



Cinema Talkies of Kozhikode district: An exploration into the rural single-screen cinema theatres

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Abstract

Cinema theatres, aka “cinema talkies”, are the primary spaces for people to watch a film. However, literature shows that cinema theatres and the cinema exhibition sector are less explored in cinema studies. Following an exploratory approach using multiple methods to collect the data, this study maps the closed rural single-screen cinema theatres of Kozhikode district in Kerala. The present research addresses the spatial and technological cultural shifts that happened to single-screen cinemas in Kozhikode. Drawing upon the ethnographic turn in reception studies and mapping the rural cinema theatres, this study explains the mutual influences of the rural cinema experience and cinema reception among cinemagoers in Kozhikode district. The collected data helped the researcher to create a rural cinema theatre map of Kozhikode district. The study shows a dearth of cinema exhibition spaces in two among the four taluks in the district. The study points out that the overall change in the cinema exhibition industry due to digital cinema, the changes in Kerala’s socio-economic aspects and the emergence of other modes of entertainment affected the rural cinema talkies and changes in cinema going practices in rural Kozhikode

Keywords: Cinema theatre; Cinema going culture; Cinemas of Kozhikode; Single-screen theatres; Cinema Exhibition; Mapping

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Citation: Sreesanth K (2021) Cinema Talkies of Kozhikode district: An exploration into the rural single-screen cinema theatres. *Global Media Journal*, 19:42.

Received: August 05, 2021; **Accepted:** August 19, 2021; **Published:** August 26, 2021

Introduction

On 2019 April 11, a public post appeared on Sangam theatre’s social media page, and it read as “Curtains fell on the silver screen of Perambra Sangam Theatre. Thanks to all our beloved audience and well-wishers who cooperated and supported us for the past forty-two years – Theatre Management” Thus, Sangam Theatre’s management decision enlists this theatre into the long list of closed single-screen theatres in Kerala. This point towards the situation of shifting centres in Kozhikode district, Sangam is among the many shifting theatres in the district that exhibited films even when most of the shifting centres in Kozhikode stopped exhibiting films. Movies reach shifting centres only after their release in the main centres. The news reports on the closure of theatres show that with all their efforts to keep the audience numbers, shifting centres face a decline in their daily audience.

Single-Screen Cinemas & Kozhikode

A single-screen cinema theatre is the cinema exhibition hall that comprises only one screen. They exhibit only one film at stipulated timings every day. The advantage of single-screen

cinemas is that it accommodates a large audience for each show. When we look at Kozhikode district, it comprises four taluks-Kozhikode, Koyilandy, Vadakara and Thamarassery. The seven municipalities include Feroke, Koduvally, Koyilandy, Mukkam, Payyoli, Ramanattukara and Vadakara. The 12 Block Panchayaths of Kozhikode are Balusseri, Chelannur, Koduvally, Kozhikode, Kunnamangalam, Kunnummal, Melady, Panthalayani, Perambra, Thodannur, Thuneri, and Vadakara. The district headquarters is Kozhikode Corporation.

Kozhikode district has a close relation with cinema that dates to the early 20th century. In 1906, a decade after the event in Mumbai, the film exhibition marked its beginning in Kerala at Kozhikode district. It was the itinerant showman, Paul Vincent, who screened some films in his Bioscope at Muthalakulam Ground in Kozhikode city (C.S. Venkiteswaran, 2012). From then onwards, Kozhikode became the centre for cinema distribution and exhibition in the Malabar region. Before distribution centres opened in other Malabar districts, Kozhikode was the film distribution main centre in this region. Distributors in Kozhikode received the exhibition prints from film production companies and distributed these film prints to different theatres in the state’s northern districts.

Cinema talkies' in Kozhikode

With the closure of a large share of single-screen cinemas, the rural cinema exhibition spaces in the district have vanished. The shifting of movies in the district has also changed with digital cinema. Thus, there is a change in cinema exhibition and cinema reception in Kozhikode district. Even though Kozhikode district comprises different regions, the present study investigates the phenomenon associated with the single-screen cinema exhibition in Kozhikode. Explaining the case of Malabar region (Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur, Wayanad and Kasaragod), D-1, a film distributor in Calicut, states that,

“Earlier in Malabar, there were only 15 releasing stations. Now we have over 25 release stations in Malabar alone. The wide release has extended the release of films to Koyilandy, Irutti, Taliparamba and many other stations. Apart from this new release, stations have also come up in Malappuram, Valanchery, Kondotty and many more places. If the movie is good, it will generate a huge collection in the first week itself” (D-1, Personal Communication, 2016) **Table 1.**

Table 1: Classification of theatres in Kozhikode District (year wise).

Theatre classification		Earlier (90s - 2010s)	Present (2019)
Single-screen theatres	Releasing theatres	9	9
	B, C-centre theatres (shifting centres)	115	10
Multi-screen theatres		2	18
Total		126	37

The above table shows a decline in the number of single-screen cinema theatres in the district where rural B and C centre theatres reduced drastically after 2010. Both B and C centre theatres operated in the rural and semi-urban regions in the district. The data indicates a drastic change in cinema theatres in the rural and semi-urban regions in the district. They are only about 10 per cent of the total number of rural and semi-urban single-screen theatres in the district. However, the number of multi-screen theatres has increased over these years, except a few new theatres' investors constructed new cinema theatres in the same space where B, C-center theatres existed.

The number of days at a movie theatre was a yardstick for a film's running success in the 1980s and 90s, and it depended on the audience and their cinema going practice. A much-hyped famous star cast film used to get only a maximum of 16 releasing stations in Kerala, but the scenario changed in the late 90s when the number of releasing centres increased. Even though the number of releasing centres increased, the number of theatres in Kerala reduced from 1500 to 500.

Cinema Exhibition Studies

Studies on television [1] and new media [2] audiences show that movies are not dead even when cinema exhibition sites face a decline in their numbers. This trend is evident from the film reception through other modes of cinema viewing apart

from the cinemas, including television, personal computers, and even mobile phones [2]. Drawing upon the ethnographic turn in reception studies as explained by Sonia [3]. And applying the approaches of 'new cinema history' the present study discusses the social history of the experience of cinema by exploring a "highly localised activity, involving particular sites and the individuals attached to them" [4]. In this process the present study explores the explanations for the changes and factors that contributed to the decline in cinema attendance for rural single-screen cinemas in Kozhikode district.

