

A Study on the Schematic Representation of Hill Stations in Malayalam Cinema in Enhancing Kerala Tourism

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Abstract

Film being an audio-visual medium that works in close proximity with empathy, its impact on the audience is much higher. This paper analyses how Malayalam films explore hill stations and mediate tourism promotion in Kerala. Due to the lack of adequate knowledge about the advantages of film tourism among academics and practitioners, this novel type of cultural tourism still receives less attention. Tourism is one of the prime factors contributing to the state's overall development; its possibilities at different levels must be identified and explored. Films promoting tourist spots have a major role in tourism's developmental process by exploring its wide aspects and possibilities. Thus, it makes an important contribution to the field of tourism promotion. Films reach a wider audience and pass the images of their locations to mass audiences and influence them to travel. Kerala, mentioned as god's own country, is gifted with an alluring geography that serves the predominant role in Indian tourism. Malayalam cinema is one of the main media which has brilliantly depicted the scenic beauty of hill stations in Kerala. The cinematic representation of hill stations in Malayalam films develops a new perception of Kerala tourist destinations and also induces the desirability of travel. There are several top-notch hill stations in Kerala that uphold a significant aesthetic beauty and their portrayal through frames creates an ample impact on its viewers. The study aims at delivering a deep knowledge about the present relevance of film tourism and how Malayalam films act as a tool to explore the hillsides of Kerala. The scenic beauty of several highlands of Kerala always won a place in Malayalam films. It generates fresh experiences for travellers, promotes domestic travel, revives places in danger of losing population, and increases a nation's economy. Affinity towards cinema, its character, the story, and the technicalities involved paved a new interest among the audience to travel to the hill areas of Kerala and enjoy the visual spectacle. The study gives an analysis of the schematic representation of hill stations in Malayalam cinema enhancing Kerala tourism, focusing on its narrative, visual, and audio schemes. A qualitative methodology which includes content analysis of two prominent Malayalam films will be adopted for the study. The analysis will be done on the three main schematic representations of the place in the movie that has helped to enhance its beauty.

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Keywords

Kerala tourism, Malayalam cinema, hill stations, cinematic space, cinematic representation, visual aesthetics

Introduction

In the digital era, film is one of the prime media which has got a huge fan base and influence on its audience. It plays a huge role in portraying stories of different genre catering to different categories of audiences. The way they conceive and visualize a theme makes it a strong competition among many other digital media platforms. The film industry has grown tremendously in the past few years and has delivered many changes in society. When researching such an effective mass medium, discussing the factors that go into producing a film is crucial. The technicalities in the making of a film contribute a lot in adding more visual aesthetics to the film as a whole. In the world of cinema, Indian cinema always owns a remarkable place. Malayalam cinema is also taking Indian cinema to the global level. Recent achievements and honors received by Malayalam filmmakers make Malayalam cinema a relevant topic to research.

Malayalam Cinema and its Locations

The Malayalam film industry is one of the most progressive and innovative film industries in the nation exhibiting some content-oriented cinemas. The Kerala film industry is renowned for consistently producing some of the best films. The Malayalam cinema industry exhibits excellent technical production quality together with impressive narrative structures. The filmmakers have shown a keen interest in discovering stunning locations in Kerala for their movies. In terms of the number of films produced each year, Malayalam film ranks fourth after Tamil, Hindi, and Telugu.

One of the most popular tourist destinations in India is the state of Kerala, which is located on the tropical Malabar Coast in the southwest. National Geographic Traveller recognizes Kerala as one of the top ten paradises on earth. The state is well-known, particularly for its ecotourism programs and backwater areas. Kerala is one of the most well-known tourist destinations in the world due to the distinctive fusion of its tradition and culture. About 13.3% of the state's economy comes from the tourism sector. Films produced in Malayalam are known for their story-driven pattern and visual aesthetics. The Malayalam film industry is blessed with mesmerizing landscapes. The popularity and visual appeal of the film are amplified by the magnificent locations.

The Western Ghats' hill stations in Kerala are always a true traveler's paradise since they are endowed with a more comfortable climate, verdant highlands, green valleys, dense and snowy woodlands, frothing rivers, waterfalls, turquoise lakes, flower-filled meadows. A traveler would certainly be fascinated by Kerala's stunning landscape and plenty of tourist attractions. All nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers have a special heartfelt affection for Kerala's high ranges and hill stations. The most well-known hill destinations in Kerala are Wayanad, Munnar, Vagamon, Ponmudi, Silent Valley, Idukki, Thekkady, and Lakkidi. This paper analyses two movies, *Charlie* and *Ramante Edan thottam*, which have hill stations as its main locations.

