# Cinema as Travelling Medium:

# Picture Time and The Reconfigurations of Movie Publics and Media Technologies

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## Abstract

*Over a period of three weeks, I conducted fieldwork in three states - Chattisgarh, Maharashtra and Haryana, travelling with a truck owned by a company named Picture Time. This company's vision is to provide the cinema hall experience to small towns and villages where there are no conventional cinema halls. They have two operating models, one in which the truck is permanently stationed at one site (a permanent site) and the other, where the truck drives from location to location (event sites). In my fieldwork, I visited one permanent site in Jashpur, Chattisgarh and travelled with two event trucks through Maharashtra and Haryana. In the course of my fieldwork, there are broadly two areas that I wished to study-the first, the creation of this new space – the travelling, rural cinema hall that is equipped with state-of-the-art technological equipment. The second was to contextualize this phenomenon by seeing how it fits into the larger network of media circulation in non-metros.*

## Acknowledgements

## Introduction

The germ of the idea for this project came from a desire to engage with the varying and constantly growing ways in which people consume media in India. A second impulse was to contact Picture Time, a company that exhibits films in mobile digital cinema halls. These portable movie halls are basically trucks that are packed with an inflatable tent, chairs, a screen, a projector, all that is needed to screen a movie. It travels with a diesel operated generator that powers it and is therefore a fully self-sufficient unit. The aim of the company is to provide entertainment to everyone by screening popular new releases in areas of the country where screen density is much lower.

I wanted to gain a better understanding of how the Picture Time phenomenon, that is of erecting temporary cinema halls in unfamiliar surroundings, is involved in the creation of a new kind of space – whether this space be properly considered urban, rural or something in between. A second aim of mine was to study media consumption practises in the areas that I went to in order to get a larger sense of how the Picture Time phenomenon inserts itself into the existing milieu of new media habituations.

## Method

These in broad strokes were the two areas I aimed to study. Going into the study I was very certain of my method. In order to study the character of the cinema hall which was at once high-tech, rural and portable, I would be a participant observer sitting in on the screenings. And in order to get a sense of media consumption practices, I would interview respondents and ask them what were the ways in which they usually watched movies, on what devices did they watch them? how did they source these movies? Apart from cinema what are other forms of entertainment they indulge in, whether they be the circus, melas, bike shows, or travelling magicians.

Once I entered the field, things quickly changed. This feels like an obvious statement to make but I slowly realized that in surroundings as new to me as these were, every minute of the day felt like sociological fieldwork. I found myself noticing seemingly trivial things around me and in turn being self-conscious of the most banal things I said or did. My decision, for example, to not wear a cap on a very sunny day was motivated most of all by concerns of how I would be perceived by others. By contrast, on another day in Navapur, after we had

had a bath at the village borewell, I felt very confident in myself when I wrapped my wet towel around my neck like a scarf to let it dry, just as the crew members around me were doing.

Where I had earlier expected the time in between screenings or interviews to be time off, I found that it was often these moments where something very meaningful took place, whether for the purposes of this project or not. The clearest demonstration I can give of this is from the first site in Jashpur. Unlike the other two sites where I conducted fieldwork, the tent in Jashpur was a more or less permanent fixture. As a result, my accommodation was not in the truck but in a separate room nearby. So, in the middle of a hot day when there was a particularly poorly attended screening, I would go back to my room and relax. I did this a few times. On another occasion, I decided to stay back at the site and sit at the ticketing counter and this was a revelation. Although I had had no strict plans of studying this part of the operation, I was able to be privy to valuable conversation, to which I would have otherwise had no access.

Thus one of my first realizations during the fieldwork was a methodological one. I was to be out in the field for a period of three weeks, and my study was not necessarily something to be carried out purposefully while sitting inside the cinema hall or interviewing people but instead an openness to be ready to accept information from unexpected sources. Thereafter in Jashpur as well as the other sites, I'd hang around the hall even when there wasn't a show on, either chitchatting with the crew members, or answering questions from passers-by curious about the sudden appearance of a giant tent.

With this said, I can categorize the concrete fieldwork I did under three broad categories. The first was sitting in on a screening inside the hall, the second, interviews with audience members after they came out of the hall, and the third was my interaction with people while doing prepublicity. This last activity requires some explanation. In order to get the word out that the Picture Time truck had come to town, they would hire and send out an auto which blared out the venue of the tent in the town/village, the timings of the show and which movie is being screened on a loud speaker attached to the top. As this auto travels around slowly, we would also get out and speak to people and ask them to come for the shows. This gave me the opportunity to speak to a different demographic of people, the ones who did not necessarily show up to the actual screenings. I did not get the chance to speak to people about their media consumption practices on these trips but it gave me a better sense of the village that I was in.