It is essential to examine the history of cinema going and other leisure-time activities to understand the changes in cinema exhibition spaces in Kozhikode district. For instance, television became a commercial mass entertainment medium when it entered the market. People changed their habit of cinema going from frequent visits to carefully planned outings. Going to the cinemas became going to see a film. In her book *Film Cultures*, Janet Harbord (2002) states a division between a cinema culture produced through specialist sources of information and focused on the film itself. A culture where the activity of cinema going takes priority over the film viewed. Thus, cinema as an experience that involves cinema going has a much more significant role in producing a cinema culture.

Exploratory approach

In exploring and analysing the cinemas in Kozhikode district, this study adopted the 'multimethod/single-site' (Biltreyst & Meers, 2016) mode approach, which helps to compare the studies related to individual cinemas and cinema going practices of a particular geographical location. Thus, in the present study, the researcher created a map depicting closed rural single-screen theatres with the help of GIS data. In this process, the researcher collected data on single-screen cinemas in Kozhikode district. To confirm the GIS information and other data collected in the research process, the researcher used Kozhikode's cinemagoers' perceptions towards cinema going in Kozhikode.

Geographic Mapping

To address the study's objective, the researcher created a geographical map depicting the cinema theatres in Kozhikode with the help of a GPS mobile device and a web mapping application. The map establishes the mutations that the cinema exhibition sector has suffered in Kozhikode.

In-depth interviews

The present study employed in-depth interview method to help in mapping the theatres and understanding the cinema exhibition sector in Kozhikode. In-depth interviews with stakeholders helped to understand the less explored aspects of the cinema exhibition sector, including the location, cultural, economic, technological and social aspects. The researcher selected the participants for in-depth interviews based on their years of experience in their respective fields. Participants for in-depth interviews included film critics, film distributors, cinema theatre owners, cinema projector operators, projector assistants, film representatives, cinema theatre managers, and video cassette/cd library owners.

Oral history method

The researcher applied the ‘oral history method’ (Perks & Thomson, 2006) to bring out the data about cinemas and cinema going in this study. The researcher utilised the oral history method to gather cinema-related memories of Kozhikode district’s ordinary people and the cinemagoers. The researcher used the snowball method to select the participants for collecting oral history accounts. The present study classifies 30 years and above participants as EP (elder participants) and below 30 years as YP (younger participants).

Data Analysis

To analyse the qualitative data, the researcher applied the “first cycle coding method” and the “second cycle analytic process” [5]. However, the researcher defined a set of pre-defined themes based on the research question to begin the coding process. Further, the researcher used the initial and focus coding [5]. Process to create links between the data, using the initial coding process, the first cycle coding method, the researcher divided the qualitative data into separate pieces or codes in NVivo software. The researcher then examined these discrete pieces of data for similarities and differences. This process helped the researcher to conceptualise the data and identify potential similarities between the data. Further, the researcher used the data to create the geographical map of closed single-screen cinemas in the district.

Closed Cinemas of Kozhikode

Mapping data of cinema theatres in Kozhikode district shows that 93 single-screen theatres stopped exhibiting films. Among the 93 closed theatres, only four theatres belonged to the film-releasing main centre category. The rest were shifting centres popularly known as ‘talkies’. Among the four taluks of the district, 39, 22, 17, and 15 theatres in Kozhikode, Koyilandy, Thamarassery and Vadakara, respectively, stopped exhibiting films. With new theatres and renovation of old theatres, the district now comprises 28 film releasing theatres and ten film shifting theatres or ‘talkies’ (B, C-centre theatres). **Figure 1**

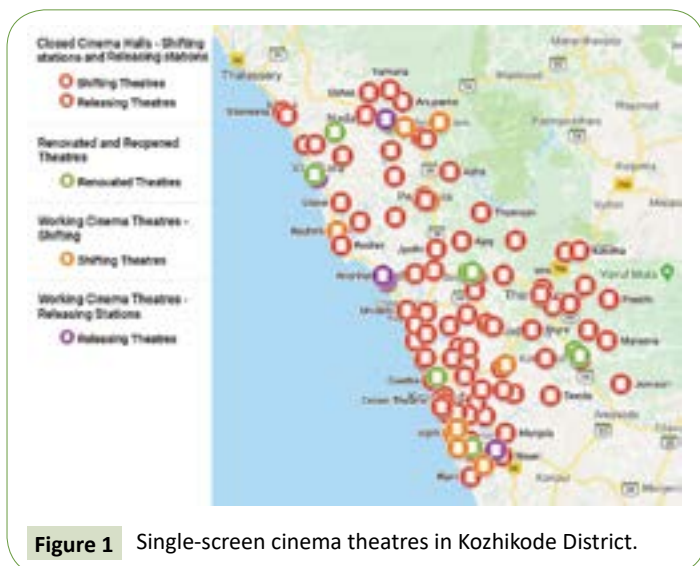


Figure 1 Single-screen cinema theatres in Kozhikode District.

Depicting all the theatres that existed in the past and existing ones shows that the district comprised around 126 single-screen cinema theatres during the 1990s until late 2000. Out of these single-screen theatres, 80 per cent belonged to B and C class shifting theatres. A large share of these single-screen theatres belonged to the rural villages of the district. The map shows an even distribution of cinema theatres in the district. The mapping of cinema theatres determines that cinema theatres were easily accessible for people in Kozhikode. That is, there were cinema theatres in almost all the villages in the district.

