CINEMATIC TOURSCAPES: IDEOLOGY OF TOURISM IN
CHARLIE (2016, MALAYALAM)

Jyotika
Research Scholar
Department of Media Studies
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology,
Hisar, Haryana

Umesh Arya
Professor
Department of Media Studies
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology,
Hisar, Haryana

Abstract

How a film promotes tourism by representing and picturing a travelling protagonist. Since advent of cinema people have been provided with opportunities to witness the unvisited world in motion. Today film has the potential to create an image of a place in the minds of people; it offers a visual spectacle and a spectator watching a movie shifts between two modes, narrative mode and spectacular mode.

Malayalam cinema has always been acknowledged for its cinematic experiments. Coming of digital format has multiplied the opportunity to a greater extent. New filmmakers are now experimenting with issues never dealt before. The cut down in cost has secured the fear of meeting the expenditure to sales (at release). Rather minimum funds are allowing filmmakers especially young ones to move ahead with the 'concept'. A recent example of such experiment in Malayalam film industry is the film Charlie, directed by Martin Prakkat. This paper unfolds the relation of tourism & films.

Divided mainly in two parts, the research paper explores the idea and revolves around the denotations and connotations like: tourism, cinema, flaneur, tourism industry, traveller & tourist, global nomad, visitability and place marketing, mentioned in the course of history by authors, cinema readers, scholars and researchers. The second part of the paper digs deep in to the study of the film *Charlie* and explores the protagonist as a mere tourist or a traveller. The paper reconnoitres how film caters to travel industry through its potential of 'recreation'. The film gives the viewer a travelling desire.
The theoretical framework of the research paper is to explore the politics of travel.
Keywords:- Tourism, cinema, flaneur, tourism industry, traveller & tourist, global nomad, visitability, place marketing.

120

Indian Scholar

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Fascination for the unseen is not something new to mankind. Expeditions done during the course of history have witnessed the rise of significant historical events. Discovering of places and people colonization and even the discovery of Earth is round and not flat, is the result of travel. Travelling has always had a kind of magnetic pull towards people. A tourist makes a journey with the comfort of a home. He is always at home even when away. Traveller unlike tourist is a countercultural being, he makes journey all on his own, and the backpacker tourist is a version of the traveller. This paper explores various aspects of tourism, the influence of cinema on tourism and also on how tourism utilizes cinema as an instrument in promoting destinations. It further focuses on the recent award winning Malayalam movie *Charlie* and on how *Charlie* becomes an iconic tourism propaganda film.

Cinema and Tourism

Tourism since its inception has been an elitist practice; the luxury of travel was not something which any normal man could afford to enjoy. It was a privilege, privilege for the rich and the ones who gets sponsored for example 'The Grand Tour of Europe' during the 18th century was undertaken only by the men of upper middle class families. With the coming of cinema people were provided with an opportunity to see the existing world in motion format. Prior to it only landscape paintings were able to give glimpse of the outside world.

Early films and George C. Hale's *Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World* offered an opening for people to travel without making an actual travel. The idea of tourism in cinema is not new, even though very little has been explored on the issue of films and tourism, it is interesting to note that cinema and tourism shares an intrinsic relationship. They offer us virtual images of actual location, making one enter a world which is physically inaccessible, the moving images in cinema give one the 'sense of travelling'.

Film has the potential to create an image of a place in the minds of people; it offers a visual spectacle and a spectator watching a movie shifts between two modes, narrative mode and spectacular mode. Spectator is always caught up in a tension between the story and the spectacle, usually in cinema we come across landscape getting subordinated to the narrative where they only function as an exterior space or a setting for the story to unfold, but when the viewer shifts in to the spectacular mode, the spectacle of the movie halts the narrative and the gaze of the spectator is born. This gaze of the spectator can be compared with the gaze of a flaneur, the 19th century figure found in the works of Baudelaire. The flaneur is considered as an ideal street stroller, a voyeur, a window shopper, an accidental gaze or an amateur detective. Flaneur is considered to be someone who is in the crowd yet is not part of the crowd (Grotta 3)