Schematic representations in Movies

One of the methods to make sense of a film is to differentiate it in schematics such as narrative scheme, visual scheme and aural scheme. All films can have their own schematic representation in order to find and establish relationships between the aforementioned schemes. The content of the film- plot, story line, progression, climax etc.- has been analysed within the framework of narrative scheme whereas visual scheme discusses shots, colour, framing and composition, colour, shots, scenes, sequences, art direction, cinematography etc. The implication of dialogue and music and how these are delivered will be covered in the audio scheme. The film form or film structure covers all these together in order to construct a system of viewer experience of films. It is the general system of relationships between the components used in the film and in each step of its production.

While the film structure as a whole is analysed, it is possible to examine each component separately and attempt to justify its presence in the movie as well as its cinematic implementation. These components give the film its unique appeal. The filmmaker must comprehend the meanings that are generated from the components and that can be experienced in the film. The film maker should have the unique ability to choose the visual and auditory pieces that best convey the film's overall theme and combine them into a unified whole.

Review of Literature

Due to the lack of awareness of the advantages of film tourism among academics and practitioners, film tourism receives little attention (Walaiporn 2009). Hill station tourism has benefited greatly from Malayalam cinema's promotion of the region. Several Malayalam films have featured hill stations, which has aided in publicizing this location to a wider audience. Kerala's hill stations are a perennial favourite location for international filmmakers too. According to Connell (2012), although being considered a niche component

of the tourist industry, film-induced tourism can help a destination's tourism industry grow. Moreover, the Kerala Tourism Board promotes state tourism by using Malayalam films. Malayalam cinema, which gives a visual portrayal of the state's beautiful splendour, has been a successful marketing tool for Kerala tourism.

Film Tourism

Film tourism broadly falls into the category of cultural tourism. It alludes to how popular certain places have become as a result of how they have been portrayed in movies and television series. The term 'film tourism' describes all forms of travel to places where visitors can interact with the film industry. It is divided into three categories: tourism for film promotion, tourism for travel-themed movies, and tourism influenced by films. Visually analyzing a film triggers the desire to travel, which has a big impact on the traveling decision of a tourist. The desire to go to movie studios and television parks, visiting locations that are directly connected to and represent a certain film are some reasons that can be cited here. A cinematic journey let viewers sink into the setting and uses the scenery as a symbol of recognition (Teng, 2021). Wray and Croy (2015) described the kind of changes that took place in the locales and areas as well as the efforts to incorporate movies into the strategic tourist plans put forth by various nations. The numbers of tourist locations that rely on movie and television tourism are increasing and it can be cited as evidence for the traveller drawing capacity through clever destination management (Strielkowski, 2017).

Influence of Cinema on Choosing Travel Destinations

Destination levels in visual media mirror those of the finished tourist product, which is promoted more vigorously than through conventional commercials (Balasubramanian, 1994). This is consistent with what Iwashita (2008) discovered. Drama series, especially when they depict authentic elements that tempt viewers to visit, may significantly improve a destination's attraction (Karpovich, 2010). The mystique generated by the "interaction of fiction with the surroundings" captivates visitors (Connell, 2005a, p. 764). This further piques people's interest in the suggested locations. Visuals let potential tourists form distinct mental ideas of a site, giving them a taste of the place before they arrive (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). According to Macionis, there are three reasons why film tourism encourages people to visit the film location (2004) Location, character, and performance.

A number of academic studies have demonstrated the ability of film pictures to encourage travel to a location that has previously been featured in the film (Rattanaphinanchai & Rittichainuwat, 2018). Films can increase the number of people visiting the locations in addition to depicting the enchanting landscapes and sceneries. The Lord of the Rings movies' depictions of New Zealand's scenery sparked a new trend that gave rise to new travel destinations around the globe. The success of New Zealand and the Lord of the Rings is a prime illustration of how film-induced tourism affects the promotion of travel destinations worldwide. (Kinson, Carl, & Smith, 2007). Bollywood movies, (Dastidar & Elliott, 2019), also support travel and tourism. After the films are released, there is a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting the places that were recorded in the movies. The tourism business can benefit from the proper usage of film tourism. Every country that promotes tourism also prioritizes film tourism.

Statement of Problem and Objective of the Study

Kerala's tourism sector needs to expand its reach in a larger scale globally. Films are one of the finest tools to showcase the mesmerizing beauty of the Kerala landscape. A study on the visual representation of hill stations of Kerala in Malayalam films will give more insights on promotion of tourism destinations of the state. A study purely based on hill stations will give an idea about how hill stations alone can be promoted as destination spots and it will enhance the tourism potential. Also, the emergence of OTT platforms in India after the Corona period took regional cinemas worldwide giving our locations a global reach. This study, through schematic representations, analysed how the narrative, visual and audio elements in selected films added value to the tourism potential of hill stations depicted in those films.