Vadakara Taluk

At around 49 km north of Kozhikode district, Vadakara is a coastal town, which shares its boundaries with Mahe and Kannur district to the north and Wayanad district and the Western Ghats to the east. Table 2 lists the rural single-screen cinema theatres in Vadakara Taluk that stopped exhibiting films from the 1980s to 2010. All the 15 theatres fell under either B or C-centre category, which was shifting stations. However, among the 15 theatres, two were renovated recently to become releasing centres equipped with DCI specified digital projection and sound systems. Thus, at present, 15 theatres have entirely been removed from Vadakara’s cinema space. They are now part of Vadakara’s cinema memories. **Table 2**

Koyilandy Taluk

Koyilandy Taluk, situated towards the south of Vadakara Taluk and onto the north of Kozhikode Taluk, comprises 21 Grama Panchayats. The research data show that 20 rural single-screen cinema theatres stopped functioning in Koyilandy Taluk. Among these 20 theatres majority belonged to the C-centre category. Table 3 lists the closed rural single-screen theatres in Koyilandy Taluk with their name, location, and GIS data. **Table 3**

Thamarassery Taluk

Thamarassery Taluk in Kozhikode district comprises the highlands of Kozhikode. The Taluk includes 12 Grama Panchayats spread across the eastern part of the district bordering with Wayanad district to the east. The geographical cinema theatre map of

Table 2: Closed cinema theatres in Vadakara Taluk - Location and GIS.

S.No.	Theatre	Location	GIS
1	Shanina	Poozhithala	11.69388, 75.53758
2	Murugan	Azhiyoor	11.68792, 75.54413
3	Priyesh	Madappally	11.64318, 75.57106
4	Sreejaya	Vellikulangara	11.64369, 75.58785
5	Aradhana	Villapalli	11.62555, 75.62986
6	Grace	Palayadnada	11.55509, 75.62715
7	Sundar	Kallachi	11.68905, 75.66588
8	Amritha	Kakkattil	11.68066, 75.69952
9	Sai Lakshmi	Theekumi	11.63445, 75.70436
10	Ushas	Valayam	11.72299, 75.67089
11	Yamuna	Vanimel	11.72698, 75.70312
12	Anupama	Kaiveli	11.70911, 75.72238
13	Upama	Kuttyadi	11.65447, 75.75125
14	Matha	Kuttyadi	11.65163, 75.75933
15	Vinod	Thottilpalam	11.6775, 75.78008

Table 3: Closed cinema theatres in Koyilandy Taluk - Location and GIS.

S.No.	Theatre	Location	GIS
1	Roshni	Thikkodi	11.48997, 75.62774
2	Urvashi	Chemancheri	11.38506, 75.73493
3	Lakshmi	Vengalam	11.36971, 75.74179
4	Pranamam	Kannur	11.44718, 75.74195
5	Lakshmi	Vengalam	11.36971, 75.74179
6	AR	Atholi	11.38839, 75.75904
7	Janatha	Meppayoor	11.53272, 75.7113
8	Sangeetha	Ulliyeri	11.45165, 75.77058
9	Jyothi	Naduvanoor	11.48444, 75.77447
10	Varsha	Perambra	11.56343, 75.75618
11	Megha	Perambra	11.55936, 75.75386
12	Krishnageetha	Perambra	11.55801, 75.75849
13	Ajay	Kootalida	11.4965, 75.81344
14	Prabhath	Balusseri	11.44957, 75.82288
15	Kairali	Balusseri	11.4463, 75.82969
16	Santhosh	Balusseri	11.44483, 75.83492
17	Asha	Panthirikara	11.60207, 75.79532
18	Thomson	Koorachundu	11.54002, 75.84341
19	Lakshmi	Payyoli	11.52626, 75.65656
20	Alaga movies	Avala	11.59463, 75.70991

Table 4: Closed cinema theatres in Thamarassery Taluk - Location and GIS.

S.No.	Theatre	Location	GIS
1	Suresh	Koodathai	11.39808, 75.95422
2	Paulson	Maikavu	11.40111, 75.98047
3	Dinesh	Narikuni	11.36686, 75.86198
4	Rachana	Narikuni	11.37124, 75.85231
5	Kalpana	Puthupadi	11.47979, 75.97375
6	Kavitha	Kaithapoyil	11.48183, 75.99482
7	Seema	Ekarool	11.44463, 75.87799
8	Magnus	Thiruvambadi	11.36136, 76.0088
9	Harrison	Thiruvambadi	11.36158, 76.00855
10	Vimala	Kodanchery	11.42944, 76.00425
11	Mareena	Koodaranhi	11.3455, 76.03724
12	Vini	Thamarassery	11.42433, 75.93866
13	Shameena	Thamarassery	11.41551, 75.93556
14	Ragam	Thamarassery	11.41094, 75.93901
15	Shyni	Koduvally	11.36193, 75.92156
16	Preethi	Pulloorampara	11.40794, 76.04057
17	Thankam	Thalayad	11.49711, 75.89663

Thamarassery Taluk shows that there were 17 cinema theatres spread across the Taluk. However, none of these theatres exhibits films now. **Table 4**

Kozhikode Taluk

Kozhikode Taluk includes Kozhikode Corporation, the district's administrative head, and 15 Grama Panchayaths. The east of the Taluk is the Arabian Sea, and Kozhikode Taluk shares a border with Malappuram district onto the south. Kozhikode Taluk alone had 57 cinema theatres, including A, B and C centres in the past. However, out of 58 cinema theatres, 40 have stopped exhibiting films. Most of these closed theatres and their locations have become other establishments. **Table 5**

Table 5: Closed cinema theatres in Kozhikode Taluk - Location and GIS.