This was especially true in Jalbera, where I spent hours on end doing prepublicity work. It is on one of these trips for instance that I met a man in Matheri, Haryana who argued vehemently that female infanticide was justified because girl children are *paraya dhan.*

This method of doing reception analysis by interviewing people after they come out of the hall is influenced by Ravi Vasudevan who undertakes the task of studying the social and institutional history of cinema. He writes that this research focus is often at odds with the more traditional focus of cinema studies, film interpretation. Vasudevan suggests that the reconciliation between these may be sought in the field of reception studies. "How do audiences understand, interpret and experience films? How does the sensory field relayed by cinema relate to or impinge on our everyday rhythms of being? For example, how does going to the cinema relate to the sensory experience of cities, from the tactility of crowds to intimations of anonymity, the heightened registers of shock and speed, and the experience of simultaneity relayed through modern communication technologies?" (Vasudevan 2003)

Although Vasudevan's focus is on cinema in urban space, it is possible to apply this same lens to study how cinema as a travelling medium situates its spectators. While I do contend that the *Picture Time* trucks are involved the creation of a novel space of sociality, there is a long history of cinema as a travelling medium that one can look to.

**Itinerary**

I set off in a train from Delhi to Ranchi on the 3rd of June and started the fieldwork on the 4th of June in Jashpur, Chattisgarh. I was in Jashpur 'til the 8th of June. On 8th evening I caught a bus from Jashpur to Raigarh and late at night I caught a train from Raigarh to Bombay. I reached Bombay on the 9th of June late at night. On the 11th early in the morning I set off for Palghar and reached Navapur by around lunch time. I travelled with the crew in the truck from Navapur to Kelwa the next day. I was in Kelwa till the 15th evening before I returned to Bombay because the heavy rains meant it was not possible to set up the tent in Kelwa. I reached Delhi at around lunch time on the 19th and spent the rest of the day at home in Delhi. I left for Ambala by bus from ISBT Kashmere Gate the next morning (20th June). I reached Ambala Cant. bus station at about 4:30 PM and immediately got on a bus from there to Naraingarh from there. I spent that day and the next here and then travelled with the truck to the next site, Jalbera. We set off late at night and what was supposed to be a short 40 km drive turned into a 2 and half hour ordeal as we lost our way. We finally made it to Jalbera at about 3:30 AM on 22nd morning. I spent the days from then 'til the 25th of June in Jalbera. I

finally ended my fieldwork on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> after the day's screenings and caught a bus back to Delhi.

## Venues/Sites

I conducted my fieldwork in 3 states. Out of these, one site was a fixed or permanent site while the other two were called 'event sites'. The fixed site in Jashpur was somewhat closer to the traditional cinema hall in that the tent was pitched there permanently and that the shows were ticketed. This is where the similarities ended. Instead of being ensconced in a large building, the cinema hall tent in Jashpur was pitched in an empty parking lot about 2.5 kilometres away from the busiest part of town where the main marketplace and bus station were. Out of the three locations that I visited, Jashpur was the only fixed site, and therefore the only one which had ticketed screenings. The ticket counter was just one plastic table surrounded by plastic chairs being manned by one, or at the busiest of times, two members of the Picture Time crew. Unlike the highly automated or systematized box office systems of most cinema halls, this was in comparison a much more flexible system. Tickets could be booked in one of two ways, either by going there and reserving a seat or by calling the site in-charge. This meant that when it came close to the show timing the site in-charge would be fielding calls constantly. The flexibility in this system also had its pitfalls. In one instance, a group of girls managed to find out the name under which someone else had made payed and made a booking. They ended up being found out very soon as the family who had actually made the booking showed up shortly after. The other way to book a ticket was to go to the venue and do so. At the ticket counter, there was a paper on which a diagram of the seats in the hall was shown, not unlike the diagram of theatre halls shown on booking websites. The person booking would then cross out the seat that they chose.