Baudelaire in his description of flaneur's characteristics addresses him as "kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness" (4), this is to suggest that what the flaneur observes and reflects is not the actual knowledge of the city but a space to be experienced. The gaze of the spectator can be further related with the gaze of the tourist photographer seen in John Urry's work *The Tourist Gaze*, here the image of the photographer tourist is an extended version of a flaneur, who not just observes the city but everything and anything that catches his eyes (Urry 3). The spectator too thus like the tourist photographer catches whatever comes his way, and through his ability he interprets what he sights and let himself abandon in the crowd, here the fantasy world is created on screen. Vikas Bahl's 2013 stunner *Queen* can be taken as an example to this notion of

spectator as a flaneur who gradually begins on a path of self discovery due to her lone-travelling spirit to a totally unknown world. Here the spectator will take up the role of a 'flaneuse', the female flaneur. The film traces the journey undertaken by Rani giving its viewers a virtual tour to the streets of Paris & Amsterdam. Here the spectator gaze is linked with that of the flaneuse who through the film is given a world in miniature form where she though immobile, is able to stroll around the cinematic representation of the streets of Paris and Amsterdam. An advantage that cinema provides is that the spectator at the stance of her safety and comfort will be able to experience the unmarked and unfamiliar foreign landscapes.

Cinema often creates the dichotomy of traveller and tourist, a traveller unlike a tourist always enjoys an authentic experience of his/her journey, travel is considered to be a countercultural notion and is regarded superior to tourism. Countercultural notion of tourism has a desire to escape the mundane ordinary life, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter in their work *The Rebel Sell*, talk about how a countercultural being takes up a journey into an exotic land or one into their self both of which exemplifies the notion of escape, an escape from the crushing norms of the mainstream society (5).

In movies like *The Beach* by Danny Boyle and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*, one can clearly see the idea of a traveller being explored; the protagonists of both the movies embark on an unconventional adventurous journey filled with risks, these movies classify and define for their spectators that who really is a traveller and who is a tourist. The protagonist of the movie *The Sheltering Sky* says that they don't expect to return to their native place anytime soon. A traveller might never go back to his home, but a tourist goes to a place looking forward to return back. For him it is an escape into a place different from his home where he is promised with comfort that resembles the one he gets at home, in fact 'better comfort'. He always takes up the conventional safe path to experience his journey.

Indian popular cinema & the idea of travel
Sameer Thahir's 2013 release *Neelakasham Pachakadal Chuvanna Bhoomi* takes up the figure of a backpacker lost in the labyrinths of geography and love. A backpacker is considered as a 'global nomad', someone who is complete contrast to a tourist, a global nomad or backpacker like a traveller portrays the idealized form of travel, who liberates himself from the limitations and restrictions of society and goes in searching the different, he is master of his own plan who can alter his travel plan by creating and deciding his own itinerary, a sort of freedom that is solely enjoyed by a backpacker.

When a traveller travels, he gets an authentic experience of the journey where he encounters himself, while a film like *Neelakasham Pachakadal Chuvanna Bhoomi,* explores the idea of traveller making the spectators experience an authentic journey into the unseen and untouched parts of a tourist's dairy. Audience and cinema readers also come across movies that reinforce the idea of a tourist, for example the very recent 2015 release of Sachy's, *Anarkali*. Through the protagonist Shanthanu, the spectator is taken on a virtual guided tour of Lakshadweep. Filmic voyages often enchant the viewer and he/she expects to experience the very same representation of the place, while what cinema does is to reconstruct the 'desired' landscape through a very dexterous manner.
Marketing a destination

Indian Scholar

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Bella Dicks in her book , talks about the 'visitability' of a place, on how a place becomes an exhibition of itself, where it's architecture, historic past or it's multiculturalism gives the place an identity of its own which lures tourists. Such places become a 'legible' space for people to come and experience something different. Dicks further says that 'visitability' is depended up on 'Cultural Display'. Cultural display can be considered as an outlet where one experiences the essence of a local world: museums, galleries, cinemas, and all becomes a cultural space where without any physical travel people experience what a traveller experiences. Place identity promotion is done through cultural display and in order to promote the indigenous identity of a place they attract visitors from outside to make them spend time and money in local leisure activities.

