passive actor is called goal. Both are connected or interacted through the vector. The vector starts from the actor and is directed towards the goal.

Actor —-Vector—Goal

Actor \_\_\_\_ goal- action (defined goal- transactional, Undefined goal is non-transactional) Reaction:

Reactor—Gaze—Phenomena

- **Action process:** When the vector starts from the actor, then it is an action process. It can be transactional (i.e., Actor creates vector towards goal) or non-transactional (i.e, when there is no defined goal but the actor and vector exist)
- **Reactionary Process:** Gaze / eyeline creates or forms the vector. The participant who initiates the gaze is the reactor. And the other participant who is gaze directed to is phenomena. This can be transactional or non-transactional.
- **Speech/ mental process:** The thought or dialogue connected to the participant through a vector. Conversation Process: The participants act as actors and goal simultaneously.

Picture 1



Picture 1



**Picture 2**



**Picture 2**

**Picture 3**



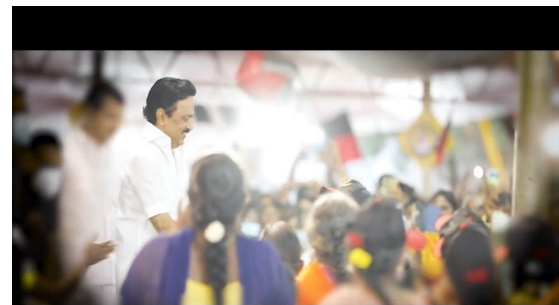
**Picture 3**

**Picture 4**



**Picture 4**

**Picture 5**



**Picture 5**

**Picture 6**



**Picture 6**

In the given 6 Pictures, the narrative representation is happening through the transactional process. In [Picture 1](#), the vector initiates from the man with the red shirt to the man in grey t shirt. The man with the red shirt is the actor and the grey shirt is the goal. In [Picture 2](#), the vector starts from the women in saree and the goal is the other women. In [Picture 3](#), The vector formed from the white saree women who plays the actor role, and the vector is directed towards the blue saree old women who is the goal here. In [Picture 4](#), [Picture 5](#) and [Picture 6](#), the vector is directed from M.K. Stalin towards the people. The process that these vectors are directed for is carried out through the smile, handshakes, and facial expressions.

**Picture 7**



**Picture 7**

**Picture 8**



**Picture 8**

In [Picture 7](#) and [Picture 8](#) and many other Pictures used in this video, have the reaction narration, where the gaze creates the vector, and the camera is the phenomena.



Picture 9



Picture 9

Picture 10



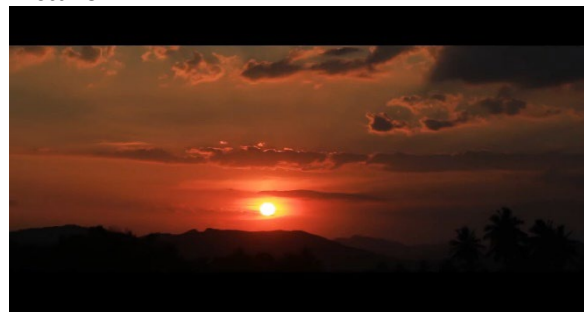
Picture 10

In [Picture 9](#), the conversational component of narration representation can be seen. Here the vector is simultaneous among everyone present in the Picture. The narration is the togetherness for a cause. [Picture 10](#) represented through speech processes; the narration happens through the words present in the Picture.

## 7.2. CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION

In conceptual representation, the participants are represented in relation to the whole and part system. It can be seen in analytical and symbolic processes. In the analytical process, the carrier and the attributes are placed to relate the part to the whole relationship. In symbolic, it emphasizes on what the participant means or is? The symbolic processes are extensively found in this video.