At event sites the crew would set up the tent for a period of two or three days and would carry out a certain number of screenings which was stipulated by the upper management of the company. A key difference between the fixed sites and the event sites is that the fixed sites have ticketed shows while the event sites allow free entry for the screenings. In the case of the event sites, a company sponsors an event, usually about 3 weeks long, where they pay a certain amount to the company for a certain number of shows. In return, they may fulfil their CSR responsibilities (as in the case of BookASmile, BookMyShow's charity initiative) or

they advertise their brand (as was the case of the Kuber sponsored event in Haryana). The latter two sites where I conducted fieldwork, that is, Palghar in Maharashtra and Ambala District in Haryana, were both events. So in my time in each these districts, the tent was to be pitched in two locations. In Palghar, the two locations were Navapur and Kelwa. Unfortunately, in Kelwa, heavy rains at the time for three days continuously meant it was not possible to set up the tent. In Ambala district, the two locations were Naraingarh and Jalbera.

**The Trucks/The Hall**

The space inside the tent was the same across the different types of sites. It was basically a large hall with inflatable walls and ceiling. The inside of the tent was all black. The chair on which people were seated were plastic chairs and a maximum of 120 people could be seated. The tent could accommodate more people but then they would sit on the floor in front of the first row of seats. In order that people at the back of the hall would be able to see the screen properly, there were large wooden platforms of increasing height, moving from front to back, upon which the chairs would be arranged. There were air conditioners attached on both of the side walls, as a large enclosed tent with a hundred plus people and no air circulation would naturally get quite hot and stuffy. Often even with the ACs running, during the afternoon shows it would get very hot and sweaty.

While these are the larger items that required heavy lifting, the real stuff was the actual technical equipment used for exhibition. The large screen would be unrolled and erected on a stand, and it was flanked by a set of large speakers under, behind and on the sides of it. The projector, according to all the accounts of the crew members, more expensive than all the other equipment in the truck combined, was housed in a room towards the front of the truck. No entry was allowed into this room. The projectionist was the only who could enter the temperature-controlled room. It needed to be always maintained at a certain temperature because the projector would otherwise overheat. This meant, luckily for the projectionist in the crew, that he was the only one who would get to sleep in an air-conditioned room at night while the rest would have to sleep either in the back of the truck or on top of it, depending on the weather.

The projectionist Rajendra in Jashpur was nice enough to show me around the control room in the truck while an evening show was in progress. Towards the front of the truck, there was a narrow space in which there was a computer screen on which he could toggle between a screen showing the details of the film being exhibited(name of the film, how much runtime

remaining etc.) and real time night vision CCTV surveillance footage of the audience watching the screen. Within this narrow space, there was a door that opened to an even smaller area where the projector was housed. As soon as I opened this door to look inside, I felt a gush of cool air. As Rajendra explained to me, this is because the projector room needs to be maintained at 18°C for it to function properly.

At the event sites, erecting the tent was a three-hour process and dismantling it would take up to five hours, and would often go on till late into the night. It was a marvel to watch as they somehow managed to pack up a hall that could seat over a 100 people into the back of a truck. The first step was to take out the speakers, the screen and other technical equipment used for the screening. The screen would be rolled up and tucked cosily into a long compartment that ran right through the length of the truck. Then the chairs would be taken outside the tent and stacked one on top of the other. The next step was to dismantle the steps on which the chairs were arranged, fold their legs and stack them in the back of the truck. The next step was the most physically taxing, it required each one to stand at different corners of the tent and lift the truss that held up the tent. Only when all the vertical beams were held up at the same time, could one level be taken out. This process needed to be repeated three times before all that remained of the truss were the horizontal beams that held up the roof of the tent. After this process was over, when there was nothing left holding the tent up, the final step of the packing process could commence. This was the deflating of the tent. This needed to be done painstakingly slowly. First, the tent would take a good half an hour to 45 minutes to deflate completely after the blower was disconnected. Then, the two long edges of the tent needed to be folded inward to the centre line and finally one of these folds needed to be lifted and put on top of the other. Every fold required each of the crew members to work in tandem and lift it together. By the time of the last fold, with the increased number of layers, the weight to be lifted was immense, and it would get even heavier if the tent had gotten wet because of rain. After the folding was done, the tent needed to be rolled. Before the rolling could start, the crew members would have to first make sure there was no air trapped in the tent which would make rolling impossible. So, they would walk in sets of three and stomp on the now long strip of folded tent to squeeze out the air that remained in the tent. Finally they would roll the tent. This again required every crew member's strength. Each incremental roll would be punctuated by a minute's pause before the next and then loud grunts and shouts before resuming.

