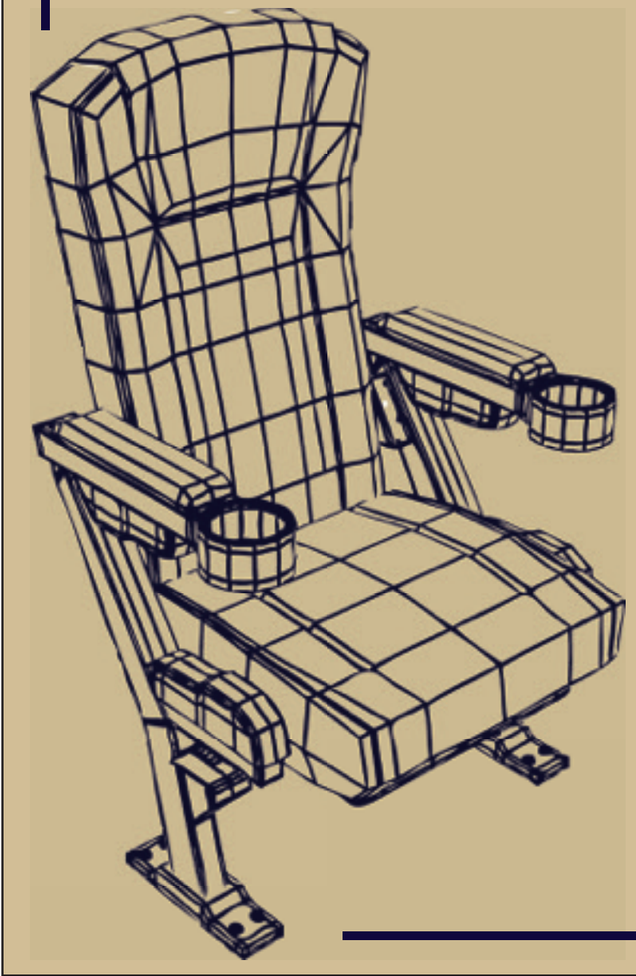
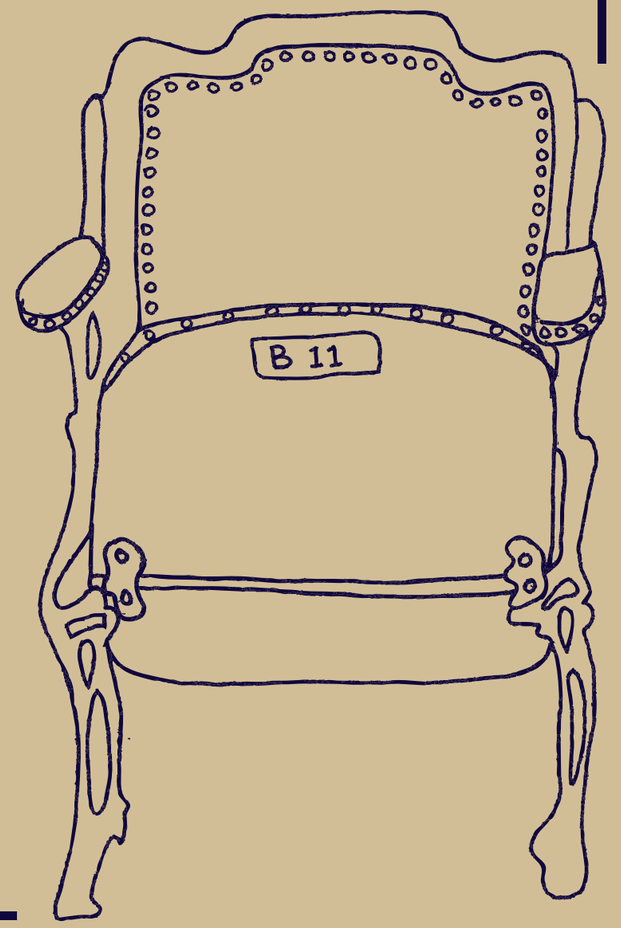
Cinema Theatres in Bombay / Mumbai

A DOSSIER





Cinema Theatres in Bombay / Mumbai
A DOSSIER

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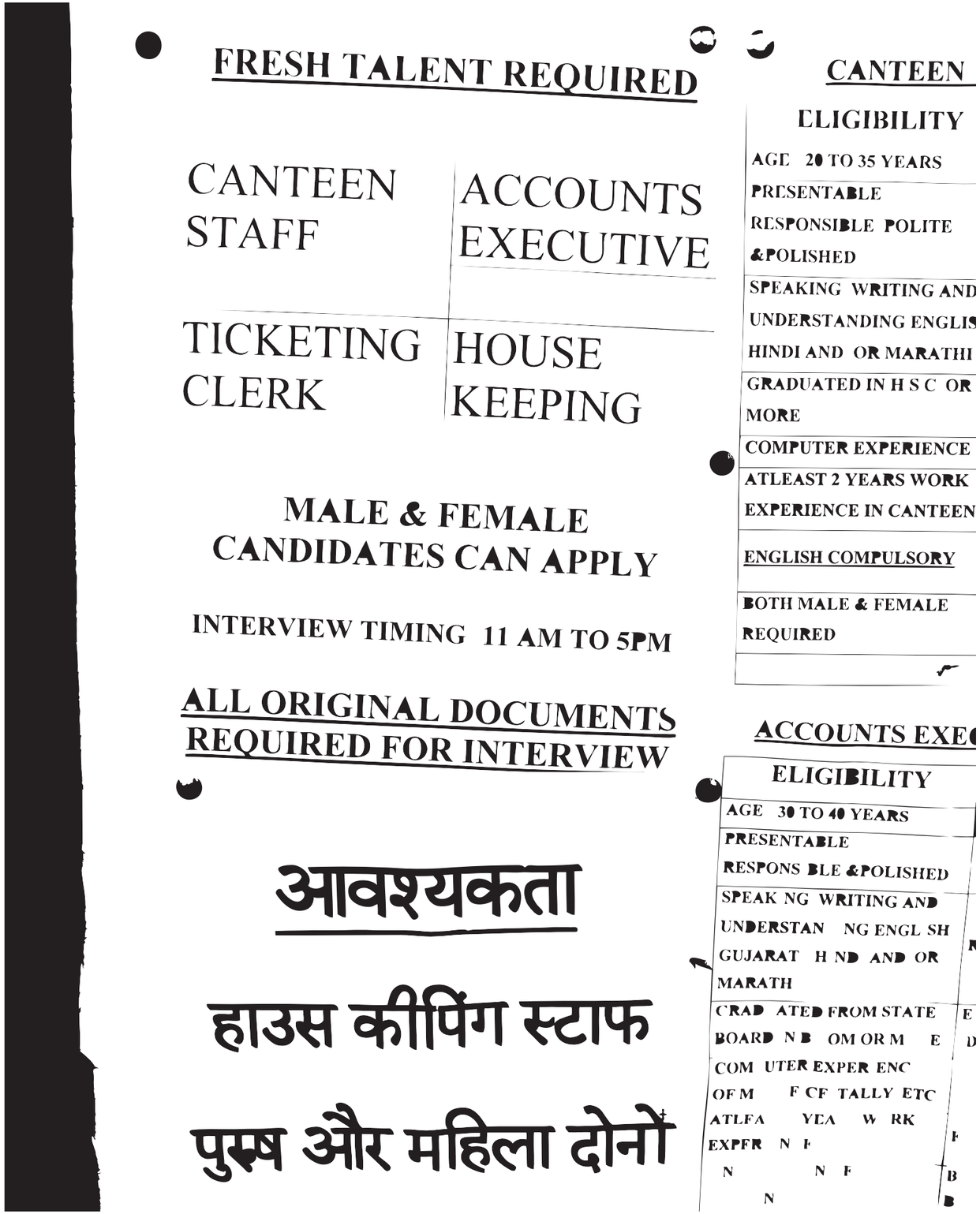

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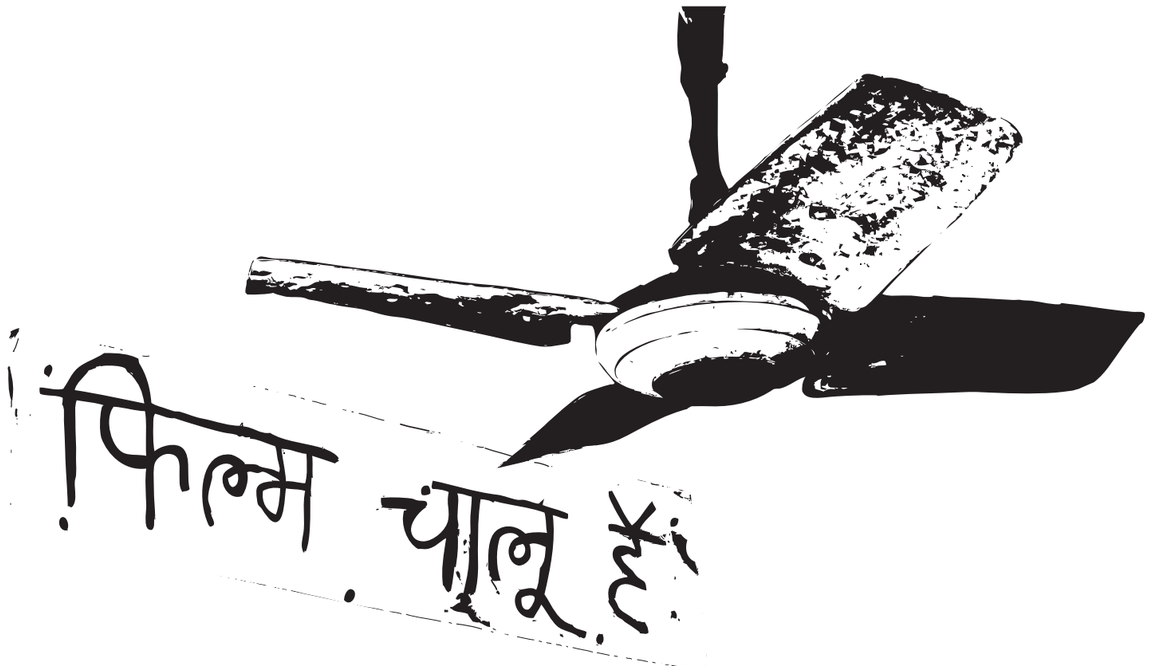