S.No.	Theatre	Location	GIS
1	Sarigama	Kakkad	11.31668, 75.99618
2	Kunnath movies	Kunnath	11.35595, 75.75914
3	Jomson	Thottumukkam	11.27902, 76.05888
4	Dhanya	Chathamangalam	11.3183, 75.94302
5	Jangish	Kunnamangalam	11.30376, 75.87465
6	Jayasree	Kakkodi	11.31905, 75.80155
7	Priya	Kakkodi	11.31863, 75.79907
8	Deeda	Mavoor	11.26094, 75.95063
9	Riya	Peruvayal	11.26388, 75.89438
10	Manjusha	Nanminda	11.42168, 75.83368
11	Aswathi	Pattarpalam	11.36797, 75.79469
12	Sri Krishna	Pantheernkavu	11.22991, 75.84944
13	Navarathna	Parambilbazar	11.30925, 75.82488
14	Rajiv	Elathur	11.34444, 75.74191
15	Geetha	Westhill	11.28443, 75.76811
16	Lakshmi	Kallai	11.23422, 75.79159
17	Krishnarjuna	Meenchanda	11.21302, 75.80682
18	Praseetha	Palazhi	11.24977, 75.83557
19	Roshni	Puthoor	11.31601, 75.75511
20	Thriveni	Eranjikkal	11.31915, 75.75806
21	Nisari	Ramanattukara	11.16931, 75.87588
22	Balakrishna	Ramanattukara	11.17826, 75.86568
23	Anaswara	Kakkoor	11.385, 75.82195
24	Sajna	Kumaraswami	11.33535, 75.80931
25	Swapna	Cheruvannur	11.19222, 75.82594
26	Preethi	Feroke	11.17622, 75.83129
27	ECB	Feroke	11.17794, 75.83113
28	Rani	Kadalundi	11.13774, 75.82723
29	Gireesh	Nallalom	11.21295, 75.80704
30	Leela	Vellimadukunnu	11.29152, 75.8182
31	Abhilash	Kuttikatooor	11.26948, 75.87818
32	Saroj	Velliparamb	11.27037, 75.84446
33	Chandra	Chevayoor	11.26959, 75.82571
34	Asha	Palath	11.33402, 75.82371
35	Asoka	Mankav	11.23544, 75.80626
36	Geetha	Pokkunnu	11.23154, 75.82427

Rural Cinemas of Kozhikode: Location and Changes

Table 5 shows that most of the single-screen theatres in Kozhikode taluk belonged to the rural and sub-urban areas of the Taluk, There are now ten single-screen releasing centres in Kozhikode district due to the increase in population in Mukkam, Koyilandy and Vadakara showed an increase in footfalls in theatres. Apart from this, the conversion of celluloid projection to digital cinema exhibition and the subsequent changes in distribution contributed to the 'wide' releasing of film. In effect, digital projection eased film distributors' tasks. **Table 6**

Considering the present number of rural film exhibition screens in the district, from the above table, it is evident that Kozhikode Taluk lost the maximum number of screens compared to other taluks. Thirty-six rural single-screen theatres stopped exhibiting

Table 6: Taluk based classification of cinema theatres and screens in Kozhikode District.

Variables	Vadakara		Koyilandy		Thamarassery		Kozhikode		Total		
		Screens	Theatres	Screens	Theatres	Screens	Theatres	Screens	Theatres	Screens	
Closed		15	15	22	22	17	17	36	36	89	89
B & C											
Active (old)	Shifting station	3	3	1	1	-	-	6	6	10	10

films in Kozhikode Taluk. In Koyilandy Taluk, 22 screens stopped exhibiting films, and in Vadakara, 15 screens closed. In the case of Thamarassery Taluk, 17 single-screen cinema theatres stopped functioning. The percentage of the cinema screen ratio between the existing screens and the total number of screens that would have existed in each Taluk of the district shows a lack of cinema exhibition screens. In addition, Koyilandy, Kozhikode, and Vadakara Taluks also show a steep decrease in rural cinema exhibition screens. However, Vadakara and Kozhikode Taluk are the two taluks that still have rural single-screen cinema theatres. In contrast, in Koyilandy and Thamarassery, the number of screens has reduced enormously.

Cinema going in Kozhikode

The study finds that the frequency of cinema going differed between EP (elder participants) and YP (younger participants) from oral history accounts. EP-12 (2018) states that “I go to watch in the theatre when a good film comes. Which is having good reviews, and it is good in all sense.” This opinion was common among the oral accounts of most of the EP’s, which shows EP’s selectivity towards going for a cinema in a theatre. However, despite having some similarities with EP in the frequency of cinema going, oral history accounts note that ‘companions influence’ to be an essential element that forces YP’s to go for films.

“I go and watch films quite often, whenever I feel like watching a film, whenever a good film reach the theatre, and also when friends compel to go along with them” (YP-25, 2018).

Looking at companion for cinema going, EP considered family as the preferred companion, and they preferred to watch only “good films” in the theatre. One female EP states that “generally I go with my family or with my husband for watching a movie in a theatre” (EP-22, 2018), this statement clearly shows that family is a crucial element for EP in cinema going. In the opinion, as mentioned above by a female participant, she recollects cinema going to be a group experience where she prefers either her family or her husband to accompany her to a cinema theatre to watch a film. On the other hand, YP preferred friends as companions most of the time, and they selected the films based on reviews and suggestions. One of YP responded, “I go for film in a theatre with my family, sometimes with friends and even at times with my girlfriend.” (YP-21, 2018). Here it could be noted that YP’s prefer watching cinema with companions rather than going alone. Even though participants mentioned solitary movie going experiences, they preferred watching it with friends or family.

Remembering Old Cinemas

Remembering the old cinema theatres in the district was one of

the common queries that the researcher asked all the participants. Data shows that both EP and YP could remember most of the old cinemas of Kozhikode district. However, male participants could remember more theatres than female participants. Elderly participants were able to remember the theatres that existed in their area of residence or the places where they lived in the past. They remembered the theatre names and the village names, including names like “Vellimadukkunu -Leela, Westhill -Geetha, Mankav - Asoka, Medical College -Saroj, Chevayoor - Chandra and so on.” Among the remembered theatres, “Pushpa Theatre” located in Kozhikode taluk was remembered by most male participants irrespective of their age. Pushpa theatre near Chalapuram was a main centre releasing theatre in the ’80s remembered most of the EP’s. However, Pushpa theatre became infamous after it started exhibiting B-grade Malayalam dubbed soft-porn films regularly. People in Kozhikode presently address the location where this theatre existed as ‘Pushpa junction’.

Cinema going as a culture is prevalent in Kozhikode and its cinema audience. Cinema theatre as space is still the most preferred mode for watching cinema by people in Kozhikode. In the past few years, a highly disciplined cinema viewing pattern is cultivated among the cinema going audience by the regular control measures in and around the cinema exhibition space. Moreover, disciplined cinema viewing has equipped the cinema going audience to seek a disciplined cinema experience, one of the main features of a multiplex cinema. However, it is interesting to observe that managements of single-screen cinemas in Kozhikode have started to adopt these measures to retain their audience. In this process, single-screen cinemas are renovated by either remodelling old cinema auditorium or splitting the auditorium into two or three sections to become multi-screen theatres. Apart from this, theatre managements in the district have also started to enhance the external appearance of the theatre by mounting shining frames or glass panes as walls. These enhancements give the cinema theatre building an emphasis.

