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# CINEMATIC CITYSCAPES: EXPLORING THE CITY OF THRISSUR IN POPULAR MALAYALAM MOVIES

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## Abstract

Thrissur, located in the southern Indian state of Kerala, has been a recurrent setting and exploration subject in popular Malayalam cinema. Often referred to as the "Cultural Capital of Kerala," filmmakers capitalize on the city's vibrant cultural scene, characterized by festivals, art forms, and historical landmarks, to create immersive cinematic experiences. This research paper delves into the dynamic interplay between Thrissur City and its depiction in cinematic narratives, investigating how the city's distinct cultural, social, and historical elements are harnessed to enrich storytelling. Filmmakers infuse their works with authenticity and local flavor, allowing audiences to engage with stories on a deeper level.

The movies chosen for the study are Pranchiyettan and The Saint (2010) and Punyalan Agarbattis (2013). The research paper investigates how the city's unique sociocultural features impact character interactions and relationships, such as its close-knit communities and distinctive urban layout. It discusses how these dynamics contribute to storytelling, creating intricate plot developments and character arcs that reflect the essence of Thrissur's society. It examines how the city's heritage sites and historical events are

integrated into film plots, often providing contexts for characters' journeys and experiences. This research paper sheds light on the intricate relationship between Thrissur City and popular Malayalam cinema. As the city evolves and cinema continues to transform, the exploration of Thrissur in popular Malayalam films remains a reflection of the dynamic interplay between culture, storytelling, and urban landscapes.

**Keywords:** Thrissur city, Malayalam cinema, cultural exploration, narrative backdrop, social dynamics.

## Introduction

Thrissur, situated in the southern Indian state of Kerala, has recurrently served as a prominent setting and thematic focus within popular Malayalam cinema. Acknowledged as the "Cultural Capital of Kerala," filmmakers strategically leverage the city's vibrant cultural milieu, characterized by many festivals, diverse art forms, and historical landmarks, to construct deeply immersive cinematic narratives. Notably, Malayalam cinema has

frequently utilized Thrissur as a pivotal backdrop, an integral element that significantly shapes the essence of various films. This scholarly inquiry thoroughly examines the intricate relationship between Thrissur City and its representation in cinematic storytelling, meticulously exploring how the city's unique cultural, social, and historical facets are purposefully incorporated to enhance the depth of narratives. Filmmakers adeptly infuse their creations with an air of authenticity and indigenous essence, facilitating a heightened connection between audiences and the cinematic tales woven within the city's vibrant tapestry. This research focuses on analyzing select films, namely *Pranchiyettan and The Saint* (2010) and *Punyalan Agarbattis* (2013). The nuanced interplay between Thrissur's multifaceted elements and their portrayal in cinematic artistry will be unraveled in this paper.

Cinema is often considered a mirror that reflects a particular region or community's culture, values, and ethos. Malayalam cinema, one of India's most vibrant and distinct film industries, is renowned for its storytelling and ability to showcase Kerala's rich cultural diversity. Located in the southwestern state of Kerala, Thrissur holds a special place in the cultural fabric of India. Often referred to as the "Cultural Capital of Kerala," this city boasts a rich heritage known for its temple festivals, classical art forms, and traditional rituals. The city is a melting pot of various artistic and cultural expressions, making it an ideal backdrop for a movie exploring tradition and modernity's intricacies.

*Pranchiyettan and the Saint*, a 2010 Malayalam satirical comedy film penned, helmed, and produced by Ranjith, revolves around the fictitious discourse between C. E. Francis, colloquially known as Pranchiyettan, a prominent Thrissur-based businessman portrayed by the veteran actor Mammooty, and St. Francis of Assisi,

played by Jesse Fox Allen. Regarded as a pinnacle of comedic brilliance in Malayalam cinema, the film has garnered a cult following since its release, earning acclaim as a significant contributor to the Malayalam New Wave movement. Addressing the intricate social fabric and the pursuit of acclaim within the closely-knit Thrissur society, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* navigates the complexities of societal stratification. Meanwhile, *Punyalan Agarbattis*, a 2013 Malayalam satirical comedy film authored, co-produced, and directed by Ranjith Sankar, featuring Jayasurya and Nyla Usha in lead roles, embarks on a journey through the entrepreneurial vigor and unwavering fortitude of Thrissur's denizens, epitomized by the determined businessman Joy Thakkolkaran.