Introduction

Urban Public and Culture of Cinema

BY MADHUSREE DUTTA

Is it possible to imagine the social life of India, or more specifically Mumbai, without its cinema? Over the century film narratives have gradually replaced the sayings and adages in social communication. It has shaped the behavioural pattern of portraying love, aspiration, rights, identity, ideology, leisure and so on. It creates visual references or templates for opulence and poverty, success and failure, rural and urban, and the good citizen and bad citizen. Sushila, a thirty two year old woman who has lived all her life in this city, in an interview in 2010 said, "Last year I went to town (colloquially means the southern end of the city)...saw the sea, the train lines, buildings, roads...they are exactly like in cinema...I felt like I have seen them all". In her case, the live experience of the space can only be negotiated in reference to the images seen in films. It is popularly believed that an average Indian manages her emotions in daily life as well as in testing situations through references absorbed from films. Whether this assumption is true or not, it points to the social reality that cinema culture in India is not merely leisure, entertainment or escape but a collection of fluid cultural and behaviourial codes.

This phenomenal width of its outreach and thus its ability to create, preserve and circulate rhetoric has made popular cinema essentially an affair of the public. I use the word public here in the sense of groups of peoples who together make an overarching entity, and yet may not ever meet each other, possibly not even otherwise share a common language, livelihood practices, eating and clothing customs, social and cultural heritage and so on. And such a heterogeneous people are likely to converge into an over arching identity as 'public' only in the porous soil of a metropolis that invites people of diverse background to serve at its various enterprises. Thus, it is not surprising that in India, cinema primarily developed in the three cities that are distinct in their colonial past and developed through port-related traffic of people and goods: Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. The diverse people from non-urban territories carried with them some traces of their cultural legacy – phrases, musical tunes, tales, metaphors, fabrics, crafts, body features etc., and upon arrival floated them in the sea of metropolitan culturescape. This public, with some memory of the linear past and a much stronger desire for the promise of future, made the primary market for the hybrid and fantasy artifact that would be called cinema. Popular cinema has, in turn, bound together this public under a common referral system and vocabulary. This dossier collects several evidences of the public-popular configuration in the city around cinema viewing – how the public got consolidated around the popular and when they became alienated from each other. In this study we take the history of the cinema exhibition centres as the site where the public meets the popular.

Cinema since its very beginning has been more of an enterprise than an art-based form. Its dependence on technology, infrastructure and talents of various kinds has made it largely dependent on financial investments and returns. Hence, unlike the preceding cultural forms of its time – painting, photography, musical and theatrical performances, literature etc. – cinema was never meant to be for the connoisseurs, nor was it dependent on feudal patronage. Since its inception cinema was treated as a commodity for public consumption – its replicability, transportability and comprehensibility only helped in its outreach. It can be then said that popular cinema, like any other consumers' good, is determined more by the forces at the reception end than by the resources at the production end. Hence history of cinema needs to be read in the context of its exhibition avenues. And at the same time history of the growth of urban culture can be traced through the expansion of cinema outlets in the city. For example, the first public exhi-

bition of moving images in India is recorded as a special show of French pioneers, the Lumière Brothers, at Watson Hotel in Bombay for the elite of the city, followed by regular public shows at Novelty Theatre in 1896. The exhibition could have stayed in the European quarter like any other imported entertainment – band music, opera, cabaret shows etc. Instead it chose to venture into a more inclusive venue of a drama house at the edge of the native quarter at Fort. This is the first instance of cinema's desire to be known as a cultural artifact to be accessed by all classes.

The world wars and the interim years between them brought heavy traffic of people, skills, goods, capital, ideologies and technology to the port cities. According to the 1921 census, 84% of the population of Bombay was born outside the city. The churning of all these diverse elements resulted in various hybrid urban enterprises and expressions that would be later known as urban culture – cinema was primary among them. Yet, for the first two decades of the 20th century commercial potential of cinema went largely unnoticed, and it was treated, at best, as a fairground entertainment. Even when the government woke up to the commercial possibility of the moving image enterprises and for the first time in 1923 imposed an entertainment tax of 12.5% on commercial exhibitions, the revenues it earned from cinema was far less than the revenues from the Bombay and Poona horse races. However, it was obvious that an overarching and sustainable entertainment form was needed to entertain the war related floating international crowd, the European gentry, the multi-racial port hands, the Indian industrialists and the Asian bazaar merchants, the migrant labours, the swelling Indian service class and so on. Silent Hollywood cinema fulfilled that role. Once the product was sourced it needed to be distributed – cinema exhibition centres had to be built or created out of the existing infrastructures. Thus by the end of the third decade of the 20th century, cinema theatres became an essential part of the urban development pattern. Since then the life cycle of the cinema theatres, in a way, outlines the nature of the public life in the metropolis. Studying maps of decade wise construction of new cinema theatres and their timeline traced in the second chapter of this volume would help the reader to comprehend the urbanization pattern of the pastoral and coastal land of the seven islands that made the city of Bombay / Mumbai.

By the end of the thirties Indian production of cinema had come of age and consolidated a ring of loyal patrons around their mythological, historical and social fares. But the Indian elites, still in their colonialised mode, kept patronizing the innocuous Hollywood productions till the time of independence. Thus came up the new high end establishments with luxury amenities in the southern tip of the city that would exhibit foreign films for the elite crust of the city; and simpler buildings that emulated traditional drama houses came up along the, then, northern end of the city for exhibition of Indian films. While the Eros-Metro-Regal brand of theatres managed to uphold the cause of 'high taste' through air conditioning, crèche facilities for infants, underground parking and cocktail bars; the ordinary neighbourhood cinemas were serving up an urban culture for the vernacular middle and working classes. Another way of looking at this phenomenon could be that while the Art Deco theatres were sites of trade in imported commodity the northern theatres were the bazaar of the local products, which was on its way to become an indigenous industry. This set of cinema theatres (between 1930s and 1940s the number of functioning theatres grew from 46 to 68 and out of the 22 new theatres 12 establishments came under the category of Art Deco and High end. The remaining were either converted from drama houses or were newly constructed neighbourhood cinema theatres) actually secured the fate of Indian cinema / Bombay cinema. These theatres cultivated the audience through various innovative strategies – getting announcers with megaphones to traverse the neighbourhood to allure the audience, making film stars mingle with the audience, marking special zenana shows for women in the afternoon and organizing lucky draws and other games etc. For example, in mid 1930s some theatres in the textile mill areas ran for 24 hours with show timings marked by the end of the mill shift. On the other side, the elite theatres were eager to prove their exclusivity as in 1939 Metro Cinema printed on their tickets, for the first time, a declaration of right of admission being reserved by the management. Such was the pivotal role of the cinema theatres that most of the film studios in the 1930s sought to have exclusive contract with the theatres in order to secure a substantial audience. It could be inferred from this, that the audience was more loyal to the theatres than to the production companies / studios. Publicity material of that time frequently carried the name of the theatres more prominently than any other information.

Since mid 1930s the available number of theatres proved to be grossly inadequate for the volume of films being produced and also for the swelling number of the audience. To make things worse, after independence the State followed its British predecessors in a discouraging, if not outright hostile, attitude towards cinema viewing. Though by independence, Indian cinema, as a combination of Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Bengali and

other language films, was already crowned as the pivotal popular culture of the 20th century, State policies continued to view this instance of mass culture with suspicion. The genesis of this suspicion can be seen in Gandhi's statement when he was invited to respond to the questionnaire issued by ICC (Indian Cinematograph Committee). The committee was set up by the government in 1927 in order to control the influx of Hollywood films and also to regulate Indian productions in favour of the British imports. Gandhi declined to engage with the exercise and said, "Even if I was so minded, I should be unfit to answer your questionnaire, as I have never been to a cinema. But even to an outsider, the evil that it has done and is doing is patent. The good, if it has done any at all, remains to be proved". As an echo of this sentiment the independent State found that the most effective way to control the public is to bring in restriction on the cinema exhibition centres, sometimes in the name of public health (municipality, police, home ministry etc.) and at other times public morality (censorship). Compared to the theatres the studios and the processing labs were bound by fewer restrictions. So it can be inferred that the State has been engaged only with the exhibition aspect of cinema and not with the production of it. Hence despite the phenomenal volume of cinema productions India has one of the fewest cinema theatres. The number of exhibition screens even in 2007-08 for per one million people in India was only 12, whereas in China it was 31, Japan 25, UK 62 and in the USA 132 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics – UIS Report, 2013). There were only 12,000 theatres spread across the country, with Greater Bombay accounting for 110 screens catering to 18 million people in 2000.