Rural Cinemas of Kozhikode: Sociocultural and Economic Aspects

Towards the middle of the 1920s, Kerala saw the rise of dissent towards prohibiting untouchables or the lower caste from using public spaces. The first struggle towards this issue began with the usage of public road in Vaikom. This incident led to a series of struggles, including the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924, 1925), Temple entry proclamation (1936) and many more. These struggles had the intention to allow the downtrodden class to enter into the public spaces. Here it must be noted that these fights were against the spatial segregation that existed in Kerala. Here, the rise of cinema exhibition spaces in the 1930s could be linked with these struggles where cinema exhibition space could break

the existing spatial segregation. Cinema exhibition space had a different set of classification, which was very new to society then.

Temporary touring talkies primarily operated by showmen from Tamil Nadu accommodated the people interested in watching the motion picture inside their tent cinemas. We can observe that rural cinemas had a gradual growth from the temporary touring talkies to semi-permanent exhibition spaces. However, they attained its life cycle's saturation point with the establishment of semi-permanent theatres. Rural cinemas catered to the cinemagoers of that particular locality where these cinemas offered re-running/shifting films. However, people visited these rural cinemas repeatedly to watch the same film till another mode of entertainment emerged. New modes of entertainment and the availability of film in these media marked the slow demise of cinema exhibition in general and rural cinema exhibition in particular. When the cinemagoers numbers reduced, the rural cinemas suffered the most as these theatres survived on the repeat audience. In addition to these issues, the internal conflicts between cinema theatre associations along intensified the problems for rural cinema theatres to continue exhibiting films. Digitalisation in the cinema industry has given cinema exhibition a ray of hope. Now, theatre owners/managements have started to renovate old cinema theatres in the district. Apart from this, new investors as well as old theatre proprietors have started constructing new cinema theatres in different parts of the district.

Rural Cinemas of Kozhikode

Looking at the history of cinema exhibition in Kozhikode, the available literature and the interview data ascertains that, in the 1930s, there were already three permanent cinema theatres in Kozhikode. Dinesh, who owns Raja Talkies, notes that government authorities allowed temporary cinemas to function at five miles from the existing permanent theatres for six months during the same period. He states that,

"Cinema exhibition happened in this Calicut even before Indian got independence. During that period, we had only three permanent theatres in Malabar namely 'Crown theatre' which was made for Britishers where they screened only English films, the other two were Coronation and Radha theatre...during those days a temporary cinema exhibition could be set up only at a distance of five miles from the permanent theatre. The present location of Raja theatre is at a distance of five miles from the permanent theatres in Kozhikode. Touring talkies showmen from Tamil Nadu and other parts of the country used to set a tent and exhibit films in this location exactly five miles from the permanent theatre. These temporary theatres had validity for six months, and they screened silent films accompanied by announcer's vocal narrative" (Dinesh, 2015).

There were strict regulations in the 1930's itself for exhibiting films. The primary reason was safety concerns as the celluloid were sensitive to heat and highly inflammable. However, touring cinema operators from Tamil Nadu visited the remote locations away from the city limits and exhibited films in temporary tents. Later, under private ownership, many more theatres emerged within the city. The locations used by temporary touring cinema showmen in the rural areas became semi-permanent theatres.

However, over the years, the number of single-screen cinema theatres has declined in the state. Mapping of closed cinema theatres shows that many rural single-screen theatres spread across the district were closed. A large share of these was semi-permanent theatres or "talkies". **Figure 2**

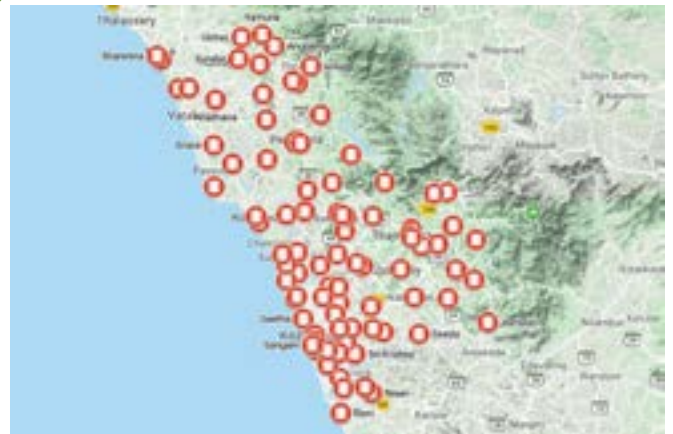


Figure 2 Closed B&C-Centre cinemas of Kozhikode district.

The above map based on the GIS data of cinema theatres marked in red symbols depicts the single-screen rural cinema theatres that are not operative. The map provides a better picture of Kozhikode and its cinema culture. A significant number of rural single-screen theatres or 'talkies' in the district existed across the district. Here it could be noted that, even though the total number of C-centre theatres or 'talkies' were not significant, the location of each C-centre made sure that it was accessible for the people in that locality and even for people from adjacent areas. On remembering the cinemagoers for Sindhu theatre in Kunnamagalam projector operator, Mr Sasi states that,

The area of the population who used to come to this theatre, before TV came into the scene was the people from adjacent villages and also people from far away remote places. However, now there is less audience in cinema theatres as a whole. This reduction in the number of cinemagoers has led to the closure of many theatres. When collection reduces, theatre owners are forced to close down their theatre..." (Sasi, 2016)

Mr Sasi is working in Sindhu theatre for more than two decades. He has worked in both celluloid based projectors as well as a digital projector. Former assistant projector operator of closed Roshni theatre (C-centre) at Puthoorambalam states that, "people from this area were the main audience for Roshni theatre then, apart from those people from the beachside also used to come in large numbers. Mukkuvar's (fishermen community) from beachside used to come to Roshni as well as Thriveni. Audience numbers reduced gradually with the popularity of television. In addition, the advancements in the cinema exhibition technology that the main centres adopted attracted cinemagoers which resulted in the decline of cinemagoers for small theatres like Roshni and Thriveni. At present, there are no theatres in between East hill Regal and the theatres at Koyilandy. The ones that existed in between these locations were all closed..." (Sathyan, 2017).