Film has the potential to create or recreate an image of a place in people's minds, these cinematic images enhance one's 'fantasy' and 'expectation' of a place. As a result people desire to visit these unreal exotic locations and hence encounter similar experiences. According to social scientist John Urry the basic motivation for a tourist is the desire to experience the pleasure they have imagined in their mind and how the cinematic representation of travelling, reinforces this desire among people.

Every tourist place has got an image, a well created image. A place often evoke a sense of rootedness, submerged with enriching yet transcending culture, it is the traces or marks left by the cultural life that defines the place and gives it an identity of its own. These marks can be materialistic in nature like buildings, signs, graffiti, etc… or it can also be non-materialistic like an event that happened there, a performance that took place or even an emotional aura invoked. Some trace makers conceive the power to alter the traces made by others and generate a new identity for that place, cinemas can act as such trace maker where they with their dominating power of cinematic images can implement a new identity for a place (Anderson 132).

Destination selection is one of the most complex processes for a tourist as he has to rely on various factors like his physical and or psychological needs, and several other factors, a tourist therefore selects a destination amongst four to five available choices. Tourism tries to market a place or destination to reinforce an existing image or create an entirely new image so that it matches the ideal self-image of travellers. Marketing tool like an apt slogan for a place can be used for destination marketing. Among the available marketing tools visual media will be the strongest one to create an image, even though their primary aim is not to market the place.

An article in the daily *Deccan Chronicle*, report about how Hollywood movies like *Frozen, Percy Jackson, Mamma Mia!*, have fired up the tourism industry, where a steep rise in the percentage of tourists in countries like Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Greece etc… has been encountered where the plot of movie has been set. Vehicle of persuasion for the individual to travel can be anything from the appeal of a fictional character to an emotion evoked by a representation over the screen.

Digging in to the movie *Mamma Mia!,* directed by Phyllida Lloyd, the movie is set in a fictitious Greek island named 'Kalokairi'. For the selection of this destination the producers of the film did check-out around twenty five islands in Greece before settling down with Skopelos, prior the release of *Mamma Mia!* Skopelos unlike other islands in Greece was a less explored place with no airport and a ferry being the only reachable option, and the place was known only for its plums, pears and pine trees but with the release of *Mamma Mia!,* tourists from all over the

123

world have been packing into the place. A daily, *The Guardian* reports on how people wooed by the spectacular landscape of the film, demand for a similar beach wedding in Skopelos.

Similar is the case with many other destinations, even around 50 years after the release of Robert Wise's classic *The Sound of Music*, around three lakh people around the world visit the city of Salzburg in Austria and around forty thousand take the official Sound of Music Tour, a tour in which one will be taken around the important sites where the movie was filmed. Another notable example of films whose impact had a rise in tourism of a particular place is Peter Faiman's *Crocodile Dundee* that has stepped up the rise of Australian tourism. A survey done even suggests that the movie has doubled the number of visitors to Queensland.

The way a film functions as a tool in destination marketing is entirely different from how a literature functions as a tool for place-marketing. In literary tourism, it is the writer who persuades one to travel, here the visitor's interest lies in places that are significant to writer but this is not the case with films, where it is not an individual who gets a role & right to influence a spectator but the actors or actresses are able to persuade people to travel. It is pivotal to note that Post 9/11 when tourism in America was stooping down, the US government used celebrities as a marketing tool to lure tourists, something similar to that of literary tourism.

Indian cinema especially Hindi film industry or Bollywood also helps in endorsing place marketing specially the front of global tourism. There has been a host of movies shot in foreign and exotic locations. Bollywood's special love with the ice capped mountains of Switzerland is something that lures the audience. The first Hindi film shot in Switzerland is Raj Kapoor's *Sangam* released in 1964 but it was with the Yash Raj Films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge, Darr*, and many other shot in Switzerland paved way for a steep rise in Swiss tourism so much that Yash Chopra was awarded with 'Swiss Ambassador's Award'. Of recent there are lots of movies been extensively shot in foreign locations and exotic location in the country itself and nowadays movies explore beyond the popular locations of Swiss, London, Goa , etc… for example places like Prague and Corsica seen in Imtiaz Ali's movies: *Rockstar* and *Tamasha*.