Curiously this scarcity of exhibition infrastructure only increased the desirability of cinema for the urban public. People waited with longing for a new release and endured every hardship to see the film – travelling long distances, standing in serpentine queues, braving familial restrictions, buying tickets at hugely inflated prices, and then relived the experience through ancillary portals – radio programmes, audio reproductions, performances by duplicate artists and so on. This mismatch between the number of films produced and the availability of exhibition screens created some other trends. Due to the scarcity of exhibition outlets successful films used to run for several weeks in a particular theatre and were crowned as 'silver jubilee' / 'golden jubilee'. This practice then led to multiple viewings of a film which sometimes even turned into obsessive viewing. In the decades of 1950s-1970s it was common to hear people boast about watching a *Shri 420* or *Mughal-e-Azam* or *Sholay* 30 times. The second trend that emerged was the ancillary industry. In pre-television days cinema had an afterlife through its audio tracks. In 1953, Binaca Geetmala, the radio request programme, bestowed iconic status to Hindi film songs. Many elderly women remember that when as young girls they were not allowed to go to cinemas they used to cling to the window provided by the Geetmala programme on radio. It was broadcasted from Ceylon Radio as All India Radio, owing alliance to the moral stand of the State, turned hostile towards film songs. Binaca Geetmala is substantially responsible for giving Bombay cinema a pan-South Asian identity. Besides, there were audio records of music and dialogue tracks, and innumerous local artists who performed the tracks live. The lyrics of the songs were printed in cheap booklet form and sold in front of the theatres. All these by-products only helped bolster the iconic status of cinema and the exhibition sites remained at the centre of public desire. Such was the status of the cinema theatres in public perception that some Bombay films used them as a vital location for city based narratives – in *Kala Bazar* (1959) the hero sells tickets in black in front of a theatre for the premiere of *Mother India*; in *Baton Baton Mein* (1979) a crucial scene in the plot was located at a cinema theatre; in *Rangeela* (1995) again the hero is introduced as a black ticket vendor.

A visit to the cinema till the late 1970s also meant much more sociality than only watching a film. Memoirs of elderly people of seeing a particular film at a particular theatre are laced with the supplementary activities based on the location of the theatres. Going to a cinema theatre in Pila House near Grant Road also meant riding the *ghodagari* and eating *patra ni machhi* at Parsi restaurants; Liberty Cinema stood as much for its restaurant of continental food as for its luxurious seating facility; theatres at Lamington Road were equally popular for their proximity to a series of shoe shops and a juice centre (a novelty in the 1950s); a visit to Lido Cinema in Juhu was always attached to a eating spree at Juhu Chowpatty; theatres in Dadar are known till today for their offerings of *vada-pao* and other Marathi snacks. Many elderly women have stated that in 1960s and 1970s their main connection with the public life of the city was through their travels on way to the cinema theatres and the extended activities there. But apart from the well known theatres with special features there were simple neighbourhood theatres that functioned as the nerve centre of the community life. The lane outside these sites would be strewn with kiosks and stalls selling cinema memorabilia (booklets of songs, audio cassettes of songs and dialogue tracks, posters of matinee idols), fashion accessories, photo studios with cut-outs of the stars, tea stalls and street food carts etc. Substantial volume

of livelihood would be generated through these ancillary enterprises along with the employees in the cinema theatres – ushers, guards, projectionists, electricians, box office men, print shuttlers, banner painters, announcers, gardeners etc. The area would be regularly visited by the locals even when they were not going to watch a film. These theatres were the area landmarks and centres of pride for the local community. Tons of memories of falling in love, bunking classes, dodging family elders, smoking the first cigarette, making friends, meeting strangers, getting robbed, coming of age or even watching a film alone were attached to the neighbourhood theatres. Thus the popularity of cinema was framed within a public mould where a certain composite culture around film viewing was performed, collated and displayed, or even denied at a public place – the cinema theatre. The heterogeneous public of the metropolis could traverse at a single site only around the composite culture of cinema.

Legendary Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal, in a video interview in 2005, described his first encounter with the city as – "…when our father…as we could not live off the farming in the village, he brought our family to Mumbai. It must have been 1957-58. We did not alight at Byculla, but at Bori Bunder. And that is why all that blazing lights of Mumbai…any boy coming from the village would have been shocked at this experience.… electricity reached our village very late. Gas lights in *gram panchayat*, or *taluka panchayat*, or in marriages or carrying *hillal* (transportable gas light carried by Dalit boys at social functions) on the head and seeing the village in that light…that was my experience of artificial light. I felt totally dazed by the blazing electric lights here…I remember that when we reached and all the luggage was kept we went for lunch via Ganesh Talkies to Byculla, and there was a poster of *Mother India* – Nargis on one side and a bull on the other, an image much larger than anything I had ever seen till that day. That was the first experience and the beginning of a difficult love." The gas light here is a symbol of limited access and hierarchical privilege in the village society whereas the electric light stands for the popular urban concept of *sarvajanik* (meant 'for all members of the public' as in *Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav*). This metaphor then could be extended to cinema as a *sarvajanik* culture as against the limited access high culture of pre-cinema era.

"I came to Bombay during the period of Emergency in 1975. I got married and within a week I was in Bombay. When you get into a local train nobody recognizes you...you stand at a *paan beedi* shop nobody recognises you; you can enjoy your freedom. For me Bombay is liberation from a lot of do's and don'ts and from unwanted ties. It is a city that lets you be. I suppose films in some way give you that platform of shared activity...Sometimes I saw three films in a day at Amber-Oscar-Minor, Gaiety-Galaxy-Gemini. One show after another and yet another…those were not the days of multiplexes, but I created my own multiplex. I was 23 when I came here and since then it has been one rollercoaster ride", said Prof. Farukkh Waris, a self-confessed film buff who is a descendent of a royal family in Lucknow, in an interview in 2012.

The cinema theatres along with the railways brought in the first homogenized spatial experience across class, caste and gender in modern India. Though there were differently priced tickets and a hierarchy of seats, the consumption of the film happened in the same space and at the same time for a diverse people – something that I would like to argue is an essential aspect of public culture. The reasons for migration to the city in the case of Dhasal and Waris are very different. One came out of economic desperation and for the other it was a journey towards a freer social milieu. Yet cinema played the same pivotal role in their relationship with the new home land. Only at the altar of cinema the Muslim aristocrat woman from North India and the Dalit boy from the hinterland of Maharashtra could temporarily enter the same site and encounter the same sensorial experience. It may not have broadened the class / caste / race tolerance to any mentionable degree but it definitely has created transitional interfaces between different strata of the society. These interfaces have been the base of metropolitan public culture and its attribute of tolerance.

Waris' memoirs of her journey from the parochial life in Lucknow to a member of the public in Bombay is complimented by Kausar, who got displaced from Bhendi Bazaar at the heart of the city to a distant suburb of Mumbra due to the communal riots of 1992-93. In an interview in 2010, she said "earlier we could just walk into any of the numerous cinema halls in town or just take a stroll to the beach. Till late night the streets were buzzing and nobody worried about where we were. But here (Mumbra) we cannot go anywhere. There is only one cinema – Alishan – which is not conducive to women viewers. Besides, in this small space everyone knows the other and then they gossip about your life style. The town was different. Now to see a film I have to wait till I get a chance to go to Bombay (the centre of the city), which happens rarely. It (the town) is so far away and the train service is poor". Both Waris's joy of replacement and Kausar's complaint about displacement point to the same fact – the anonymity that

the metropolis provides for the women, cinema theatres being a prime site of that.

The collapse of the manufacturing industry and the organised sector in 1980s severely changed the demography of the city and the configuration of the public and its culturescape. According to the 1981 Census the population in the Suburban District (49,58,365) surpasses that of the City District (32,85,040). The expansion of the service industry and financial corporations in the suburban district increased the consumption capacity of the middle class. At the same time the demise of the organized sector within the manufacturing industry began to usher in unorganized migrant labour with an uncertain financial capacity. From 1973 to 1987 employment in the unorganized / unregistered sector increased by 159% (Report: Regional Economy of BMR). Simply put, the upper end of the middle class turned more solvent and the lower end of the class structure became poorer. So it became highly incongruous to expect that the two sectors could be entertained in the same place at the same time – namely, at the neighbourhood cinema theatres.

Additionally, screen entertainment reached home through television and later through video-digital portals. Following the first tele-serial *Hum Log* on Doordarshan TV ownership in the country grew from 27,00,000 in 1984 to 1,25,00,000 in 1986. The serialized format of soap operas has a similarity with the folk and traditional performances that lasted for a month or so. People began to plan their daily chores around the timings of the popular serials on television. This domestication of entertainment technology and avenues resulted in the closing down of the erstwhile popular convention of *zenana* shows in cinema theatres. Despite their attachment to TV programmes generally the urban women spectators were not too happy about being pushed back to the domestic space – "Now we have got everything at home...we watch whatever comes on TV, chew our food and sit at home. That is all we do now. There is nothing left to do now...Earlier I got to see pictures in nearby theatres – Kalpana Talkies, Sheetal Talkies, Bharat Talkies. I went to each and all of them. I used to go with friends, only we girls went in a gang. We used to carry the brooms on our heads and roam around the *gullies*. We sold brooms and with the extra profit we used to see pictures...you can't do such things now", said 60 years old Pochutai, a domestic worker in an interview in 2012.

The cumulative effect of all these was a segregation of the act of viewing cinema. The generic public as cinema spectators, by now, got fragmented into several segments – the multiplex viewer, the single screen audience, the home based audience, the patrons of unauthorised video parlours and so on. Moreover, cinema viewing receded to the sites which are gated / veiled / invisible. Now within the sprawling, brightly lit malls, the only gated zones are the cinema spaces. While the mall accommodates the hangers-on, the window shoppers and the urban escapists, the cinema space within the mall restrict entry only to ticket holders. The sensory experiences of the escalator, the shop windows, the gaming zone, and the food mall have proved to be more cinematic than the darker space of cinema exhibition, generally tucked away in the deepest corner of the highest floor. With so many screens and many more shows at each screen, the choice for the multiplex audience has increased dramatically. Yet, with average occupancy rates of 26% the multiplexes have become sites for special facility and not sites of public culture with heterogeneous participation. Hence no patron loyalty could be developed for the multiplex either being the pride of the neighbourhood or for having any special ambience. The landmarks of Bahar, Lotus, Darpan had to give away to the generic title and standardized architecture of PVR, Fame, Cinemax outlets.