The two types of sites I visited, that is event sites and permanent sites, differed not only in this respect (that the permanent sites were fixed) but importantly, also in the nature of the town/village in which they were located. Thus my analysis of media circulation and consumption practices will also vary bearing in mind this difference. Of the five sites that I studied, the sites in Palghar (Navapur and Kelwa) as well as one out of the two of the sites in Ambala (Jalbera) were villages. The other site in Ambala was located on the outer edges of Naraingarh, which is a small town. Naraingarh and Jashpur were definitely larger settlements. Having said this both of these were still small towns nowhere near the size of large cities or metropolises. Perhaps the reason that the company was able to financially sustain a fixed site in Jashpur is precisely because it can properly be called a small town, with a population of almost 30,000 as per the 2012 census. This meant that they are able to consistently have well-attended screenings with enough audiences coming to watch the new releases.

## Who Came to see the Films?

The kind of people who came to the shows varied across the different locations, but there are certain generalizations that can be made. Across the board there were fewer women than men who came to attend shows. The most skewed case was in Ambala District where I did not see even a single young woman who came to attend a screening. There were young girls and older women who came, but not a single one that looked to be between the ages of around 20 to 45. This difference in audience composition was not nearly as exaggerated in the other 2 states but it was there nonetheless.  In Palghar as well as in Ambala, there were a lot of young children attending. The fact that the shows were free in these places meant that if space permitted, young children would attend all 5 screenings of the same film on all the days that the tent was there. This allowed their parents to let them out of the house and not have to take of them at home. In the evening shows, when adults would come for a show after a day's work, the children who had seen the movie multiple times would be removed from the hall. This was often not as straightforward a task as it might seem. Inside the hall, the children would hide behind chairs to avoid being thrown out. Even after being found they had to be chased and physically thrown out to make space for others to sit. In between shows, the children would wreak havoc. A group of young boys in Naraingarh were particularly unruly, they threatened to cut the tent with a blade if the show did not begin when they wanted it to. Later when no one was watching, one of them started to urinate on the tent. All of this was put to a stop when one of the crew members told the leader of their gang that they would have to pay for any damage done to the tent.

In Palghar, the crew adopted a different strategy to control the racket that the children made inside the hall. The children in Navapur were understandably thrilled to have the chance to watch a movie on the big screen. Added to this was the bonus that the hall was air conditioned. These two factors meant that as soon as the crew opened the tent for public entry, a group of 60-70 children who were eagerly waiting outside poured in screaming and shouting, searching for the seats closest to the AC vents. I was inside the hall at this point, sitting in the cool and quiet hall along with some of the crew members who had finished their part of the work for the afternoon show that was due to begin then. I was taken by alarm when there was a huge cacophony of screams and a literal stampede at the entrance of the tent the minute the clock struck 2 PM. By the time the children finally sat down in their seats, it was nearly 2:30, but they were still talking amongst each other loudly. This meant the show could not begin. The projectionist started to play the film in hopes that the children would quieten down once the movie began, but no such luck. Finally, they stopped the movie after about 15 minutes and projected on the big screen the feed of a CCTV camera pointing at the audience that was affixed above the screen. Over this video feed, the site in-charge Anupam's exasperated voice spoke through the loudspeaker and said that this camera was recording the audience and that if any child misbehaved it would be caught on camera, that they would stop the screening and everyone would be told to go home.

The group of boys in Naraingarh were even more difficult to control. We were clearly in their territory and they made it known to us. Not only was the audience in both Naraingarh and Jalbera predominantly male, there was a clear segmentation in the seating arrangement as well. The young and middle-aged men would sit at the rows towards the back and would scold the boys to maintain some semblance of order and quiet in the hall where we couldn't. Immediately in front of them sat the slightly younger adolescent boys. After this point, moving closer to the screen, there was a clear divide between male and female audience members on either side of the aisle. On one side of the aisle sat the little boys and on the other, the little girls and their mothers and grandmothers. The first two rows were reserved exclusively for the elderly men in the village, the *taaus* who all wore white *kurta pyjamas,* and could not see very well and walked feebly.