Charlie

A fragrance that is 'untouchable'.

How Tessa finds Charlie and in the process, falls in love, drives the plot of Martin Prakkat's award winning movie *Charlie*. The film revolves around the character Tessa and her search for a mysterious figure named Charlie, there is an elusive, magical aura revolving around Charlie's character in the film. The film touches only the positive side of the life. We see him doing magic, saving people's life, he calls himself to be a genie, 'jin' as told in the film. The character does not hate anyone for example even the thief who enters his house for robbery. It is interesting to note that the popular belief of Aladdin's genie is that of a slave, someone who was constrained by certain laws and here Charlie is bound by the laws and limitations of tourist industry. A wind that hits you so fresh and hard but when you want to catch it, you can't!

Findings

The character of Charlie becomes a filmic interface between the spectator and tourist industry. Here the spectators without their knowledge are made to take ride of Kerala where they will be taken to places which are of appeal to the sentimentalities tourist agencies. The movie makes an attempt to create an image of nomad in Charlie. He is been addressed as a 'migratory bird' by

124

people who have met him. There is an air of difference and ambiguity surrounding the image of Charlie. Also to focus that it has very little connection with reality to most of our lives.

His introductory scene itself strives to establish this nomadic image in him. He is shown to be in an unknown place. By not revealing the name of the place, he is metaphorically hiding his true self. The same scene is also placed with a background having a performance of Kerala's art form that automatically is a trial to portray the state as a hub for all the soul-seeking traveller, when co-read with the dialogues of the character Charlie. The lead character does not live by the rules of the society. In a particular scene, he is shown calling himself to be a traveller 'who travels wherever his feet takes him to'. This reveals a kind of flexibility in his travel plan through which the movie tries to give a picture of a nomad or backpacker in him. A backpacker or a traveller is always associated with his flexible travel plans.

Charlie's attire strongly resembles the kind of dress of the hippies, or that of someone who separates himself from the mainstream society, a countercultural being (the above frame from the movie). For Charlie his costume is just a facade which reinforces an image of nomad in him. He though appears to be nomadic in nature is in reality a tourist who strengthens the idea of tourism. In this film, he is in fact the promoting figure of the tourist industry.

The promotional figure attributed to Charlie is similar to the kind of promotion celebrities do, where the film uses the star image of Dulquer Salmaan to attract people, visitors, travellers & wanderers. This tourism promotional technique is similar to the literary tourism that was used for destination marketing. The character of Charlie is given a super man like image, someone who is always there to help someone who is in need. This in a way contradicts to the wander image of Charlie.

Attributing Superman like image to Dulquer is a way of manipulating the star image, the impact of stars over their fans. The special effects used in the song *Oru Kari Mukilinu* does give him a power to fly up till anywhere and to reach any height. When a star like Dulquer comes in and guides one through the less taken paths of Kerala, this in the minds of fans creates an image

125

Indian Scholar

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

of the place, like how the left over marks or traces, give a place, an identity, the track taken by Charlie gives the spectators or mostly fans of Dulquer Salmaan a new identity for the place, a kind of sacred identity associated with that of pilgrimage which create in them a desire to visit those places. Sue Beeton in her work clearly explains how viewers can get influenced by actors or characters so much that they tend to worship. This tendency in spectators has been misused by both film and tourism to set forth their ideology (Beeton 35).

Charlie becomes a cultural display where one is taken on a tour and is shown the essence of Kerala culture, the way a tourist does. The images of *Kathakali*, elephant as in temple festivals like *Pooram, Kalaripayittu* and other traditional cultural practice forms the ideal brochure for Kerala tourism. In *Charlie,* there are instances where *we* get to see glimpses of these cultural practices, like the *Margam Kali* performed by Tessa and others or the *Kathakali* artist in his costume whom Tessa meets on a shared ride on her way to a new home.

Further, as the narrative continues, the movie also gives many glimpses of various cultural art forms which form the backdrop.