With the homogenization of the cinema exhibition centres, the specialized screenings of regional language cinema came to an end by the early years of the 21st century. Nobody paid any attention, as by then regional films could be seen on DVD or through television channels. But there is yet another side to the story, another kind of privatization of the public. The number of migrant workers from other language belts of the country continued to scale upwards. The workers are generally brought to the city by contractors to work on daily wages with an irregular work flow. Most of them live in language and clan based clusters across the suburban district which is where the cheap entertainment shops that show films in their native languages pop up – Tamil cinema at Dharavi, Telugu cinema at Orlem, Bhojpuri at Nalasopara, Punjabi at Sion Koliwada and so on. Contrary to popular belief, this floating population does not subscribe to the overarching popularity of Hindi films. Their near exile existence makes them a diehard audience for flicks made in their native languages. These shanty theatres function with rudimentary infrastructure, sometimes using cheap video projectors, and often manage with a mere TV set. These makeshift structures are inserted within the unassuming rows of lottery ticket kiosks, tobacco shops, tender coconut stalls, tea vendors' carts, mobile phone repairers, and so on. For the rest of the public in the city, these camouflaged cinema exhibition centres

remain hidden, if not completely invisible. Often they are demolished by the municipality only to mushroom at another location a few metres away.

There is a strange similarity between the multiplexes, home television and the slum cinemas – they all function within the framework of exclusivity. As opposed to the open and public culture of the neighbourhood theatres these cinema centres provide for only their clan and class, and that too away from the eyes of the other segments of the public. Now film viewing is an isolated and concentrated activity, concealed like a cult ritual, as opposed to the public ritual of the earlier set up. Finally the fair-like characteristic of cinema spectacle has died. When cinema exhibition was a stand alone and homogenized phenomenon at the time of celluloid and large theatres, its audience profile at any given point was heterogeneous and composite. The site of cinema consumption, quite like the composition of the urban public, was a junction where identities made of different economic and cultural backgrounds could intersect. Currently cinema viewing, it is claimed, has been democratized, with diverse practices taking place in multiple sites across time. Yet, the audience profile at a given time and space is increasingly narrowing to a peer group defined by class congeniality or familial proximity or language and clan affinity.

Cinema still reigns over the chart of popular culture, but with the fragmentation of its sites of consumption, it is slowly disengaging from the public domain. But without the popular cinema viewing we have very little public and collective ritual to perform in this mega metropolis. Besides, in this time of social intolerance, and class and gender hostility, it is very important that several sets of people are facilitated to converge and share a site or activity in the process of their daily life. On the other hand, it is essential for sustainable urban development that the citizens develop a sense of belonging and pride in their surroundings, neighbourhoods and communal spaces. With the fading out of the single screen cinema theatres along with other open spaces, ordinary people have very little in terms of public life to cling to. This alienation from one's own location may result in severe social disaster in future. The surviving single screen cinema theatres are poorly maintained, burdened by a hostile tax regime (one that privileges the multiplexes over them) and hounded by real estate sharks. Some attention from the civil society, a small measure of state intervention towards easing the tax structure and protection from real estate speculators can go a long way in preserving some of these centres of affordable and popular urban culture towards a more inclusive and coherent social life in the city.

An Imaginary Cinema Lane

BY MADHUSREE DUTTA
AND PAROMA SADHANA

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Profiles on Neighbourhood Cinema Theatres

BY SHIKHA PANDEY

The owners Bejan Bharucha and his German wife Gertrude took over EDWARD THEATRE in the 1930s converting it to a Talkie, with the intention of making entertainment available to people from all classes. The Bharucha family owned many theatres across the country and operated each one with great love. The benevolent Mr. Bharucha was a big enthusiast of horse racing – every time he won big on betting, he would generously distribute the entire amount as bonus amongst his employees across all theatres. Such is the tradition that 30 years after his demise his sons and nephews still make sure that the employees are given bonuses at least twice a year. As Edwards's ownership is passed on from one generation to another; the employees of Edward too come bearing a legacy. The present manager recalls growing up in a makeshift home in the erstwhile green room of the theatre. His father joined the establishment in 1946 as the gate keeper. Likewise, the positions of the ticket seller, canteen manager, and projectionist have passed on from one generation to another.

After the death of Bejan Bharucha, Gertrude would visit the theatre thrice a week to look into the administration and accepted a princely salary of Rs 2000.

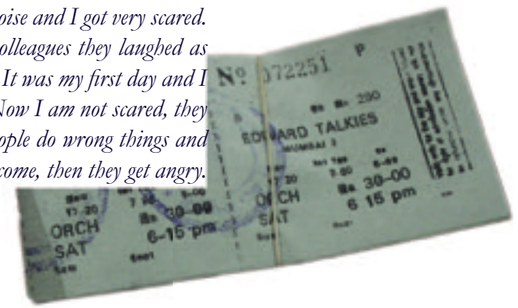
The entertainment neighbourhood straddling the European quarter and the Bazaar area in early 20th century

With the release of Jai Santoshi Maa in 1975, Edward ran houseful shows for a continuous stretch of 48 weeks. Lore has it that women came to the theatre dressed in their finery carrying diyas and thalis. They would remove their footwear before entering the theatre, perform prayers in front of the screen before the film started, and watch the entire 130-minute film with heads covered and palms joined n reverence. The audience would sing in sync the many religious songs that punctuated the film. At the end of the show an employee would stand at the exit and offer prasad. The theatre ushers however remember the chaos that unfolded in finding the footwear and a couple of women inevitably left bare foot.

The yet to be written memoir of the centenarian Edward Talkies is full of urban lore. With the fading of its glory the theatre's repertoire of anecdotes too has run thin. The only story that keeps resonating in all the testimonies of the workers and audiences is about the Spirits of Edward.

Under the theatre screen is a basement. One day, while closing up for the night I heard a knock from inside the bathroom. Now I had already locked the bathroom so I panicked and quickly reopened the door. But there was no one! So I re-locked and was walking away when I heard the knock again! I checked again, but no one was inside. A mouse couldn't have made such a noise and I got very scared. When I related this story to my colleagues they laughed as if they knew a secret that I didn't. It was my first day and I think the ghosts were testing me. Now I am not scared, they don't trouble us in any way. If people do wrong things and come in their way, like drink and come, then they get angry.

Harish, Ticket Keeper, 2013



Liberty Cinema A TIMELINE

1947 – On the occasion of the Indian independence Habib Hussein conceives of a grand cinema theatre that would befit the title of "The Showplace of the Nation".

1948 – Manu Subedar leases a plot of land from the government, extending from the West End Hotel to Lotus House on Marine Lines, which he rents out to Habib Hussein on a 999-year lease.

1948-49 – English architect Ridley Abbot designs the Art Deco building but dies in a plane crash before its completion. Indian architects J B Fernandes and W M Namjoshi subsequently resume the work.

March 31st 1949 – *The Lovers of Carmen*, a Hollywood film, is exhibited the night before the official opening of the theatre for the benefit of the builders and investors who, most importantly, were nervous about the air-conditioning working.

April 1st 1949 – The 1100-seater, air-conditioned, art deco cinema on Marine Lines opens to public with Mehboob Khan's *Andaz*, becoming the first cinema theatre in the erstwhile European quarters to exclusively show Hindi films.

1957 – Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* runs for an entire year at Liberty starting from October 1957.

1960 – The documentary footage of *Mother India*'s premiere at Liberty is used in Dev Anand's film *Kala Bazar* that portrays the rampant black market of tickets.

1970 – Habib Hussein, the owner of the theatre, dies. His son Nazir and sister Perin inherit the theatre. Because of Nazir's disinterest in running the theatre, Liberty is sold to a consortium of investors who turn it into a private limited company.

1970-late 1980s – Liberty Cinema descends into disrepair as, under the new leadership, B grade films become the new staple. Nazir Hussein starts a 20-year legal battle to wrest back control of the theatre.

1994 – Suraj Barjatya approaches the newly renovated Liberty to be one of the six cinema theatres in Bombay to premiere *Hum Apke Hain Kaun*, on the condition that they install a new sound system. Apprehensive that they may not be able to survive if the film flops, Barjatya assures Nazir Hussein that he would reimburse the cost of the sound system if the film tanks at the box office.

1996 – *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* runs for 2341 shows changing the fortunes of the theatre. To commemorate the occasion, MF Husain puts up a canvas from his 'Shakti' series in the foyer of the theatre. The art work is based on Madhuri Dixit, lead actress of the film.