Methodology and theoretical framework

Content analysis of two films, *Ramante Edan thottam* and *Charlie*, was adopted to complete this study. Content analysis, a qualitative method, is the most common research approach in social science and mass communication. Content analysis based on the categorisation of schematics such as narrative, visual and aural was performed to elicit information of the usage of film components to portray locations as central theme. An offshoot of this exercise was the inadvertent promotion of locations as probable tourism destinations in the minds of viewers.

Goffman's framing theory offers a thorough analysis of how something is presented to an audience and how that presentation directly influences how people absorb information and come to judgments (Hallahan, 2008). The

definition and construction of any item of transmitted data by a communication source is known as framing. We all add our own frames to our communications, so framing is an inevitable component of human communication.

Discussion

Film 1: Ramante Edan thottam

The primary part of the movie where Ramante Edan thottam is filmed includes spots in the enchanting town of Vagamon, a famous hill region in Kerala. Prior to the film's premiere, not many people were aware of this stunning location, which opened the door to improving Kerala's travel destinations. The narrative structure emphasizes the importance of content.

Narrative scheme

The narrator of the story becomes the main concept in the analysis of a narrative text (Bal,2009). According to Mieke Bal, visual arts like cinema depend on the content of the photography, composition, acting, and other elements that formulate the cinematic creation (Bal,2009). The story of Elvis (Joju George) and Malini (Anu Sithra), a married couple, is central to the movie Ramante Edanthottam. Malini led a very quiet life, giving up her career and dreams for her family, whereas he lived a life of great freedom and explored the delights of a metro city. Malini once takes a vacation with her family at Vagamon, where they encounter Raman (Kunchacko Boban), who leads a nearly ascetic life and gradually develops a bond with Malini.

The hill station and the resort shown in the film have given Raman and Malini's narratives a greater depth. Raman's persona is encircled by the resort's freshness and greenery. This is one of the key reasons why Malini felt a connection with him. The film's central protagonist Raman's character development is greatly influenced by the lush landscape in which it was filmed. Raman became more real and realistic due to the tranquil environment, wildlife interaction, organic farming, and fresh air. This caused Malini to become drawn to a person who is in touch with the earth and environment. The character Raman and the location where the movie is shot are very similar, which is another important conclusion than can be drawn from the movie.

Visual Scheme

The images of the hill stations were made more captivating by the use of a blend of closeup, midshot, and long shots. The sequence in which Raman

displays a Yellow Bullbul's nest and eggs on a gigantic tree is another spectacular one from the film. Using an aerial and long shot, the cinematographer expertly caught the entire set in that particular scene.

Every single piece of property used in the movie worked in perfect harmony with the plot. One of the stunning works of art produced by the art department is the tree house, one of the key locations used in the film to establish a connection between Raman and Malini. The utilization of the tree house in the movies adds to the feeling of nature. The dialogue taking place at the top of the tree house has undoubtedly improved the setting and contributed to its beauty. Selection of colours and gradients is extremely vital in completing the visual scheme of the film.

To depict the hill station, the movie frequently uses the hues of green, yellow, blue, and earthy tones. The hill station is represented by dark and light green merged together, while the tree branches are shown by yellow. The precise beauty of the sky is depicted using the color blue. The analogous color scheme is employed to enhance the scene in the opening sequence. The lovely scenery is depicted using a combination of green and yellow, and the costumes perfectly matched the setting. In majority of scenes, the hill station is represented by hues of blue and green. The use of green and blue calms and soothes the audience and encourages them to travel to the hill station where the movie was filmed.

Audio Scheme

Music played a vital role in enhancing the visual beauty of the place and movie. One of the key elements that deserve special attention is the background music which maintained rhythm and mood throughout the narrative structure. The location is described in detail in the lyrics, as is the atmosphere it provides for those who visit.

Film 2: Charlie

Charlie is one such genre of movie that uses a new approach to narrative. In reality, the movie is made up of numerous layers of short fiction that are combined to create a full-length movie. The entire narrative revolves around the main character "Charlie," and it basically portrays the lives of various characters as they are positively impacted and transformed by Charlie. The excellent narration gives the characters in the film their best possible representation. Gypsy character Charlie (Dulqar Salman) is like the wind; you can feel invigorated by his presence but you can't hold him. Charlie makes a cameo role in the novel to brighten the lives of many characters through minor incidences and happenings, and the story concentrates on these small events.