In the movie the character of Tessa can be associated with the figure of a 'flaneuse' or an extended version of flaneuse like the photographer tourist who gazes on everything that comes her way. Robert Tally discusses about Fredric R. Jameson's concept of 'cognitive mapping' (Jameson 67). This concept of 'cognitive mapping,' which has been developed by Jameson can be employed in multiple ways, one usage of the term as discussed by Tally Jr. is that of an individual who tries to make sense with an unfamiliar place and makes an attempt to discover himself or herself in that particular social context. This is a method adopted by the individual to overcome the anxiety of getting lost. The individual using visual reference maps the place and finds ways to move within it. What Tessa does in the movie is something similar to this. She moves around unfamiliar lands in search of an unknown figure, here meeting this unknown figure for her is actually a discovery of herself within the context of film. Tessa is shown moving around the hidden heavenly places of Kerala those are filled with joy, soul and bigger meanings of life.

She has been portrayed as someone who strolls around the city observing things. The finest of details on streets to those present in the room where Charlie lived before Tessa's arrival. Through the character of Tessa, the spectators are also given a virtual tour of the city. The gaze

126

Indian Scholar

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

of the spectator here gets associated with the gaze of Tessa. In the very beginning of movie itself we experience a curious observer in Tessa, she becomes a kind of perplexed observer. While touring around the city, on the way to her new home she makes an attempt in capturing everything that meets her eyes. The foreign-couple in the boat fascinates her and with awe she goes on observing them to a deeper emotional extent. Also the presence of that foreign couple do reflect that people who are deeply in love do travel to meaningful places like Kerala where they connect with their soul mates and understand love to a deeper extent. The eyes of Tessa catch the very little nuances of the city. As the gaze of the spectator gets identified with the gaze of Tessa, spectator is also taken on to stroll around the city.

Charlie here takes up the image of a *Lonely Planet* guide, where he along with Tessa guides the spectators into exploring the spectacles of Kerala. Tessa's search for Charlie takes her through the less taken path and the spectators are taken on a ride to experience staged authenticity of Kerala's culture. Charlie is used as more of a tool of tourism industry, a marketing agent, an advertisement of Kerala tourism. Rapid shifts from one episode to another doesn't really give audience the desired time and chance to understand the same. The pace is quick as Charlie's existence in all the places that in no time jumps away.