These cinematic pieces captivate audiences with their storytelling and offer profound insights into Thrissur's customs, festivals, and distinctive lifestyles. Through their artistic representation, both films encapsulate Thrissur's cultural richness, everyday life, and ethos, thereby enhancing the audience's understanding and appreciation of the city's heritage."

The plot of *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* centers around Pranchiyettan, who is a wealthy and prominent businessman in a small town called Thrissur. Despite his success and financial affluence, Pranchiyettan suffers from a deep sense of insecurity and self-doubt regarding his name, which leads him to seek validation from others. His encounter with a saint at a crucial moment tells him that he will achieve greatness in his life and sets off a series of events that challenge Pranchiyettan's perception of success and happiness. The movie delves into Pranchiyettan's journey of self-discovery and introspection as he grapples with his inner demons and tries to find his true purpose in life. The supporting characters in

the film, such as Pranchiyettan's childhood friend Dr. Jose, his love interest Padmashri, and the various people he encounters along the way, add depth to the narrative and contribute to the exploration of themes such as ambition, identity, and the quest for meaning.

In the movie *Punyalan Agarbattis*, the plot revolves around the life of Joy Thakkolkaran, a struggling businessman trying to succeed in his agarbatti (incense stick) business. After facing numerous challenges and setbacks, Joy decides to take matters into his own hands and campaign against the corrupt system. Throughout the movie, we witness Joy's determination and resilience in fighting against the odds and his unwavering belief in bringing about change. The movie also features a range of exciting characters, such as Joy's wife, Anu, who supports him in his endeavors, and his friends, who stand by him throughout his journey. These characters add depth and complexity to the storyline, creating a compelling narrative that explores the themes of entrepreneurship, social injustice, and the power of unity.

The city of Thrissur is portrayed as not only a geographical location but a cultural and lifestyle hub in many Malayalam movies. Through these two movies, the essence of Thrissur is vividly depicted, capturing the unique characteristics that define this city. The culture of Thrissur, famed for its rich tradition and ethnic diversity, is portrayed through various aspects such as vibrant festival celebrations, unique art forms like Kudamattam, and local cuisine. Thrissur has a rich architectural heritage with landmarks like Vadakkumnathan Temple, Shakthan Thampuran Palace, Swaraj Round, Shakthan Market, and numerous churches. The films showcase the grandeur of these structures, underscoring their significance in the city's cultural identity by including them in these movies.

The lifestyle of the people is highlighted in these movies, showcasing their simplicity, warm hospitality, and strong religious beliefs. Joy Thakkolkaran and Chiramel Francis, the significant characters in the movies, are deeply rooted in the city's ethos, and their interactions reflect the close-knit community bonds for which Thrissur is celebrated.

In analyzing the socio-economic structure of Thrissur city, it is evident that both *Punyalan Agarbattis* and *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* depict different facets of the social and economic makeup of the city. *Punyalan Agarbattis* highlights Thrissur's entrepreneurial spirit, focusing on the protagonist's journey of starting and expanding his own business. This reflects the city's reputation as a thriving commercial hub known for its traders and industrialists. On the other hand, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* shed light on the hierarchical social structure and the challenges faced by the lower strata of society. The film portrays the protagonist's desire for societal recognition and subsequent struggle to achieve it. This depiction of the class divide in Thrissur City showcases the importance placed on social status and its impact on individuals' lives.

