

Beyond the Screen

Cinema Road: Movie Theaters in South India

by Helen Stauffer and Michael Christopher



Cinema Road in Bombay, Foto Stauffer/Christopher

B*eyond the Screen* invites the reader to have a look beyond the silver screen. It includes topics which are loosely connected with film, like performance, music, dance, visual culture, literature, or television. These ties should not be too vague and the article ought to be somehow connected with the cinema. We start with a journey to the cinema buildings of South India.

Our “Cinema Road” invites you to travel to the movie theaters in South India. There are many cinema buildings all over India. We selected some exemplary, beginning in the capitals of cinema: Bombay and Chennai. Going southwards, to smaller towns, and failed to find some cinemas which are marked on the city maps...! Where have they gone? Some are vanished like the *Gaiety*, the first cinema hall in Chennai (demolished 2010), some are abandoned. While some multiplexes launched in prominent city areas like malls, smaller cinema halls improve their quality and enhance their look. As long as fanclubs celebrate their stars in front of these temples of entertainment, there is still hope, that the rich cinema culture survives.

Quotation:

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The capital of cinema is Bombay. It's the home of Bollywood. You can find many cinema halls all over the city. New multiplexes in malls or enhanced cinemas with more screens like the *Metro*. But we have decided to show you classic cinemas: The *Eros*, opposite to Churchgate, has a long tradition (left) and the *Edward Theatre*, one of the oldest cinema halls in India (right).

The southern counterpart of Bombay is Chennai. Mostly over-
seen, the Tamil film industry is equal to Bollywood. Here you can see the *Albert* in Chennai Egmore. Big posters show you the actual movies. The *Albert* has got a big screen for new releases and a small screen, *Baby Albert*, where older movies run.



Nearly every town has its own cinema. Thus every villager has the possibility to visit a cinema hall nearby. Some movies are specifically filmed for rural areas to attract villages or small cities. Here you can see a cinema in Senji in Tamil Nadu.



Next to a big screen, cinemas in bigger cities often have a small screen hall like here in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Most of these smaller halls have their own entrance and their own name like the *Sree Visakam*.

Multiplex chains enter the cities: *PVR*, *Inox*, or *Big Cinemas* like here in Coimbatore. In front of some cinemas, food stalls are waiting for the cinema-goers.





But on the other hand, many cinemas are closed down. Like the *Plaza* in Bangalore, many cinemas vanishes from the cityscape. In Chennai, for example, some of the oldest cinema halls like the Gaiety are demolished. Instead of flickering images, shopping malls grows, or apartment buildings raises to the sky. But with this development, a bit of culture, of memory, is gone.



In the year 2010, the *Theatre Alankar* in Udagamandalam (Ooty) celebrated the Tamil blockbuster hit *Aayirathil Oruvan*, but just a year later, the theatre was vanished and closed down. Satellite Television is a serious problem for many cinema halls.



In Tamil Nadu, cinema releases comes to Television early so that even DVDs of the latest movies don't come to the shelves of *Landmark* or *Planet M*.

Other theaters are being renovated. They get new equipment (digital projection), or just a new paint outside.

The *Anbe* in Thiruvannamalai looks awesome and modern in his fresh pink and shows the latest Tamil movies in the centre of the town, near the temple.



In Thrissur, the *Sapna* shows Malayalam movies in a brightly new painted building. They hope to attract the spectators with AC, Dolby and a proper look.

An other trend: a modern (plastic) clinker construction. The *Ramba* in Tiruchirapalli. Behind the surface you can discover the old concrete structure.





In Bangalore you can find many star-celebrations in front of cinema halls. Action-movies, love-romances, mythologicals, or star-movies, nearly every film is advertised by big banners and cutouts, decorated with flowers or bells which show the big love of fans for their actors.

Sometimes, the devotion to the film star is more important than the film itself.

Not only in Bangalore, also in Chennai you can find big banners and cutouts of big stars like Karthi. Sometimes these banners are financed by fanclubs.



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