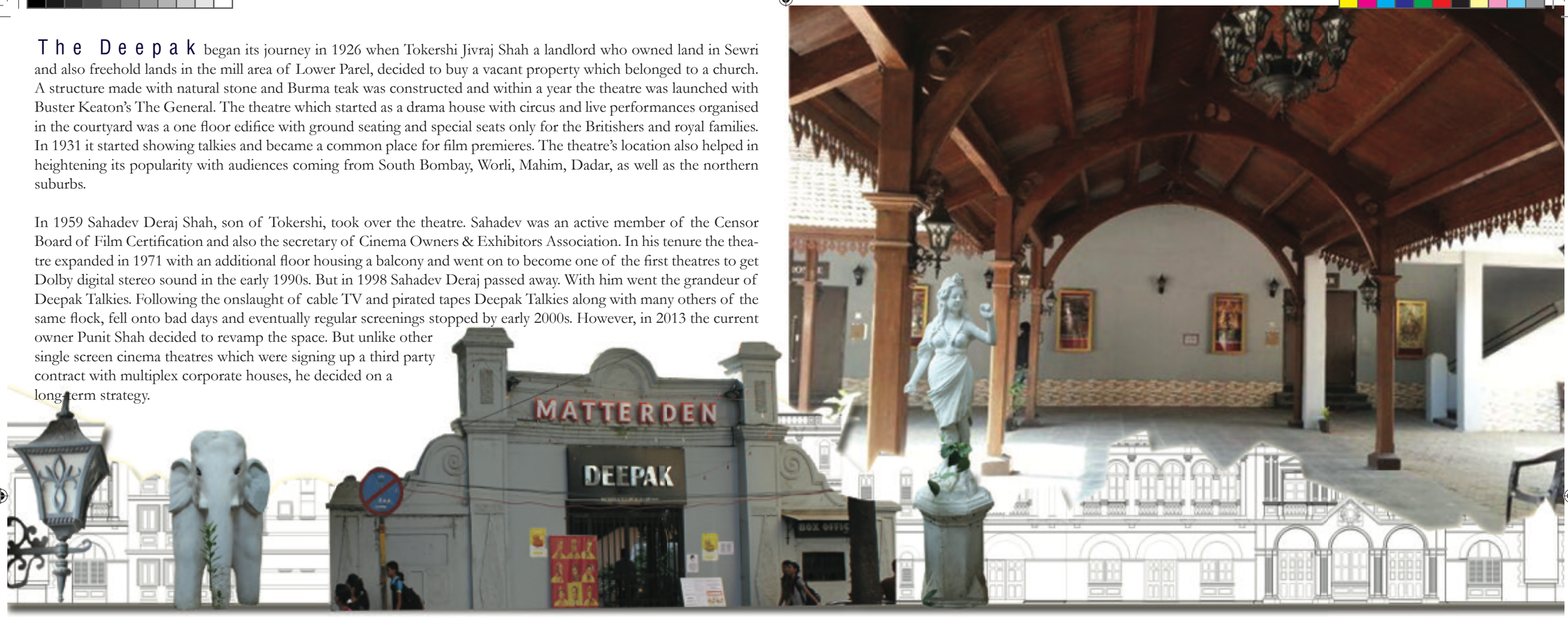
2006 – Liberty Cinema comes under the protection of the Heritage Committee. It is shortlisted as a Grade II A heritage structure but not granted status yet.

2012 – In October Liberty Cinema stops regular screenings of films and henceforth it hosts cultural events like the Mumbai International Film Festival, Stand Up comedy acts, music festivals etc.

Special Air-Conditioning Effects have been incorporated in the construction. Adequate exhausts and inlets ensure as-near-as natural atmosphere as possible, so as to avoid that suffering feeling one experiences soon after coming out of a crowded, air-conditioned hall.
Liberty Opening Gala Booklet, 1949

The Deepak began its journey in 1926 when Tokershi Jivraj Shah a landlord who owned land in Sewri and also freehold lands in the mill area of Lower Parel, decided to buy a vacant property which belonged to a church. A structure made with natural stone and Burma teak was constructed and within a year the theatre was launched with Buster Keaton's The General. The theatre which started as a drama house with circus and live performances organised in the courtyard was a one floor edifice with ground seating and special seats only for the Britishers and royal families. In 1931 it started showing talkies and became a common place for film premieres. The theatre's location also helped in heightening its popularity with audiences coming from South Bombay, Worli, Mahim, Dadar, as well as the northern suburbs.

In 1959 Sahadev Deraj Shah, son of Tokershi, took over the theatre. Sahadev was an active member of the Censor Board of Film Certification and also the secretary of Cinema Owners & Exhibitors Association. In his tenure the theatre expanded in 1971 with an additional floor housing a balcony and went on to become one of the first theatres to get Dolby digital stereo sound in the early 1990s. But in 1998 Sahadev Deraj passed away. With him went the grandeur of Deepak Talkies. Following the onslaught of cable TV and pirated tapes Deepak Talkies along with many others of the same flock, fell onto bad days and eventually regular screenings stopped by early 2000s. However, in 2013 the current owner Punit Shah decided to revamp the space. But unlike other single screen cinema theatres which were signing up a third party contract with multiplex corporate houses, he decided on a long-term strategy.



"… we have maintained the status quo, we did everything within the books. We have restored the space diligently; it is now brand new, and re-launched it as The Deepak. We removed the 'talkies' because that word is associated with our past of running Bhojpuri, Marathi movies. We want to change that and so No cinema, No theatre, it is just The Deepak."
- Punit Shah, Owner, The Deepak

In July 2014, The Deepak in collaboration with Enlighten Film Society started a venture called Matterden. It is India's first international film centre (based on the lines of film centres in New York, London and Japan) where it hopes to host workshops, film training institute, international exchange programmes for upcoming filmmakers, and a discussion and an idea exchange platform. Though The Deepak is still showing some commercial film releases along with world classics, it eventually aims to be a dedicated space for alternative cinema. They will also have a café and a book store in the open courtyard.

The transformation of this space can be seen as a new possibility emerged out of a dead end situation. According to the Development Control Regulations for Greater Bombay, the transfer of land use of a cinema theatre is restricted, forcing theatre owners to keep their property engaged in the dwindling business of cinema exhibition. But this initiative by owners of The Deepak is an innovative way to retain the relevance of single screen cinema theatres and to convert it into an expanded cultural space for the citizens of the city.

"The single screen theatres are dying, the owners are not interested in saving them. They either sell it to the multiplex or let it survive in a state of disarray. And I can't really blame them because the taxation is very high. There is entertainment tax which is 45%, there is show tax which is collected under BMC but nobody really knows the definition of show tax. We tried to figure out by filing an RTI but they didn't know. There is garbage tax, advertisement tax, there is property tax which is so hefty and then there is income tax. So these are direct link taxes. Out of 100 rupees of a ticket, 85 rupees goes in taxes. And 15 rupees is what you are left with to run and maintain your theatre."

- Punit Shah, Owner, The Deepak

Cinema came to the working class precinct of Parel as early as the second decade of the 20th century with the opening of Venus Cinema / Jaihind in 1917 followed by Hindmata Talkies, Deepak Talkies, Palace Talkies and Laxmi Cinema / Bharatmata

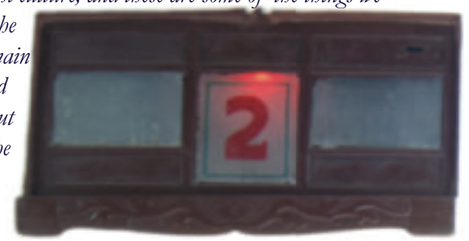
Urban entertainment was perceived as a tool to keep the migrant workers from the hinterland glued to the city and work, and thus many theatres were opened under direct patronage from the mill owners. To make these spaces more conducive to the workers the theatres, in the beginning years, followed a convention of aligning the show timing with the shift timing of the mills. Along with clan- and village-based bhajan mandalis, folk-based performances such as Vagnatya and Powada, commercial performances of Tamasha and Lavani cinema became an essential part of the working class culture of Parel.

In the 21st century, the 91 year-old-establishment **Bharatmata Cinema** is a rare theatre in the city which is still running and surviving in its original form with its main audience coming from the Marathi-speaking working class. The theatre is popularly considered not just as another cinema house but also as a symbol of the vibrant Marathi culture in Mumbai. It is successfully running three shows a day, with tickets priced at 1/10th of that of the multiplexes, by primarily screening Marathi films.

Bharatmata covers 1800 square meter of land and is located on the premises of the India United Textile Mills; National Textile Corporation (a central government undertaking) is currently the owner of the mill/property. In 2002, the NTC decided to take over the land and refused to renew the theatre's 72 year-old-lease which was to expire the same year. Earlier, in 1989, too, they had served an eviction notice to Bharatmata but the then Chief Minister Sharad Pawar intervened and managed to temporarily save the theatre from being demolished. The threat of demolition of the only cinema theatre in Mumbai which regularly screens Marathi films at affordable rates to ordinary people in Girangaon is seen as a big blow to the city's working class culture and many artists, film stars, writers and intellectuals have rallied around Bharatmata Cinema to save it.

Kapil Bhopatkar who runs Bharatmata Cinema approached the city civil court against NTC's eviction notice in 2002. Bhopatkar appealed to the court to consider the history of the theatre and its importance as a cultural hub in the lives of people. He argued that NTC only wanted to exploit the commercial potential of the prime location on which the theatre stands by building residential and commercial property. Yet the court dismissed the opposition to the eviction notice in 2010. So far the public outcry and strategic mobilization with the citizens, artists as well as the trade union activists, has kept Bharatmata Cinema alive.

The point is not that a Marathi speaking person wants to watch exclusively Marathi films, we watch Hindi films and English films too. The important thing is the availability of a theatre. This theatre was especially created for the mill workers, and these workers are predominantly Marathi and hence showing Marathi films is preferred. Such a place should be conserved, should be saved, the city should not snuff it out, but nurture it since it is a symbol of Marathi culture, and these are some of the things we have been agitating for. Our appeal to the government is that this place should remain for movie viewing only. This theatre need not be as spectacular as say Metro… but it needs to cater to the basic needs of the common man, and be affordable for a regular worker with minimal wages.