Picture 11



Picture 11

**Picture 12**



**Picture 12**

**Picture 13**



**Picture 13**

**Picture 14**



**Picture 14**

**Picture 15**



**Picture 15**

In the [Picture 11](#), [Picture 12](#), [Picture 13](#), [Picture 14](#), the symbolic representation of the party, ideology and impact are clearly represented through various symbols. Throughout the video, the flag of DMK and the colours of DMK were used to symbolise the support for DMK in the election. In [Picture 11](#), the rising sun is used. It could have been any stage of sun, but the rising sun is the symbol of DMK. In [Picture 13](#), the dresses of three men are the symbol. One has the taqiyah which symbolize Islam, another has the rosary around his neck, another has kugumum on his forehead. This whole picture represents the secularism that has been promoted, supported, and claimed to be exercised in DMK. In [Picture 14](#), the green towel around M.K Stalin's neck symbolises his support for farmers and agriculture, since green is associated with farmers association and unions. In [Picture 15](#), the mask, and gloves of M.K Stalin represents the fight during covid and against covid.

### 7.3. INTERACTIVE FUNCTIONS

According to [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(1996\)](#), the interactive function is the relation between the producer and the receiver of the visuals. This is analysed by studying contact, social distance, attitude, and modality.

#### 7.3.1. CONTACT

The contact of the visual can be classified into demand and offer based on the gaze. If the gaze of the participant in the visual is directed towards the audience, then it demands something for the viewers through their expression. If the gaze is not towards the viewers by doing something else, then the visual offers some information to the viewers.

In contact, the image/visual is studied on whether the contact / gaze provided in the visual demand or offer anything to the audience.

**Picture 16**



**Picture 16**

**Picture 17**



**Picture 17**

**Picture 18**



**Picture 18**

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**Picture 19**



**Picture 19**

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**Picture 20**



**Picture 20**

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**Picture 21**



**Picture 21**

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From [Picture 16](#), [Picture 17](#), [Picture 18](#), [Picture 19](#), [Picture 20](#), [Picture 21](#) and yet some other Pictures in this video offer a demanding gaze. Demand gaze in the visuals talks directly to the viewers through various ways and builds an imaginary relationship. In these Pictures, through their smile and joy they communicate that they will be / are happy being part of DMK. It builds a positive relationship towards the viewers. It also communicates the peaceful and joyful life that the audience are supposed to predict from the win of DMK in the coming election.

**Picture 22**



**Picture 22**

**Picture 23**



**Picture 23**

**Picture 24**



**Picture 24**



**Picture 25**



**Picture 25**

**Picture 26**



**Picture 26**

**Picture 27**



**Picture 27**

**Picture 28**



**Picture 28**

From [Picture 22](#), [Picture 23](#), [Picture 24](#), [Picture 25](#), [Picture 26](#), [Picture 27](#), [Picture 28](#) and yet few Pictures in the video gives the 'offer' gaze towards the viewers. In [Picture 22](#), it communicates agriculture, the major business in Tamil Nadu. Thanjavur is the rice bowl of south India. In [Picture 23](#), the tea manufacturing business has been communicated. [Picture 24](#) expresses the traditional folk dance of Tamil Nadu. [Picture 26](#) and [Picture 27](#) state the current condition of the people because of various non-people friendly policies the past government had brought. [Picture 28](#) shows M.K Stalin addressing the gathering in a very fierce way. This aims to symbolise the assurance that he represents the people and works for the people.

### 7.3.2. SOCIAL DISTANCE AND ATTITUDE

Social distance defines the relation between participants in the visual and the viewers. This is studied through the types of shots used in the visuals. Attitudes are studied through the angles. Frontal view, oblique view, high and low angle are the major ways the attitude can be established between the participant and the viewer through the visuals.