Charlie in his room can turn any scrap in to a living being.
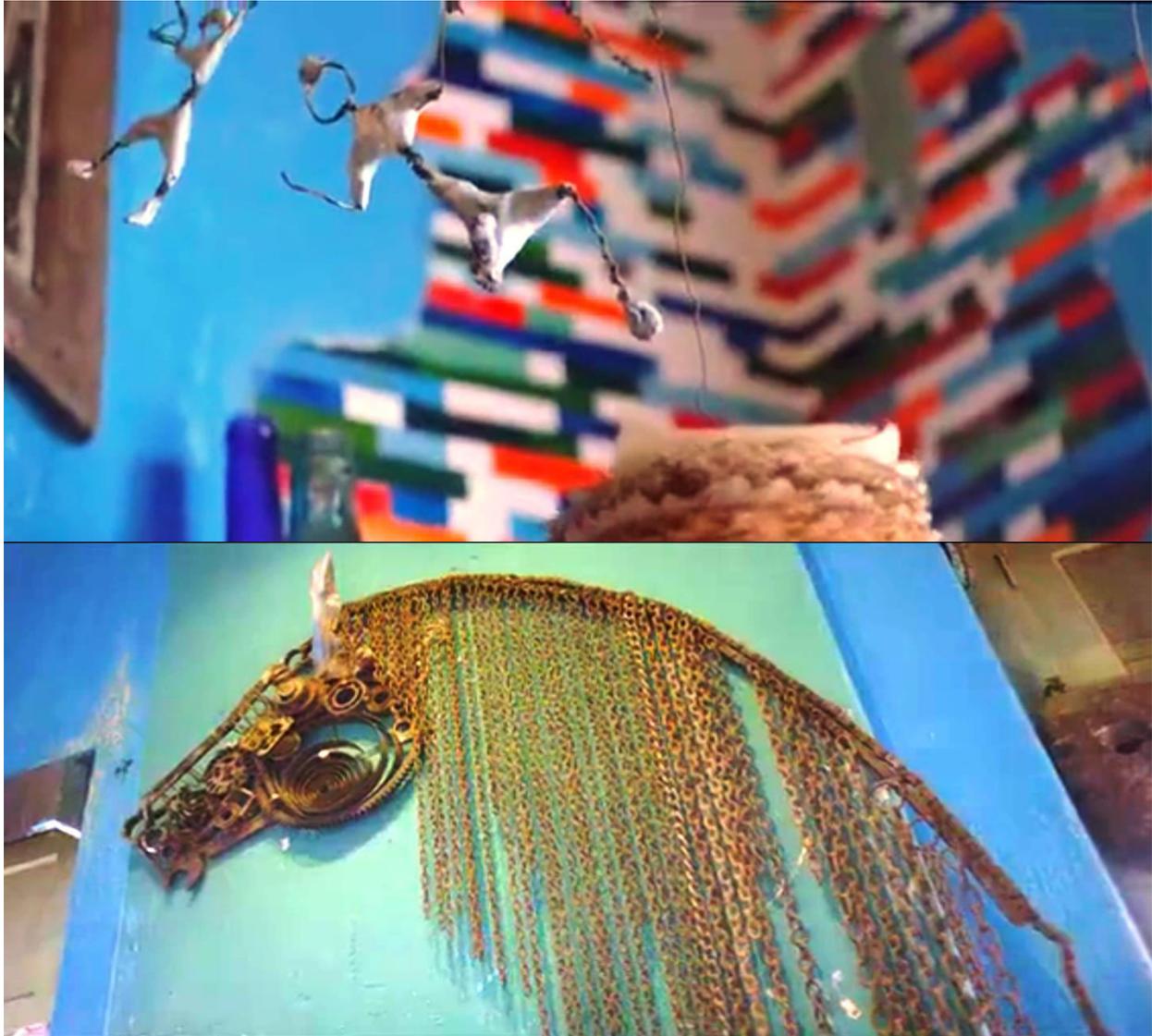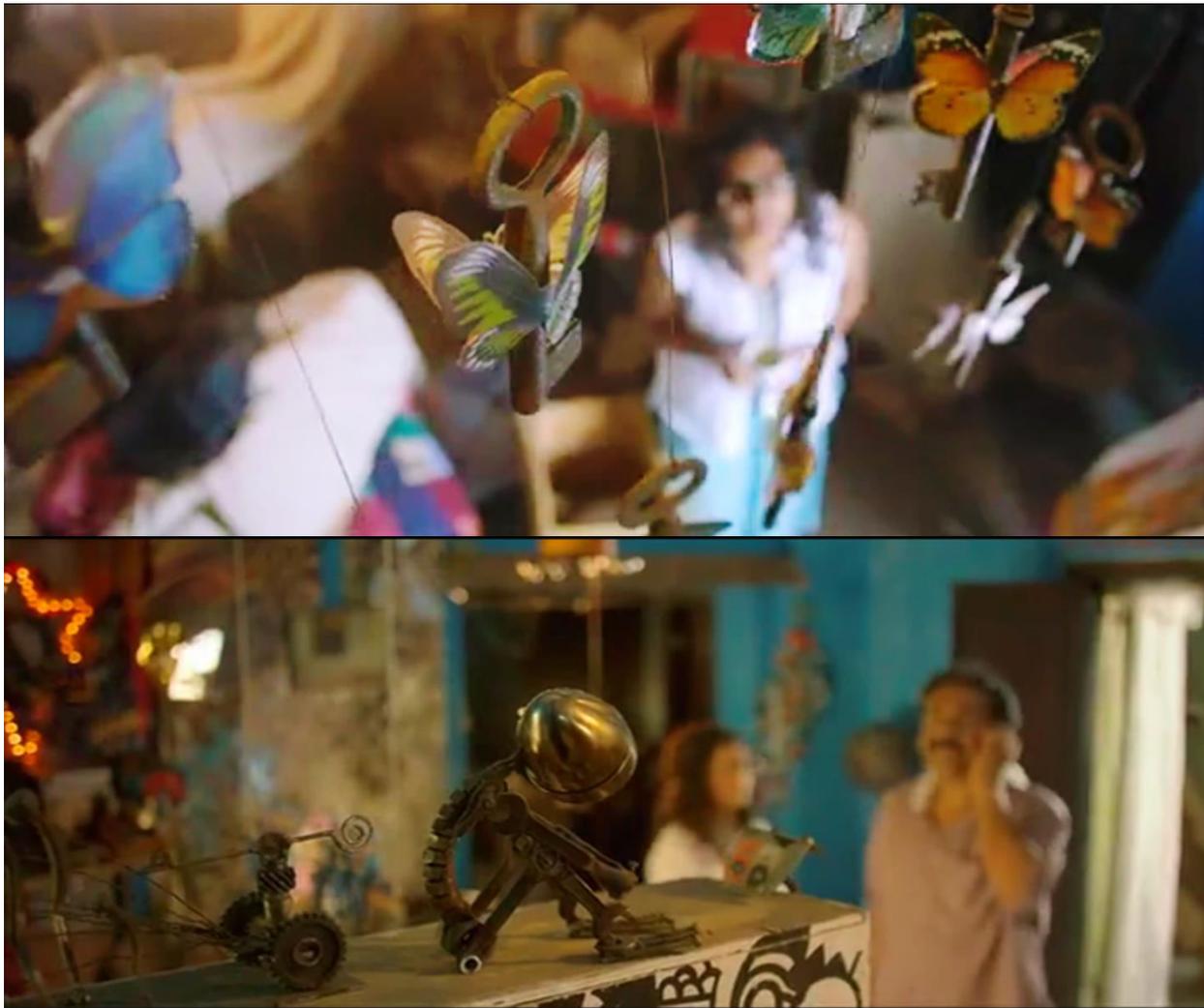
A very special focus has also been provided to the place where Charlie stayed for a while and not a temporary apartment for Tessa. Earlier Tessa sifts through these belongings but soon they set her on a trail to find the mystery behind the man, and all these belongings become a part of her own being. The room holds ones' breath to every extend. From the story-book that Charlie had sketched about an interesting adventure with a small thief, Tessa comes to know that the person in question had an unusual approach to have fun but was at the same time, a tremendously genuine & legitimate human being. The art & craft and the finest pieces that are made pivotal parts of the rooms' existence, do mean more than what they are. The purpose is to free oneself from its unseen limitations & barriers of time, life and society. The purpose is to give existences to artifacts. The purpose is also to eliminate the loneliness that a person encounters when he/she stays alone at a place and city less known. The artifacts have been made mostly of scrap pieces and not something that has much of the finances spent over. These are also the pieces that are gifted by Charlie to the person who comes to stay there next. The director never loses the audience's attention through the mysteriously rich frames filled with these belongings. Every tiny thing does speak a character detail of Charlie.

Works Consulted

Anderson, J. (2010). *Understanding cultural geography: Places and traces*.

Beeton, S. (2005). *Film-induced tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.

Dicks, B. (2004). *Culture on display: The production of contemporary visitability*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Grøtta, M. (2015). *Baudelaire's media aesthetics: The gaze of the Flaneur and 19th century media*.

Hannam, K., & Ateljevic, I. (2008). *Backpacker tourism: Concepts and profiles*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.

Heath, J., & Potter, A. (2006). *The rebel sell: How the counterculture became consumer culture*. Chichester: Capstone.

L, ISSITT, & MICAH. (2009). *Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture*. ABC-CLIO.

Lefebvre, M. (2006). *Landscape and film*. New York: Routledge.

Prakkat, M. (Director). (2015). *Charlie* [Motion picture]. India.

Tally, R. T. (2013). *Spatiality*. London: Routledge.

Urry, & John. (2002). *The Tourist Gaze (2nd edition)*. (Urry, John (2002) The Tourist Gaze (2nd edition). Sage. ISBN 0761973478.) Sage.