Datta Iswalkar, trade union leader and founder of
Bandh Girni Kamgar Union

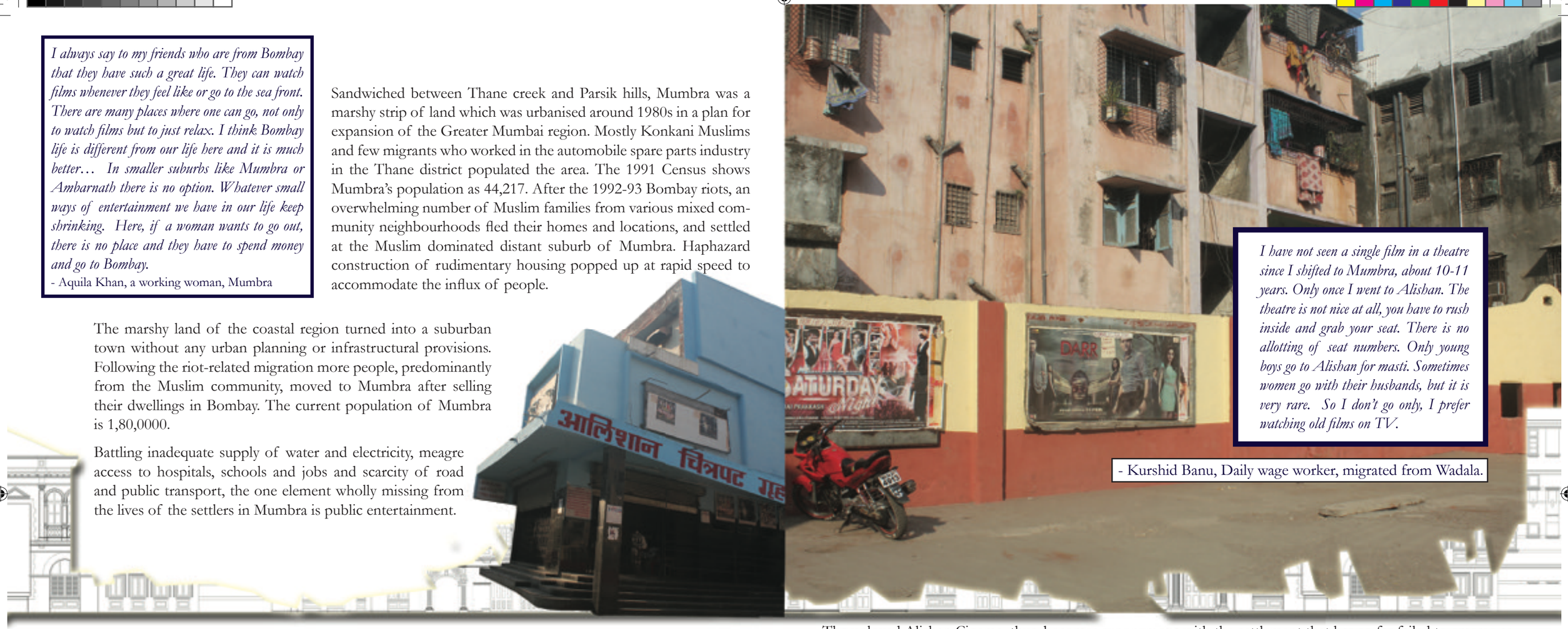
I always say to my friends who are from Bombay that they have such a great life. They can watch films whenever they feel like or go to the sea front. There are many places where one can go, not only to watch films but to just relax. I think Bombay life is different from our life here and it is much better… In smaller suburbs like Mumbra or Ambarnath there is no option. Whatever small ways of entertainment we have in our life keep shrinking. Here, if a woman wants to go out, there is no place and they have to spend money and go to Bombay.

- Aquila Khan, a working woman, Mumbra

Sandwiched between Thane creek and Parsik hills, Mumbra was a marshy strip of land which was urbanised around 1980s in a plan for expansion of the Greater Mumbai region. Mostly Konkani Muslims and few migrants who worked in the automobile spare parts industry in the Thane district populated the area. The 1991 Census shows Mumbra's population as 44,217. After the 1992-93 Bombay riots, an overwhelming number of Muslim families from various mixed community neighbourhoods fled their homes and locations, and settled at the Muslim dominated distant suburb of Mumbra. Haphazard construction of rudimentary housing popped up at rapid speed to accommodate the influx of people.

The marshy land of the coastal region turned into a suburban town without any urban planning or infrastructural provisions. Following the riot-related migration more people, predominantly from the Muslim community, moved to Mumbra after selling their dwellings in Bombay. The current population of Mumbra is 1,80,0000.

Battling inadequate supply of water and electricity, meagre access to hospitals, schools and jobs and scarcity of road and public transport, the one element wholly missing from the lives of the settlers in Mumbra is public entertainment.



I have not seen a single film in a theatre since I shifted to Mumbra, about 10-11 years. Only once I went to Alishan. The theatre is not nice at all, you have to rush inside and grab your seat. There is no allotting of seat numbers. Only young boys go to Alishan for masti. Sometimes women go with their husbands, but it is very rare. So I don't go only, I prefer watching old films on TV.

- Kurshid Banu, Daily wage worker, migrated from Wadala.

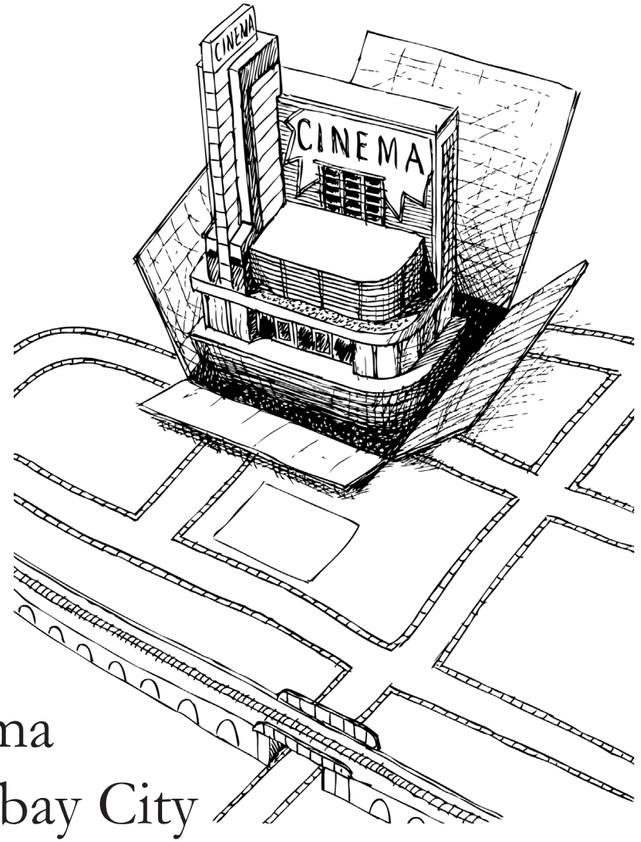
In 1994, **Alishan Cinema** was constructed in Mumbra. Its owner Yunus Supariwala already had a couple of theatres in the island city, including Dreamland Cinema in Charni Road. It would largely cater to residents of neighbourhoods like Grant Road, Lamington Road and Nagpada. After the riots when a lot of people from this area moved to Mumbra, Supariwala decided to follow his loyal patrons in order to make up for his financial loss. Thus opened the 1050 seater Alishan but it failed to recreate the old magic of a neighbourhood cinema theatre in terms of patronage from one and all.

The settlement of Mumbra has emerged through a systematic process of ghettoisation that relocated the lower class Muslim community to a presumably safe space after the riots, completely insulating them from the rest of city. Yet the random settling of displaced / ejected people could not turn them into a homogenized community nor could it create a neighbourhood of pride. The longing for the erstwhile cosmopolitan life style at the heart of the city keeps haunting the settlers now confined to a sterile existence.

The unloved Alishan Cinema, thus, becomes synonymous with the settlement that has so far failed to emerge as a neighbourhood of pride and longing.

Now only when I go to town with my friends we make plans to watch a film. Like somewhere in VT, or there is Derby theatre on Sandhurst Road. Otherwise we just sit at home…In town one could do any odd job and earn a living. So everyone could enjoy. Here it is very difficult to find work. When there is no employment there is no money, there is no money so people can't afford to go out and so there is no entertainment. Besides, it is very difficult to travel to anywhere from this place.

- Kausar, lives in Mumbra, migrated from Madanpura after the 1992-93 riots



Contours of Cinema
Theatres and Bombay City

BY PAROMA SADHANA

THE BUBONIC PLAGUE ARRIVED at the end of the 19th century triggering a series of events that became instrumental in planning the urban infrastructure of Bombay. In an attempt to curb the spread of the epidemic the British government carried out forceful evictions and segregation of people resulting in a mass exodus out of city limits. The government also set up the Bombay City Improvement Trust (BCIT) whose main agenda was to expand the limits of the city in order to decongest it. This was one of the first of many urban development schemes initiated by the government to plan the growth of the city. Broadly speaking, the BCIT was to focus on housing and road construction – the two main concerns of Bombay urban development till date.