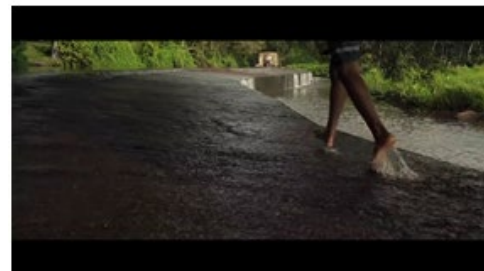
High angle	Feeling of inferiority
Low angle	Emphasize power dynamics
Close up shot	More engagement
Dutch shot	Disorientation
Overhead/ bird eye	Neutral / divine and establish
Eye level	Neutral Perspective

**Picture 29**



**Picture 29**

**Picture 30**



**Picture 30**

Picture 31



Picture 31

Picture 32



Picture 32

Picture 33



Picture 33

Picture 34



Picture 34

Picture 35



Picture 35

Picture 29 and Picture 33 have bird eye shots that establish the condition of people and the wholeness of excavation respectively. In Picture 30, the ground/leg shot used to introduce the normal, naturally connected life of the village. In Picture 2,3,7,16,18,19,21 and 31, closeup shots were used. In terms of attitude these Pictures have a frontal view that sets out the straight line and engagement with the viewer. Here the implications are strong and clear to the viewer. These Pictures create a direct bond with the viewer through the facial expression and the artefacts present.

Picture 32 and Picture 34 have low angle shots, these shots represent M.K Stalin as a larger person which emphasises the leadership. In Picture 34, a high angle is present with blur effects to focus on the person and represent that he is one among them. Picture 23, Picture 26 and Picture 27 have oblique views that have no direct engagement with the viewer through the eye but make the viewer construct a contextual meaning.

### 7.3.3. MODALITY

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, modality is realised by a complex interplay of visual cues and the overall assessment is derived by the viewer Yao and Zhuo (2018). Modality in the visual states the truthfulness or the credibility in the content. Modality can be studied using colour, depth, representation, conceptualization etc which is called modality markers. In campaign video songs, the majority of the Pictures are montages of file visuals (secondary source). So, the modality remains high in the majority of Pictures. Whereas the effects added to certain scenes or Pictures such as Picture 15 and Picture 34, has more Visual effects to highlight the person resulting in low modality.

## 8. COMPOSITION

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) states that compositional meaning reflects all meanings that link both the internal and external context of visuals in which they are created. The compositional meaning is achieved through three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing. The compositional function of the Picture cannot be read in dynamic visual Picture by Picture. This song has no distinct compositional structure to study. Yet, the last scene in the song has eight Pictures that talks about the issues such as central involvement in Keezhadi excavation, NEET ban, Jallikattu Ban, Custodial death in Thoothukudi, Thoothukudi police firing, Farmers protest in Delhi. The file pictures used in this sequence compose the issues

that happened in Tamil Nadu during the previous government. Despite the non-compositional coordination of visuals, the lyric creates a meaningful composition through the visuals.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the official campaign song of Tamil Nadu state political party DMK was analysed using the visual grammar approach of Kress and Leeuwen. From the analysis it is evident that various semiotic modes present in the video have constructed a bond towards the viewers(voters) emphasising the drawbacks of the then government. It also emphasised on the imaginary wants of people and the need for change in the coming election.

In representation processes, transactional action, reaction, and conversational processes are majorly found in the video. In the interpretation processes, demand gaze was used through the people which builds a bond and to communicate happiness. Offer gaze is used when the visuals of M.K Stalin are used which communicates a 'for the people' image of Stalin. Bird's eye shots were used for showcasing the key voter issues while close up shots were used in projecting the people of Tamil Nadu and establishing an effective communication with the viewers. Low angle shots were used for Stalin to create the image of a leader. This video song used more symbolic conceptual processes in communicating the manifesto of the party which is the strength of the video. Compositional aspect is present only in explaining the problems existing in Tamil society.

Though this song's visuals had limited scope towards advancing the propaganda of the party, the lyrics and the music still managed to create a long-lasting impact on the people and successfully projected MK Stalin as a leader/messiah in the minds of the voters.

## 10. LIMITATION

This paper has analysed only the visual grammar of the campaign song through the perspective of Kress and Leeuwen, while there is enormous scope available to read this campaign song in multimodal discourse analysis which is the future scope of this paper.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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