The atmosphere in the Jashpur hall was quite different from what I have described above. While still totally different from the urban theatres that I am used to, it was not as wild an environment. This was in large part because of the fact that the shows were ticketed here and not anybody could simply walk in. In my time in Jashpur, the film being screened was

*Bharat*, the new Salman Khan film that released to great expectation on Eid. For the first time in my life, I attended a first day first show screening on the morning of 5th June. This first morning show at 11 AM on a sweltering day proved to be a bit underwhelming but I was able to take in the full experience of the buzz and excitement surrounding a first day screening on the same night, when a huge crowd gathered for the 8 o'clock show. It was only in Jashpur, out of all the sites that I visited in my three weeks in the field, that I saw whole families coming together to watch the film. In one case, a large group of 14 people- three families who were neighbours (all of whom I interviewed together!) came for a night show. Unlike the other sites I visited, there were very few children who came for shows here. The audience composition was also largely different depending on the time of the day. The 11 AM and 2 PM shows were attended mostly by men, while the evening and night shows had more of a mix.

On the whole, women were fewer in number and more reluctant to talk to me than men when I approached them. This combined with the fact that more men than women came to the shows meant that I had a lot more male respondents than female. This is a weakness in my study. I was on different occasions turned away by both men and women when I approached them for an interview. These cases were few and far between however and most people I asked spoke to me happily. One fact that I did not consider before going into the field was the difficulty in catching people to interview immediately after getting out of the cinema hall. I only needed to think back to my own state of mind after exiting the theatre to understand their rush to get up and leave. So, in some cases I would make my introductions to people before they went into the hall and ask them beforehand if I could interview them after the show, and this helped a bit.

## Findings

Perhaps the most salient finding through the course of my fieldwork is that despite the fact that the places that I went to were not metropolitan cities, and did not have cinema halls, most of the people were anything but deprived of access to films and media. This could not have been the case even a few years ago without the rapid spread of the reach of the internet and associated services. This then emerges as the central area of study.

In order to study this fundamental shift, access to the Picture Time trucks served a dual purpose for me. The first was that I was able to observe the ways in which the cinematic event was different when the cinema hall was transplanted into unfamiliar surroundings; and the second was that it provided me with a ready set of respondents and a convenient way of posing questions about how they usually watch films or consume media. I elaborate on these below.

## Vernacular Modes of Engagement

The *Picture Time* cinema halls not being a conventional site for the exhibition of films, and therefore not attached to set ideas of cultural practice presented itself as a media form whose finer points of protocol had not yet come to take shape. "Technologies are unstable things. The meanings attached to technologies, their technical functions, and the social uses to which they are put are not an inevitable consequence but something worked out over time in the context of considerable cultural debate… Debates about what media are, and what they might do, are particularly intense at moments when these technologies are introduced and when the semiotic economies them are not stable but in the process of being established." (Larkin; 3)

In trying to get a clearer picture of the ways in which the space created by the Picture Time trucks was new, I sought to understand how the atmosphere inside the hall was different because the audience members were not all seasoned movie goers, attuned to the finer points of urban cinema hall behaviour protocol, accustomed and therefore indifferent to the technological splendour of the large screen and the immersive surround sound. How was audience behaviour different when these codes of conduct, for instance of maintaining silence during the film or of standing during the national anthem(*Bharat* had a scene in which the national anthem plays) or of ways of sitting in one's chair, were not observed or enforced or standardized. I was able to get an immediate sense of this strictly enforced code of conduct in

cinema halls when I went to watch the recent *Aladdin* remake on a break day in Mumbai in the middle of my fieldwork. My uncle and I arrived a bit late for the show and were struggling to find our seat in the darkness as the movie had already started. As we were slowly making our way to our seats three people angrily voiced their displeasure with us because we had blocked the screen for a matter of a few seconds as we moved past in front of them. By contrast, on one day in the field in Naraingarh, an 11 o'clock show of *Chhoriyan Chhoron Se Kam Nahi Hoti* (CCSKNH) could not take place because the KDM file required to play the movie had not come through. But the audience had already been allowed in and made to take their seats. Finally, after about 40 minutes of just playing trailers, it was announced that the screening would not take place because the KDM had still not come. People were not upset about this, they just asked when the next show would be and left without complaint. Similarly, in Jashpur, people had come to the hall on time and paid money to come see the 11 AM screening of Bharat. But the show did not start 'til 12 because the hall had not filled up. People in the audience were a bit annoyed and worried that they might miss the start of the India vs. South Africa cricket match, but everyone seemed to understand that the company could only carry on with their operation if enough people came and bought tickets for the show. And so, people kept coming in and taking their seats while the ones who came on time waited patiently for an hour in the hall talking among themselves until there were enough butts on seats to begin the show. I remember thinking that if something like this happened at a movie screening I went for, I would be furious, and would think something along the lines of "these people have no value for my time."