Cinema arrived in this city a few years before the plague. Though 1896 is the year that showcased "Living Photographic Pictures in Life-Sized

Reproductions" to an audience in Bombay, it is not till ten years later that cinema exhibition would become a viable economic enterprise, and a veritable threat to the reigning entertainment form of the time – the live performance space of the drama theatre. Drama theatres were built in the city in the 1860s and huddled in the demarcated entertainment district of Bombay – Play House – near Grant Road. They were the show palaces of *natak mandalis* and amateur theatre groups. The city theatres, first in the Grant Road area, and then later in the Fort area, were impressive structures with proscenium stages, green rooms, and segregated seating (orchestra, gallery, boxes). People flocked to these theatres to catch Gujarati, Parsi and Marathi performances by traveling and home-based theatrical companies; as well as the global touring vaudeville acts. Dramatic theatre in Bombay was at its peak during the last two decades of the 19th century when the Gaiety and Novelty theatres were built in 1879 and 1887 respectively in the Fort area that housed the European quarters and the commercial district and was known as the Esplanade. The two theatres fast became the premier performance spaces, relegating their counterparts at the Grant Road area to B Grade establishments.

Yet by the end of the 19th century, even as the city was changing its shape and people were redistributing as a result of the plague related state policies, the growth of the reigning culture of drama as well as of cinema, a new invention, had begun to languish.

From the Maidan to the Palaces

"Moving Pictures" started attracting a regular stream of audience only in the first decade of the 20th century when local entrepreneurs started the business of cinema exhibition by setting up temporary tents in the Esplanade Maidan in Bombay's Fort area, in close proximity of the grand drama theatres. Initially, these permanent drama theatres paid little attention to this phenomenon that would unfold season after season in the maidan. As they saw it, their business was secure, patronage intact, investment lucrative, and the sites well established. The only time they would engage with the business of cinema exhibition was when they required fillers between their programmes, and for that they would hire an exhibitor for a nominal fee. Meanwhile, tent cinema exhibitors were pulling out all the stops. With 4 shows (exhibitions) a day starting in the evening and continuing till late in the night, different ticket prices and seating facilities ranging from cushioned sofas to the bare ground, decorated tents and furnishings – they were attracting people from all classes and cinema was fast becoming a sustainable leisure activity. Compared with the businesses of drama theatres, the initial investment required to start a tent cinema was minimal: essentially one person to operate the imported equipment. Most of the films screened were reels that were imported from abroad and exchanged and re-sold many times over in Bombay as the production of local pictures was few and far between. The exhibitors capitalized and exploited the novelty of moving pictures, and the foreignness of the content was irrelevant.

"Cinematograph" was the term that was attached to the cinema exhibition companies, differentiating them from drama theatre companies. Often cinema exhibition companies took on the names of famous drama theatres in order to boost their publicity. So, for instance, Excelsior Cinematograph (name borrowed from the famous and established Excelsior Theatre) had to release a public statement clarifying that they were not attached to any other business – whether this announcement was prompted by the ire of the management of Excelsior Theatre, or out of their own good conscience, is not known. By the end of the first decade, drama theatre managements became alert to the threat posed by the tent cinematographs. In a letter to the Editor of Times of India, dated March 31st, 1910 the proprietors of Novelty Theatre expressed their protest against their existence –

Our protest is that undue advantage is given to proprietors of temporary structures over our Company, whose principal shareholders are Indian gentlemen with large vested interests in the city, and who have spent nearly seven lakhs of rupees in erecting theatres.

The letter continues to describe the safety and health hazards that tent cinematographs pose to their audience, and it especially rues the low rental costs of plots on the Esplanade as opposed to the rental costs / hiring expenses of the permanent theatres. Two months after the protest was registered with the Commissioner of Police, tent shows were banned in the maidan on grounds of inadequate safety measures. But the management had also realized the commercial potential of cinema exhibition. They then proceeded to buy the entire stock of Excelsior Cinematograph and the latter's exhibition now continued within the premises of Novelty Theatre –

The last exhibitions in the present Excelsior tent took place on Monday and the Excelsior will resume its entertainment on Saturday next, at the Novelty Theatre, under the sole general managership of Mr. Colonello, which may be regarded as an assurance that the traditions of the Excelsior will be perpetuated and its attractive features maintained.

The garden areas attached to the theatre building are being adapted to preserve…the 'al fresco' character of the Excelsior…

It is from this moment on, even before local production of cinema has started on a mass scale, that the space of exhibition gets prominence. As cinema exhibition made its way inside the premises of the hallowed drama theatres it transitioned from the cloaked tent cinematograph to the high ceilinged cinema theatre. It would take another decade for the transition to be complete, with cinema exhibition taking over the space of live performance.

Cinema marks the City

In 1912 two rival drama companies joined forces to produce two iconic plays *Manapaman* and *Saubhadra* which created a great stir in the city of Bombay. People thronged the Baliwala Theatre where the performances were to be staged and ticket prices skyrocketed. While Marathi drama was enjoying its golden hour on a proscenium stage in Grant Road, in its vicinity on Sandhurst Road the city's first locally produced film was being screened. *Pundalik*, made by Dadasaheb Torne, was a silent shooting of the play *Shree Pundalik* staged in modest surroundings at Mangaldas Wadi. Like two star-crossed entities, drama and cinema overlapped each other in this year, where the former started its decent from the zenith, and the latter ascended. This was the beginning of the consolidation of cinema in Bombay. The following year *Raja Harishchandra*, a fictional narrative mythological, was released at Coronation Cinematograph marking the commencement of the production of narrative films in India that demanded dedicated exhibition spaces. The ban on setting up tent cinemas within the city limits led to the mushrooming of quasi permanent exhibition structures, which can best be described architecturally as tin shed structures, to accommodate the growing cinema exhibition business. These spaces remained in the business for the long run (at the time a long run meant a few steady years) – renting plots of lands, obtaining proper licenses from the Commissioner of Police, and trying to adhere to the as-yet-not-consolidated safety and public health stipulations in their premises. Some of these exhibition spaces evolved in later decades into permanent structures, and some stood standing for a few years before being dismantled for a new fare of existence. One such establishment is worth mentioning in detail here – the America-India Cinematograph. Its inception can be traced back to 1910 when it was erected at the Esplanade Maidan, alongside the numerous tent cinematographs. Its ambitions though were different from the temporary structures of the tents. It had earlier sought to rent a plot of land in the Fort area to construct an exclusive cinema exhibition space, but since cinema was not yet a proliferating entertainment form, the space had instead been allotted to build a skating rink – at the time, a much more enticing amusement option for the people of Bombay. After the ban was introduced in the Esplanade Maidan the America-India Cinematograph shifted to a more permanent location where apparently it installed electric fans for the comfort of its audience. This is the theatre where Phalke saw *Life of Christ* (1904) in 1910 – the event that inspired him to make films. The general life span for these kinds of theatres – America-India, Coronation, Al Hambra – was three to four years.

A longer run for cinema theatres came by the middle of the second decade when two entrepreneurs joined hands to venture into the cinema exhibition business on a large scale. Ardeshir Irani, who was the India representative of Hollywood's Universal Studios since a decade, partnered with Abdulally Esoophally, a Singaporean film entrepreneur who had traveled extensively across South East Asia with his touring cinema, finally arriving in Bombay. Their first undertaking together was to buy over an exhibition space. Alexandra Theatre, built in 1911, was bought over by the duo in 1914 and re-launched as "New" Alexandra, on Bellasis Road. In another four years they proceeded to build a theatre of their own – the Majestic at Girgaum, near the tram terminus. In the history that is recounted up until now what is most significant is that cinema as a phenomenon in India began as an exhibition enterprise. It was first exploited as a commercial prospect for the exhibitors by developing audience patronage around the exhibition sites. These sites, the vessels in which the magic of cinema was revealed to people – the cinema theatres – in turn, started becoming the bearers of the marks cinema leaves on a city.

Till this time cinema theatres in Bombay were still predominantly exhibiting imported American films. The only major film producing company was that launched by Dadasaheb Phalke. Following his success many film companies sprang up overnight but were unable to sustain themselves. Phalke had created a home-based film production unit the control of which was in his own hands. Other film producing ventures in the second decade were in the form of flimsy partnerships between entrepreneurs. SN Patankar was one such entrepreneur who floated at least four film companies with various friends and businessmen, 1915 onwards. All the companies lasted for

a period of one to three years. At the time a film studio was synonymous with a film company. Phalke had converted his house on Dadar Main Road into a studio for shooting *Raja Harishchandra* (1913); and other companies rented plots of land in the city (scattered around Girgaum Chowpatty and Parel) and erected rudimentary four-walled structures to demarcate shooting space. These temporary roofless structures were like the tent cinemas of the 1910s – seasonal, basic and low maintenance. Film production in Bombay was formless and amorphous and in this transitioning period many companies / studios produced films that were merely warming up the engine. It is only in the third decade that film studios were launched as successful ventures and, following in the footsteps of Phalke's success produced largely mythological films for the Indian audience. Ardeshir Irani, who controlled two cinema theatres, launched the Imperial Film Company in 1926 (after three earlier failed attempts). The films produced under this banner were exclusively screened at his own theatres – Majestic and New Alexandra. The other key players in this decade were Kohinoor Films, Krishna Films and Sharda Films. All were launched by and / or with the financial backing of Gujarati businessmen who recognized the commercial potential of cinema and were stakeholders in the city's development. While films were being churned out at lightning speed, not all films made it to the exhibition screen. Barring a few successful outfits, countless film companies opened and shut down within months or a year of their inception. The demand for mythological films was high and not everyone could deliver. Besides, Indian films had to compete with the imported American films whose rights could be bought at one-tenth the price of making an Indian production.