Narrative Scheme

The plot opens with Tessa (Parvathy) traveling to find Charlie, a character she had learned about from the place she had rented out, and several other people. The story was filmed in two parts, the first in Mattancherry, Kochi, and the second in Idukki, a mountainous station called Peeremedu. Both the setting and the character Charlie have been greatly influenced by it. Nonetheless, the setting at Peerumedu, close to Old Pambanar, which was referred to as Vattavada in the film, had a significant impact on the narrative. It is surrounded by the lovely Ladram tea plantation. The place received a lot of attention after the movie's release and is currently one of the top tourist attractions. The hill station has a significant impact on both Charlie's life and the movie. Charlie, the main character in the story, has a strong bond with the hill town.

The role of Kani as a doctor is played by Aparna Gopinath, who decided to end her life after suffering from severe depression. Charlie arrived on the scene at that point and saved her from being hanged. Charlie questioned her, "Where are you going before viewing all the magic made for us by God?". Charlie drove Kani to the old age home in the hill station. From there the setting provides the plot and the character a new face. It was so calming to see the old age home in the first shot. Idukki was displayed in style and grace. The movie has beautifully enriched the hill town.

When Kani first breathed in the mountain air, she had a sense of healing, tranquility, and relaxation. Most people choose hill stations or other similar calming locations to take a rest, breathe easily, settle down, and heal. This is what Charlie offers to each and every people who come to him. He intervenes in the lives of unknown individuals and heals them. Thus, the setting is important to both the story and the development of the characters. Since Charlie is a free bird, anyone is welcome to visit him for healing, much like we might go somewhere to unwind. The mood of the film would have changed if the second half had not been shot in the picturesque setting of Peeremedu Hill Station.

Visual Scheme

The breathtaking splendor of the hill station was primarily captured in long shots. The scene that introduced the hill station provides a lovely long shot of the location that will gratify our eyes and souls. The bike trip that Charlie and Kani took to the old age home was portrayed in long shots. To demonstrate the location's natural splendor, some aerial shots were chosen.

The background greenery was shot so exquisitely at the scene where Charlie was conversing with other people, which contributed to enhancing the hill station. The promotion of the hill station as a tourist destination has been significantly impacted by the construction of the old age home, which was an LP School.

Three colours that are next to each other on the color wheel make up an analogous color scheme. The first color acts as the main focus, the second as a complement, and the third as an accent. Any similar color scheme can also combine black, white, and grey. As long as they are adjacent to one another on the color spectrum, other colors may be employed. Similar color schemes are used frequently in traditional art forms. Usually, analogous hues can be found in nature. When viewed side by side, colors that are close to one another on the color wheel always look very comfortable and pleasant. This color palette mostly depicts nature and conveys a serene atmosphere.

The wooden boat that was positioned close to the river enhances the charm of the hill town. The utilization of colour is another factor that enhances the setting and the tone of the movie. An introduction to the hill station using the comparable hues blue and green. To convey the beauty of nature, an analogous color scheme mostly uses light and dark colours of green. The sky is represented by the colour blue, which has improved the hill station overall. Hill stations are frequently depicted in scenarios using the hues blue, yellow green, and green. These colours contributed to giving the movie and the character a new sense of energy. Each character's costume in the film did a great job of complementing the setting. Another element that greatly improved the entire movie was the music.

Audio Scheme

Charlie's dialogues which describe the serene beauty of places generated a lot of buzz among moviegoers. The number of people traveling to the hill station to view the snowfall significantly increased after the movie's release. With the delivery of its dialogue, the film greatly enhanced the hill station. These elements have enhanced the audience's perception of the hill station. The songs narrated the visual beauty of locations. The movie's background music did a great job of preserving the charm of each individual and the setting. The fresh vibe of the movie was well-coupled with each song.

Conclusion

Film-inspired tourism is recognized as a growing global trend.(Di Cesare, D'Angelo &Rech,2009). The paper discussed how Malayalam cinema's stylized depiction of hill stations promotes tourism destinations in Kerala. The

potential of tourism is enormous, particularly in a state like Kerala, which is well-known for its breathtaking scenery and captivating landscape. Kerala tourism can be promoted through a variety of channels. One of the most effective ways to promote tourism in Kerala is through the cinema. Kerala's many unexplored locations are being sought after because of Malayalam movies. Numerous Malayalam movies have highlighted Kerala's lesser-known regions. This has made it easier for the tourism agencies to find undiscovered areas and develop them as tourist hotspots.

The locations in the film have been enhanced through cinematic techniques. The sites in Kerala are also emphasized through the use of color, shots, properties, music, conversation, cinematography, and narrative style. With the influence of film, the idea of traveling and exploring new places has taken on a new face. A movie's audience may be persuaded to begin traveling and discovering new locations by characters portrayed in films. After seeing the movies, a significant rise in visitors was observed in Vagamon and Peeremedu. The movie plays a vital part in promoting travel to film locations.

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