Another way in which the atmosphere inside the hall was different was the way people conducted themselves inside the hall, their behaviour, their way of sitting, talking etc. Often, when a show was not sold out, audience members would adjust their chairs so that they could orient themselves towards their companions, such that they could be able to discuss and talk among themselves. Sometimes, they would even turn the chairs in front of them around so that they could stretch their legs, recline back into their seats and enjoy the movie comfortably. This is another illustration of how the strict code of conduct and also the moral posturing that goes with attending a movie in an urban cinema hall has not found its way into this space.

Even the preoccupation with being silent during the runtime of the movie was absent in the Picture Time theatres. People constantly talked loudly in many shows, but most of the time this was not a source of irritation for others. On the contrary it added to the *mahaul*, as one

respondent in Jashpur told me when I asked if the constant chatter in the hall bothered her at all. Often there would be children who would scream and shout at seemingly the slightest of things, a particularly powerful punch by Salman Khan, a romantic kissing scene in *Bucket List*. In CCSKNH, the movie begins with traditional Haryanvi instrumental music. In one particular show in Jalbera, the entire hall began to clap to the beat of this music that played in the opening credits. In all these instances, no one tried to shut these people up or ask them to "please keep it down" because it did not negatively affect the movie watching experience at all, indeed it added to the excitement and the carnival environment.

In Jashpur, the movie being screened in my time there was *Bharat* in which there was a scene where the national anthem plays and all the characters in the scene stand up and belt it out. I sat through numerous screenings of the film in the 5 days I spent there. In most shows just a handful of people in the hall stood up while most people continued sitting. In some shows nobody stood up at all and in one evening show that I attended almost everyone stood, but the impression I got, both from observation and from asking a few people about it in my interviews with them(when I was able to gather the courage to do so) was that it was hardly a big deal or anything to give any thought to after the event. Interestingly, on one occasion I was sitting outside the hall at the ticket counter in Jashpur as the film was playing. The volume of the sound system was high enough inside the hall that one could easily hear the loud noises or the music even when outside. There was a group of 5 of us (crew members and me) sitting around the table when suddenly one of them noticed that the national anthem was playing. Everyone around the table immediately stopped what they were doing and stood in attention until it ended.

## Media Consumption Practices

The second purpose for me was borne out by my interactions and interviews with people outside the actual cinema hall. It provided me with a ready set of respondents and a convenient way of posing questions about how they would otherwise watch films or consume media. This proved to be a much more complex area of study of which I was only able to scratch the surface.

In my interviews with audience members immediately after they came out of the hall, I had a basic series of questions that I asked them. In some cases, they would answer cryptically or cut the interview off, clearly eager for it to be over and done with, but I was also lucky to

catch some respondents who were generous enough with their time to give me detailed answers to my questions. The questions that I asked were posed with the basic intent of trying to get a clearer picture of how, where and how often people watched movies in the area.

Based on my interviews, what seemed to be common across the three states where I conducted fieldwork was that the mobile phone was the device on which most people consumed media. For a large number of respondents, even if they had a computer or television set at home, the mobile phone was the primary media consumption device. Many said, especially in Ambala District, that they had bought their TV years ago and it was now just lying in their homes gathering dust. In Ambala especially, besides movies, one of the main things that men especially watched was Kabaddi and WWE wrestling on their phones on Hotstar. In Palghar as well people said they watched movies mainly on their phones. Here, everyone I interviewed said it was difficult to download movies from online because the connectivity wasn't always good and also it ended up being expensive for them to download large files over data. They'd transfer movies to each other on memory cards and watch them on their phones.

In Jashpur there was a lot more variation in the answers I was given. There were some people who had DTH satellite dishes installed in their homes, there were also people who watched movies mainly on their laptops, there was also one woman I interviewed who used a projector to project movies on a wall at home. But even here, easily the majority of people used the mobile phone as their principal media consumption device.


**Virality**

Another development in recent years that has no doubt shaped media consumption practises in India is the low cost of mobile data plans provided by network operators. This has come about due to the intense competition between network providers, especially since Reliance Jio's entrance into the space in 2016. This development has radically changed the conditions of access to the internet for a huge population of people in India.