Located at a distance of one kilometre from each other Eranjikkal

Thriveni talkies and Puthoor Roshni theatre catered to two different audience sets. Thriveni started exhibiting films in the 1970s, which was long before Roshni was built. Thriveni was the first theatre to stop functioning due to the decline in cinemagoers, and Roshni followed it. Sathyan notes that the advancements and adoption of the latest cinema exhibition technology as a reason for the decline in cinemagoers. The decline in the audience could be read along with other factors such as road connectivity development and transportation to the city's main centre theatres from rural areas. Within fifteen kilometres from the city, cinema theatres such as Roshni undoubtedly faced this problem as Roshni did not get new release films. Apart from this, the popularity of TV gave the audience the pleasure of video songs, films and teleserial, which directly resulted in the decline of the female audience, i.e. the family audience.

Oral history accounts of residents of the rural areas of Kozhikode where the closed theatres existed show that, majority of these theatres had to close due to lack of audiences. The arrival of television and other media reduced the interest among people to watch a re-running film in these theatres. In-depth interviews with ex-projector operators and cinema theatre owners show an overall change in the audience's approach towards cinema going. Sasi explains the present trend in B and C-centres that,

"footfall is very less here in Sindhu theatres, and now this is a trend in almost all the theatres. Earlier it used to be a part of family outing and entertainment, but now, it is not the case. The ticket cost is very high, and a family outing for a film show will cost hefty for a middle-class family. In addition to this, the weekend film shows have a different price now which costs more than the normal day ticket price. However, the theatres with lower ticket rates, B and C-centres, do not get the films on the releasing date. In fact, by the time a film reaches the B and C-centres, people would have received the same film on their devices/screens" (Sasi, 2017)

Thus, it is evident that audiences or cinemagoers seldom prefer old fashioned cinema theatres that lack facilities. With digital cinema and its acceptance, an overall conversion of cinema business to digital occurred in the recent past. The conversion to digital proved to be a difficult situation for the B and C centre theatres in the district. They could not afford the conversion and renovation because of their low box office collections. However, some of these theatres which had better revenue could renovate and sustain. The recent trends show that the theatre owners of the theatres that sustained the crisis period are now renovating their theatres into multi-screen theatres. Some of these renovations include Maliki theatre in Feroke, East hill Regal, and single-screen theatres in Mukkom Balusery, Kakkattil, and Edacherry. To understand this gradual shift, it is necessary to explore the changes in cinema and its content and the change in Kozhikode's cinemagoers interests.

Rural Cinema Exhibition: Social, Cultural and Economic Factors

The historical data shows rural cinema exhibition or rural cinema theatres as the evolved form of touring talkies of the past.

The growing popularity of cinema during the 1960s and 70s in Kerala would have attracted investors to invest in this business by building a cinema theatre. In addition, this study points out that rural cinema theatre owners built their cinemas in their land. Moreover, people considered owning a cinema hall as a status symbol in society.

Social, Cultural and Economic aspects

Social

Kerala marked its social transformations in cinema going among cinemagoers with the acceptance of television. TV and "its plethora of teleserials ate into the traditional thematic terrain of cinema" [6]. The reduction in the number of cinemagoers forced single-screen theatre owners to convert their theatre into a multiplex cinema theatre. The other establishments into which theatre owners remade their theatres include wedding halls that could draw profits. However, rural cinema theatres could survive with its shifting films as television entered rural households much later.

With the emergence of video libraries and door delivery of videocassettes, films started to reach the consumer's doorsteps. Thus, households with television became cinema exhibition spots where people from the neighbourhood would gather and watch films. The reduction in television prices and the subsequent onset of cable television in the urban areas paved the way for television's entry into rural areas. However, terrestrial television was popular in rural areas until cable operators started operations in the late 1990s. Television and its reach into each household in the rural parts of the district reflected in cinemagoers attendance in the rural cinemas. Besides, the development of roads and bridges gave better connectivity to the remote villages in the district. These developments made rural people's commutation to urban locations of the district easy and fast.

With better commutation facilities, most of the A-centre theatres located in the urban area became easily accessible for rural audiences. Thus, the reduction in cinemagoers attendance forced rural single-screen theatres with a low audience attendance to stop exhibiting films. Moreover, cinemagoers motives for choosing a movie to watch in a cinema theatre have changed. They prefer to watch big-budget movies of superstars, which gets higher publicity in theatres than other films. However, cinemagoers consider reviews and ratings available on online platforms to select a film for watching it in a cinema theatre. We can consider these changes as a part of the more comprehensive social changes where people's preferences and requirements for cinema going have changed. However, these changes reflect in the cinema exhibition business, where rural cinema halls slowly become releasing centres after renovations. In addition, new cinema halls have come up in rural and suburban areas of the district.

Culture

When cinema halls became part of the village, cinema going became the popular mode of entertainment. Until cinema exhibitors started building cinema halls in rural parts of the district, cinema going was part of city outings. Findings of the

study show that rural cinema theatres catered to the “repeaters” or “repeat viewers” [7]. Lakshmi Srinivas explains repeaters or repeat-audience as the cinemagoer who watch the same film repeatedly. Oral history accounts show that B and C centre theatres were the favourite choice of cinemagoers for watching certain movies repeatedly. The accessibility and affordability of these rural cinema theatres and the absence of other modes of entertainment are the prime reasons for this trend. As discussed above, the proliferation of television sets and cable TV opened a plethora of programs and TV channels. Television, with its visual content, could quench the thirst of the repeat viewer. These changes in leisure culture resulted in the audience decline for single-screen cinemas. Besides, the arrival of videocassettes, CDs and DVDs gave repeat viewers plenty of content to watch in their own private spaces.