The movies also provide insights into the dominant occupations of the people in Thrissur city. Both movies showcase the significant role of business and agriculture in the city's culture and lifestyle. In *Punyalan Agarbattis*, the protagonist, Joy Thakkolkaran, is an ambitious businessman who aspires to establish his agarbatti (incense sticks) manufacturing company. Through his entrepreneurial journey, the movie sheds light on the thriving business culture in Thrissur, where trade and commerce play a pivotal role in the local economy. Similarly, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* revolves around the life of Pranchi, a wealthy businessman from Thrissur who is widely respected. Pranchiyettan achieved

financial success and prominence within the local community due to his business acumen and shrewd dealings in trade. This movie highlights the dominance of the business community in the city, which is still prevalent, and the affluent lifestyle it affords.

An insight into the deep-rooted connection between Thrissur city and religion/ spirituality is also carved into these movies. In *Punyalan Agarbattis*, the protagonist's journey into the agarbatti (incense stick) industry showcases this religious symbol's importance and highlights the city's thriving religious economy. The movie elucidates the significance of festivals like Thrissur Pooram, where spirituality and religion intertwine to create a mesmerizing spectacle of devotion and culture. Similarly, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* delve into the protagonist's quest for social recognition and spiritual redemption, ultimately emphasizing Thrissur's inclination towards religious rituals and beliefs. The film depicts traditional practices, such as visiting temples, performing rituals, and seeking divine intervention, as integral aspects of the city's identity. These movies shed light on Thrissur's close association with religion and spirituality, showcasing how faith intertwines with the city's culture, lifestyle, and essence.

The Malayalam spoken in Thrissur has a distinct dialect and is integral to the city's cultural identity. The Thrissur dialect, often called "Thrissur Slang," is characterized by its rich, colloquial expressions, unique intonations, and a touch of humor. *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* and *Punyalan Agarbattis* feature this dialect prominently, adding authenticity to the characters and the narrative. Thrissur slang uses a lot of local idioms, proverbs, and cultural references like "Gaddi, which means buddy, enthused- what is up? Ishta-friend, pada- died, pedal-super". This lends

a cultural depth to the dialogues and helps the audience connect with the characters and their surroundings. The use of local colloquialisms and expressions immerses the audience in the cultural milieu of Thrissur.

In examining the themes explored and the cinematic styles used in the movies *Punyalan Agarbattis* and *Pranchiyettan and the Saint*, it is evident that both films delve into the complexities of cultural identity and societal norms in Thrissur city. While *Punyalan Agarbattis* primarily focuses on entrepreneurship and the challenges a small business owner faces, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* delves into the notions of social status and the pursuit of recognition in a conservative society. Both movies employ comic elements and satire to convey their messages, with *Punyalan Agarbattis* presenting a light-hearted approach and *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* adopting a more introspective tone.

Cinematically, *Punyalan Agarbattis* showcases vibrant visuals, lively music, and fast-paced editing to create an energetic atmosphere. In contrast, *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* embrace a more subdued color palette and deliberate pacing to reflect its contemplative nature. Overall, both films successfully capture the distinct essence of Thrissur city, albeit through different lenses and stylistic choices. Both films not only provide entertainment but also serve as a reflection of the vibrant cultural heritage of Thrissur.

To conclude, the films *Punyalan Agarbattis*, *Pranchiyettan*, and *The Saint* exemplify how cinema can effectively promote and preserve cultural heritage. Through these movies, the city of Thrissur and its unique culture, lifestyle, and essence are aesthetically depicted, allowing audiences to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the region's traditions, rituals, and values. Moreover, these films showcase the exquisiteness of the city's

iconic landmarks. By highlighting these aspects, cinema not only preserves the cultural heritage of Thrissur but also promotes it to a broader audience, both within and outside of Kerala. Furthermore, the cinematic medium vividly portrays the essence and atmosphere of the city, immersing viewers in its ambiance and allowing them to experience the richness and vibrancy of its cultural tapestry. Overall, cinema holds immense power in promoting and preserving cultural heritage, offering a means through which traditions, values, and historical elements can be showcased and cherished. *Punyalan Agarbattis* and *Pranchiyettan & the Saint* offer a compelling narrative that captivates viewers and enhances our understanding of this captivating city.

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