Where before one could think of media as something that circulates, today it can be thought of as a viral phenomenon. Ravi Sundaram writes that the metaphor of the virus is useful in understanding the ways that media circulation takes place because it "suggests parasitic attachment to larger structures, rapid replication, disruption and transformation of official

networks through non-linear communication." (Sundaram; 126) The virus embraces the workaround, the jugaad, and allows for the recognition of new spaces of media habituations and parallel distribution circuits. The metaphor of the virus is also useful in this context because it captures the idea that media spreads, proliferates, reproduces in ways that resist any kind of prediction and control.

These circuits are driven by a range of low-cost infrastructures that, from the outside, tend to remain away from view. This can be demonstrated by the fact that, throughout my experience in the field not a single respondent said that they were starved of media entertainment, or that they weren't able to gain access to a movie they wanted to watch. They always found a way, through these non-linear, parallel distribution circuits. In this context, what is the significance of the fact that, in my time in the field I was not able to properly excavate any of these pirate channels of media distribution, besides only the very straightforward ones. What could this fact mean for my study? Brian Larkin, in *Signal and Noise* writes that there are two types of infrastructure, which facilitate the movement of matter- hard and soft infrastructure. Hard infrastructure refers to the actual material and technical apparatus which facilitates movement, whether these be the wires through which electricity travels or the telephone towers which transmit signal. This is what comes to mind when we think of infrastructure, the hard, physical, material infrastructure. Larkin draws our attention to the importance of soft infrastructure. Set apart from hard infrastructure such as cables and antennae, soft infrastructure refers to ideas of cultural practice, competencies or other sorts of engagements that go beyond the technical. Larkin writes that *infrastructure*, in his usage, "refers to this totality of both technical and cultural systems that create institutionalized structures whereby goods of all sorts circulate, connecting and binding people into collectivities." (Larkin; 6)

My explanation for not being able to easily uncover these circuits of pirate media circulation is that access to them required a cultural competence that I simply did not possess as an outsider. This discussion on the totality of hard and soft infrastructure ties in to the larger point that practices of media consumption, whether in the cinema hall, or on the handheld smartphone is greater than just the films, it includes forms of cultural competence and ritual mastery that are linked to social practice and are therefore highly variable.


**Sensations of Cinema**

Drawing from the work of Amit Rai, an inference that I have been able to draw from my experience in the field is that this new form of media delivery is part of a patterned transformation in new media habituations. While it is certainly true that there is something quite novel about the form factor of the mobile cinema hall, it can at the same time be recognized as being made possible by the potentials of digital technologies of distribution and replication. This technological potential interfaces in very specific ways with what Rai calls the political philosophy of *jugaad*.

"That word, repeatedly featured in people's self- presentation of their meshed media practices and work- related strategies in everyday life, is a reference to a sometimes elegant, but always makeshift way of getting around obstacles." (Rai 2019; 2)

I was able to observe this jugaadu ethic in a number of exchanges during my time in the field. Two examples of this spring to mind immediately. In Navapur, a coastal village in Palghar, Maharashtra, a young man approached one of the crew members after the night show had ended and asked surreptitiously if he could get a copy of the film on a pen drive. He was dismayed when he was told that the file being played was not in ordinary video file format but was encrypted and required a KDM key. A KDM or Key Delivery Message is a file that is sent by the CBFC to cinemas to unlock/decrypt their content for authorized playback in theatres. In Kelwa, another village slightly further inland in Palghar, I asked a boy where and how he usually watched movies. He said he watched them on his phone. When I asked where he sourced these movies from, he said that he couldn't download them from the internet because it was too expensive to download it over the mobile data network and there was no Wi-Fi in the village so that was not an option either. He told me that him and his friends all have some contacts in the neighbouring Boisar who have Wi-Fi in their homes who can download movies and they all get their movies from these friends.

These nonlinear experiences of Bollywood are the ones that often go unnoticed. Amit Rai's work is an attempt to study precisely these patterned trajectories of the varied experiences of cinema that do not fit the linear script. The linear script here may be understood as the official channels through which films are meant to find their way to people's eyes and ears. First, even before the release of the film comes the work of publicity. The first task is to generate a buzz about the release. This is often most successful when there is some combination of a star-studded cast, an acclaimed director, and attachment to a large production house. In some cases, for the biggest stars, all that is required to build up the hype and fanfare is their name

on the poster, as was the case for *Bharat*, the Salman Khan starrer that released when I was in Jashpur.