Religious and cultural festivals were prime time for rural cinemas in the past. Rural cinema theatre owners used to bring popular films to their theatres during the festival seasons to make profits. However, the rise in television channels and their programs confined people to their houses themselves. Now, families seldom opted to visit a rural cinema hall in the festival seasons that they used to do in the past. Memories of Elder participants explain the cinema going practices during festival seasons and their preference for cinema theatres in their childhood. The Elder participants and their cinema memories have close connections with the rural cinema theatre close to their houses. Apart from this, the study observes that the gradual change in cinema going among families led to a gradual change in themes in Malayalam films, Themes discussing the “upper-class milieu and ethos; their rituals, costumes, concerns and mannerisms” [6]. Started to appear in Malayalam films, besides this Malayalam films also saw the “rise of macho superhuman hero’s” [6]. At par with these changes, Kerala saw the rise of people forming film actors’ fans’ association.

The present trends in the rural cinema exhibition show a revival in the cinema going culture. However, the present revival differs from the repeat viewers of the past. Now, new cinemas in the rural areas create a cinema going culture among people who are slowly shifting their cinema going practices from the city to rural and suburban theatres. Data shows that even though the younger cinemagoers in the district watch cinema on their mobile devices, their first preference is to watch it on a big screen.

Economic

The Indian economic policy reforms in the post-1990s are “characterised by the push for a consumerist society and the turn of the middle-class romance as the dominant theme of the Indian cinema” [8]. The changes in the socio-economic standards and the developments in state infrastructure, including roads and other institutions, resulted from the neoliberal policies of LPG in India. Combined with the already established concrete support from the Gulf boom, these changes helped Kerala state grows further in the development indices.

The findings of this study show that consumerism has crept into every aspect of society. Even though the study states “movie” to be the criterion for participants to watch a film in the cinema

theatre, the participants were interested in the amenities provided by the theatres. In the past, rural cinemas exhibited re-running films to a houseful audience irrespective of the quality of the projection, seats, amenities such as restrooms and cafeterias. Now, cinemagoers do not prefer rural cinemas for watching films, and they mentioned the rural cinemas as “local theatres”. However, the study shows that the post-liberalisation period saw the widespread closure of theatres in the state.

Economic aspects of the rural cinemas resulted in the lockout of many rural cinemas in the district. Rural cinemas depended on repeaters for their income, where they exhibited shifting films regularly. However, television penetration grabbed the repeaters by providing entertainment to the whole family at a lower cost than rural cinema theatres. The study thus notes this as the first setback for rural cinemas. The decline in revenue for cinema theatres due to the new trends among cinemagoers affected the economy of the rural cinemas in the district.

In contrast to rural cinemas, the urban and semi-urban cinemas (A, B-centres) in Kozhikode could survive this stage. Since the A, B centres used to receive films much earlier than rural cinemas (C-centres), the management of these theatre’s made renovations to their theatres and could keep their audience. However, the gradual decrease in audience numbers forced rural cinema theatre owners to opt for other means to generate revenue. One of the options for survival for rural cinema theatres was exhibiting soft-porn films. Noon shows of rural theatres were famous for such films. Soft-porn films could generate profit for rural theatre owners as people from distant places visited these rural cinema halls to watch soft-porn films. This cinema going trend among people was when mainstream Malayalam cinema had a face-off with soft-porn films, as soft-porn films generated higher revenue than other films. The advent and rollout of the internet through internet café’s in the district opened a new world of entertainment to the audience where rural cinemas lost their soft-porn audiences. With the decline in audience, rural cinema theatres lost their hope of revival. However, the soft-porn exhibition was a relief for at least some rural cinemas and a few sub-urban cinemas too. The cinema theatres that exhibited soft-porn films created an identity for the “space” where they existed and the theatres. People in the district still remember these theatres as soft-porn theatres.

In the 2000s, with digital cinema exhibition technology and the wide release of films in the state, most of the B, C-centre cinema theatres with a lower number of cinemagoers stopped exhibiting films. However, for rural cinema theatres in Kozhikode, technological advancements in cinema projection equipment could not go beyond the increase in the film spool size and the implementation of the DTS sound system. Thus, the study’s findings determined that much of the audience for rural cinema theatres belonged to the lower-middle or middle classes. The uniqueness of these audiences was that they were repeaters who loved watching the film repeatedly in these rural theatres.

Single-Screen Cinemas and Digital Transition of Films

Analysing the practices associated with cinema exhibition in

Kozhikode, the study shows that cinemas could inculcate a social habit where theatres could provide a “socialised experience” [9]. The single-screen theatres in the district could create a generation of regular cinemagoers. The repeated cinema going habit of the cinemagoers economically helped the Malayalam cinema industry until it started to explore sources of income other than the box-office collections. However, watching films is still a part of life for a large population in the district where cinema theatres are the preferred medium.

Digital cinema and exhibition

The changes in single-screen cinemas due to the arrival of digital cinema show that the cinema exhibition sector in the district is evolving. Even though new experiments such as widescreen exhibition and 70 mm film projection emerged in the film exhibition sector, the 35 mm film projectors and 35 mm films remained the standard in most cinema theatres around the world for over a century. Digital cinema exhibition could break this standard by replacing the celluloid with digital files. Digitalisation in the cinema industry marked an overall change in cinema exhibition in almost all parts of the world. In Kozhikode district, it led to the closure of most rural single-screen cinemas and the beginning of a new digital cinema era. The rollout of digital cinema gave a new life to the cinema exhibition business as cinemagoers started to show interest in watching cinema in digital format. For theatre owners and the theatre staff, the digital cinema exhibition was an altogether new experience. Hence, they were sceptical about the working of a digital projector.