YouTube is now the main channel through which content for the movie is disseminated, whether they be trailers, snippets of music videos or what has recently come into fashion, flashy lyric videos. The next stage is the theatrical release, and if there is enough hype around the release, first day first show is a significant event. Following this comes the assessment of the film's performance based on its opening weekend collection numbers. Then depending on the film's performance in terms of box office numbers, the film may continue to be exhibited in theatres from anywhere between a week to, in some cases, a year. The next step, is the DTH (direct to home) delivery services which include Tata Sky, Dish TV etc. and the slowly disappearing cable companies, or alternatively, what has picked up in recent years, the partnering of films with online partners, with Amazon's Prime Video being the most dominant in India. This is a rough sketch of a linear experience of Bollywood. Amit Rai's is an attempt to outline the much hazier contours of the non-linear experiences of cinema, the ones that are rooted in practices of jugaad.

In this climate of seemingly unchecked piracy, concerns about property regimes are now secondary to questions of access. Piracy has radically altered the contours of media circulation and consumption. Ravi Sundaram writes that post-colonial piracy "works more through dense local networks of exchange and face-to-face contact, rather than individual online downloads."(Sundaram; 125) The most common answer I received from respondents when I asked them where they sourced their movies from, was either that they streamed them on online sites or that they downloaded them off the internet. Only a few respondents told me about the social networks (their 'contacts') through which they were able to procure the movies.

Unlike the top down story of the linear Bollywood experience detailed above, assemblage theory aims to provide a bottom up framework to account for the complexity of everyday practices of media consumption. In *Jugaad Time*, Rai makes "the case for an ecological encounter with social practice that is itself best understood as a pragmatic, ad hoc, networked approach to an obstacle." (Rai 2019; xii)

The cases that he describes in his book speak of highly innovative practises of hacking in order to procure pirated films. In my observation in the field, even if these jugaad hacking practices were taking place at the level of sophistication that he describes, I was not able to

uncover them. All the same, I found that people did still find a way to watch the movies they wanted to. And they did so through networks that are often overlooked when looking through the conventional top down view. Its ad hoc and improvised nature necessarily means that it follows a path from producer to consumer that is dependent on a range of contingencies and is therefore not linear and unidirectional, but dependent on highly diverse factors, on the infrastructure in place, both hard and soft.

**Cinema as Travelling Medium**

The importance of small towns and villages to the film industry cannot be overstated. Even if it is the big cities that are shown as the glamorous destinations in films, a large proportion of Bollywood's audience and revenue comes from non-urban populations. The realization of this fact is reflected in the rise in recent years, in the number of Bollywood movies especially, that seek to tell stories of small-town India. This development is a stark departure from the past, when travelling cinemas would go the countryside either through the railways, or in cinema cars and show movies to the peasant population in villages. These mobile film units would exhibit 'useful cinema', films that sought to educate the peasant. Contained in this instructional mode of address, there was an implicit conception of the figure of the peasant, the rural subject who needed to be educated, and with whom the state sought a developmental engagement.

The perception of the rural spectator is now different, a level of visual or filmic literacy is now assumed. *Picture Time* screens the same films that are running in theatres in cities. This claim may be up for debate however; out of three films that were being exhibited in my time travelling with the *Picture Time* trucks, two of them (*Bucket List and CCSKNH*) contained obvious and overt social messaging about feminism. The choice of screening these films is therefore interesting because it might show that this new incarnation of travelling cinema is still tethered to its past as an instructional medium.

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Taking the institution of cinema as a textual system as well as a spatial system, I seek to understand the shaping of lived spaces by cinema as a cultural practice. I also seek to understand how this urban imagination of the cinema compares with the imagination of the

travelling cinema and how these differences present themselves in actual movie going practices.  Second, moving outward from the study of the physical space or rather, the spatiality of the moving cinema hall, I also seek to understand the conditions in which this phenomenon takes place, or on the milieu into which it inserts itself. More substantially, I seek to understand the actual arrangements of existing media consumption practises that are in operation for people in a given area. Further, what are the factors, the infrastructural constraints that determine these arrangements and how these compare across the three states that I studied. By briefly considering the history of cinema as a travelling medium, I ask the question, how does this current form of mobile cinema, equipped with hi-tech capabilities construct the subject of the rural spectator. Has it moved beyond simply a developmental engagement?

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I have tried to stress the point that insists through all the others, that cinema as public form, and the logic of exhibition practices cannot be understood separately. They need to be considered together, how different genres and film circuits target particular audience segments, how ideas of cultural practice can determine access to media. By drawing on the work of Ravi Vasudevan I have tried to join these questions by speaking to audiences and doing a reception analysis.

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