Single-screen cinemas of Kozhikode and digitalisation

Digital cinema exhibition in Kerala was still evolving in the latter half of the 2000s as theatre owners in the main centres or the A-centres were slow in adopting the new technology into their theatres. Digital Service Providers (DSP) such as UFO and QUBE systems were the forerunners of digital cinema exhibition technology in India. Findings of the present study show that projector operators of B, C-centre theatres found digitalisation helpful. Unlike the interruptions due to the wear and tear of the celluloid prints during film projection in the film projector era, the digital projectors did not break during the film exhibition. According to Tim Gomery (1992), the labour in movie theatres has reduced to button-pushing where film projects from low-cost server machines. The projector operator is now a communicator between the projection system and the DSP. Looking at the maintenance costs of the digital projector, such as the replacement of the bulb, it is the exhibitor’s responsibility to do the service and replacements in time. Realising all these issues, owners of a larger share of semi-permanent cinema theatres in the rural and semi-urban areas of the district stopped exhibiting films in their theatres. Thus, the present study states that when digital cinema opened a new trend in the cinema industry, many single-screen cinemas and their staff faced lockout. Also, the present study notes digitalisation in the cinema exhibition sector as the last step of a steady decline in the lifespan of single-screen cinemas in the district.

The present study also indicates the advent of new technology

in cinema theatres, not merely part of the upgrading process alone. Analysing these changes from a broader perspective, the renovations of cinema theatres help the theatre owners in the district to compete with the digital transitions happening in the entertainment industry. Taking Seymour Stern’s perspective shows that it is mandatory to make the cinemagoer understand the difference between cinema theatre experience and the other screen [10]. Hence, the cinemagoers’ ability to distinguish between the two experiences will help cinema theatres stand apart from the other screens and maintain the essential feature of imparting an emotional experience and sense of liberation from reality.

Reception Studies and Cinema Exhibition

A cinema theatre is the prime space of movie reception for cinema audiences. Findings of the study show a strong inclination towards the reception and watching movies in the cinema theatres among the cinema audience in Kozhikode. The study finds that the ethnographic approach of “Reception Studies” gives a broader perspective to understand rural cinema exhibition history.

Film reception and cinema theatres

The findings of the study show a radical change in the way a cinema theatre functions at present. Unlike the physical renovation in cinema theatres, upgrading the theatres with cinema technologies is inevitable for single-screen cinema theatres. In addition, with digital cinema technologies, the present study shows that, for cinemagoers, cinema is not just a product or art. For an audience, cinema is an experience that is continuously evolving with the changes in technology and sociocultural factors.

The oral history data on the closure of cinema theatres in Kozhikode shows that all the presently closed theatres had a significant audience in the initial years. The audience numbers were present in all these theatres until other modes of entertainment became popular among the audience. Among other modes of entertainment, television as a medium invited and encouraged people to use the technology. However, when households receive entertainment through television broadcasts, theatrical film viewing and cinema going gets hindered. The present study’s findings reiterate that television could get a stronghold on the family audience by its programs and compactness to fit into the house’s living room. This change created a new culture of cinema reception among the audience where the new mode of cinema viewing accepted the private reception of movies. Until TV gained popularity as a cinema viewing mode, the public exhibition of movies in cinema theatres imparted a social experience for the cinemagoer.

New Cinema History and single-screen cinemas

As a social practice, the history of cinema going reveals that it is “strongly inspired by community identity formation, class and social distinction. The overall picture of the film audiences highlights them as social media users, historically the first social audiences for a mass medium” [11]. This study determines that rural cinemas provided a community cinema going experience

where each theatre gratified the entertainment needs of the people of that locality. Moreover, from the present study, it is evident that cinema going itself is a community event where, in the past, families used to visit theatres frequently. The present study observed a trend of closure and changes among the single-screen cinemas in the district. A large share of rural theatres in the district where theatres' management did not renovate according to the advancements in cinema exhibition technologies is now defunct. In contrast, the surviving rural and the urban theatres in the district are now on the path of renovations.

Oral history accounts collected in this study give a "bottom-up" approach to analyse cinema history data by giving importance to the audiences and their experiences. Oral history accounts of the study show that participants remember single-screen cinemas as an experience. Here the participant's cinema experiences involve selecting a movie, selecting the theatre, the mode of conveyance, selecting companion(s), having food, and other related activities. However, the present study determines such experiences as a *passé*, which is associated with single-screen cinema going. Single-screen cinemas in the district played a significant role in cultivating cinema going as a practice among the people. With its presence in different parts of the district, including the remote villages and the urban areas, single-screen cinemas gained popularity among the people of the district. With better commutation facilities, people from rural areas started to travel to urban A-centre theatres in the city to watch films on release day. This trend among rural cinemagoers made rural cinemas become the spaces for repeat watching of an already watched film. In addition, the lower ticket rates in single-screen cinemas and the absence of other modes of entertainment made cinema going a regular and frequent practice among the people in Kozhikode.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show a gradual shift in the cinema going practices among the audience and cinema exhibition culture in rural cinemas of Kozhikode. The gradual decline in the number of

cinema theatres occurred in the B, C-centres. In addition, there are shifts in cinema going culture among the younger generation, where cinema theatre is now one of the various platforms for watching films. The overall change in the cinema exhibition practices because of digitalisation in film exhibition and the closure of rural cinemas of the district were the significant elements that contributed to the changes in cinema exhibition in the district. Hence, the changes mentioned above resulted in the closure of a large share of rural single-screen theatres in the district.

The study shows a lack of cinema exhibition spaces in Koyilandy and Thamarassery Taluk compared to Kozhikode and Vadakara. The majority of the single-screen theatres closed in Kozhikode Taluk belong to the B, C category. The overall change in the cinema exhibition industry due to the emergence of digital cinema technology and the changes in economic policies post-1990s brought in the changes at a faster pace than before. Cable television, combined with the boom in television studios and the increase in the number of television channels in regional languages, became sources of income for film production. This trend led television to become a prominent source of income for film production, where satellite rights became a deciding factor for movie production. However, the popularity of the internet and online platforms has resulted in a gradual change in the entertainment media, including cinema exhibition and reception. Over The Top (OTT) platforms such as hot star, Amazon Prime, and Netflix also invest in the film industry to get film broadcasting rights. Hence, there is an emerging competition among the conventional single-screen cinemas, multiplex or multi-screen theatres, television screens, and OTT platforms.

Kozhikode's rural cinema exhibition has become a *passé*, where it is now associated with Kozhikode's cinema memories of the past. However, now the cinemagoer's choices for watching a film have increased. With theatres getting renovated with modern technologies and amenities, the overall cinema experience is undergoing a gradual change.

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