The British State was already concerned with the depiction of white women and western lifestyle, which was one of questionable morality, in the avalanche of cheaply produced American films that were imported into Bombay. The rest of the market was now being threatened by the steady increase in Indian production. The State decided to intervene in order to protect the interest of the Empire by introducing the Indian Cinematograph Act in 1918 under which cinema theatres had to be licensed by the Commissioner of Police. The films too were brought under provincial censorship to acquire "fit for public screening" status in specific regions. It is important to note here that the exhibition of a film is what incurred surveillance from the State, not the production of it. In 1923, on the heels of the Cinematograph Act, came the Entertainment Duty Act where a tax of 12½ % was imposed on tickets priced 4 *annas* and above. The State intended the onus of the tax to be borne by the audience in another measure to curtail the masses from viewing cinema by making it unaffordable. The cinema exhibitors though, not yet sure of the loyalty of their audience, feared a backlash. They ended up reducing the base price of their tickets so that when the entertainment tax value was added to this reduced amount, the price of the ticket remained the same as before, in effect making themselves the bearers of the tax and not the patrons.

With the production of Indian films gaining momentum, cinema theatres were fast becoming the sites of leisure for people. Being essentially a business, exhibitors had to ensure that they attract a wide audience base. Thus, from time to time, they would announce special shows for poor people, "Ladies in purdah" and children making sure that all classes were accommodated. Certain cinema theatres got established with the screening of "hit" films (a continuous run of one month was considered good. Anything more than that was a veritable success) and came to be more in demand by the producers. For example, cinema theatres like Imperial, West End, Majestic, New Alexandra were popular with the film studios; while Cinema Precious on Lamington Road was infamous for showing films that never ran for more than a week. Because of poor business this exhibition space changed many hands and titles till eventually when it became Apsara and its fortunes changed. There were long waitlists for certain theatres and films were sometimes released long after their completion, just so that they could be released in an established theatre. This was still an unsteady period for cinema in Bombay and producers could not take chances with the exhibition of their films and so, in the 1920s, many film producers entered into exclusive contracts with certain theatres in order to control where their films were shown. While Irani's Imperial Films controlled Majestic and New Alexandra theatres, Sharda Film Company controlled West End, Krishna Films had Dubash Theatre, and Kohinoor Film Company exhibited its releases at Imperial Theatre. There was a distinct monopoly that only breaks after World War II and the independence of India.

The BCIT, between 1905 and 1930, had made three principal cuts through the congested area of the city, slicing open the thicketed quarters. The main roads that were built were Sandhurst Road which ensured an east-west thoroughfare through this area; the north-south Sydenham Road was created between the Byculla Bridge and Crawford market; and the construction of Princess Street was the nodal point of remodeling of the area. These three incisions opened up the tracts of land lying to the north-east

of the then city limits. Dadar and Matunga, which fell in this north-east portion of un-sculpted land, were being developed as housing colonies for Parsis and Hindus. As the neighbourhoods started to shape up and communities marked their territories, leisure spaces popped up in their vicinity to serve the needs of the residents. Cinema theatres then, one could argue, developed on the cusp of urban development making them a very useful tool for studying the expansion of the city. Between 1920 and 1930 there were eighteen cinema theatres already running in the Fort and Grant Road area, and six new theatres were built in the Dadar-Parel area. Despite the new set of regulations for exhibition of films, and the high capital and time investment in theatre construction, the demand for new cinema theatres was high and the supply followed.

The year 1927 is particularly notable as it marks the end of another phase in the timeline of cinema theatres in Bombay. One of the biggest and most renowned drama houses in Bombay, the Gaiety Theatre near Victoria Terminus, is converted to Capitol Cinema, signaling the takeover of dramatic performances by cinema. It is also the year that the Indian Cinematograph Committee is set up to study the extent and efficacy of censorship in India, and to develop a plan to encourage the exhibition of Empire films. The committee sent out 4325 questionnaires to people associated with the film industry across India. Amongst them were several cinema theatre owners and exhibitors. As it was with the evocation of the Cinematograph Act, this committee too was set up because the British had concerns regarding the unregulated exhibition of American and Indian films and through the committee the State wished to collect data on the functioning of the Indian film industry. The responses of the exhibitors included the several problems they faced with the Entertainment Duty Act (mentioned earlier), high cost of hire of Indian films (due to the high import duty imposed on raw stock), and the local authorities that sought privileges in the form of free tickets / bookings in exchange for a hassle free procurement of film prints. The committee in its report, interestingly, asks for the abolition of the import tax on raw stock in favour of the Indian film producers; and asks for a "quota plan" for the cinema theatres whereby it is mandatory for every theatre to show a proportion of Indian films – both recommendations in favour of the exhibitors. Though the State ignored the committee's recommendations its appointment was proof enough that the Indian film industry had made its appearance on the map. The apathy that the State showed towards the concerns of the exhibitors and producers would continue in the post independence years as well. The relationship of the State with the film industry will always be reflected in them regulating cinema exhibition as it is at this end that the films are received by the public. But the exhibitors would have no time to complain. Soon after the committee published its report in 1928 another development pushed them into a new phase – the arrival of the sound picture.

Talking to Art Deco

One of the biggest challenges faced by the theatres with the arrival of the talkie film was the installation of technology required to exhibit such films and the reorganization of technicians. In the era of silent films theatres often hired narrators to describe the film to the audience. The films too inserted subtitle slides in three or four languages based on the audience profile. Once talkie films replaced silent films, the role of the narrator was redundant, the audience was segregated on the basis of language and trained operators were needed to run the new projection system. In the early years of the 1930s the studios were using a whole host of sound recording systems ranging from Tanar Sound system to Audio Carnex, Fidelytone and RCA amongst many others. *Melody of Love* was the first talkie film to be exhibited in India. It opened at the Elphinstone Bioscope in 1929 in Calcutta where Ardeshir Irani saw it. And he, along with a few other prominent producers in India at the time, entered the race for producing India's first talkie. Irani won this race when he produced and released *Alam Ara*, a talkie production, in March 1931 at his own cinema theatre – Majestic. In his urgency to release the film he had to borrow sound film projection equipment from Calcutta (where talkie films had already been screened previously) for the first two weeks of screenings. During this time the screenings were on an invite only basis. It is only when his own American imported equipment arrived in Bombay that he opened the theatre to the general public. The trend in cinema had been changed forever and in 1931 alone twenty-eight talkie films were produced. By the mid-thirties many theatres upgraded to include permanent sound projectors and speakers and added a suffix 'Talkies' to their names to announce the new fare in town.

With the ushering in of the talkie film, the drama companies, who were struggling to survive, were thrown in at the deep end. The one thing that kept them distinct from films – dialogue delivery – was null and void in the face of synchronized sound in film. Allegedly, nine drama companies in Bombay shut down in the first few years of the talkie films. But still the new cinema theatres that were being built in this decade (and in later dec-

ades) would include proscenium stages as part of their architecture to accommodate live performances. Quotes from a Times of India report dated October 9, 1937 on the opening of Broadway Theatre in Dadar illustrate the changing trends in architecture and spectatorship in Bombay.

The Broadway has a forty five feet stage with dressing rooms in addition thus making the theatre suitable for the presentation of stage plays…The Broadway, incidentally, will also accommodate stage shows of any kind, the stage having been specially built with this end in view. Not only can Indian plays be staged there but European touring companies can be accommodated as well.

While the Broadway Theatre adapted the classical proscenium stage into its architecture, it was equipped with the latest technology in order to exhibit the talkie films and serious attention was given to acoustics for projected sound from speakers, unlike earlier when acoustical attention was directed to the live spoken word.

Sound proof carpets are laid on the floor (of Broadway) while the number of exits are such that the whole theatre could be emptied in less than two minutes…The whole of the walls and the entire roof is lined with Heraklith which has rendered the acoustics of this theatre practically perfect. The projection machine is R.C.A.

The Indian film was now split along linguistic lines with films being produced in multiple regional languages. But this also opened up the exhibition market for the Indian producer that was earlier facing competition from cheaply imported American films. Audiences thronged the theatres to watch films in their own languages. The trend of studios and theatres entering into exclusive contracts was disrupted as the number of films produced increased exponentially, thus allowing the theatres to choose their pick, and vice versa. Theatres got labeled as "first run" and "second run" houses – the former were spaces which had contracts with distributors / studios and got the first chance to release a film; the latter were freelance houses that would pick their films – Indian or foreign – after the first releases.

The invention of the talkie film was a direct result of the post World War I atmosphere of technological experimentation. The overwhelming power of technology, as realized in the sophistication of weaponry and propaganda during the war, was capitalized on in the post war period. The western nations employed the rhetoric of modernity where advancements in machinery would aid them in rising out of the ashes of the war. This rhetoric permeated itself in architecture as well and the Art Deco genre became internationally popular in 1920s, which celebrated the technological through geometric designs. In 1937 the Indian Institute of Architects organized the "Ideal Home Exhibition" in Bombay that showcased the international Art Deco style in home exteriors and interiors . The style permeated and proliferated in Bombay in the 1930s, the period between the two wars when movement of people and goods was at an all time high. The city adopted the style quickly and various office buildings and residential apartments were built using its tenets that changed the visual-scape of the city, hauling it from Victorian to modern times. In the construction of cinema theatres the most known examples of the Art Deco style are Regal, Eros, Metro and Central Plaza that were erected around the commercial district of Bombay at the Southern tip between Colaba and Charni Road. Principles of Art Deco were accommodated not only in the imposing angular and linear design of the outer façades of the theatres but also in its interior décor.

It (Broadway) is a steel-framed reinforced concrete building…Simplicity of line is one of the characteristics of this theatre…a striking feature of the decoration is two fibrous plaster panels designed in modern abstract style depicting the age old struggle between the horse and the machinery. These are aptly named "Progress" and adorn the two sides of the proscenium arch…The Broadway is what is known as a "thousand seater". It is built on what is now an accepted principle for a cinema theatre, an auditorium and balcony, with a few boxes at the back of the balcony…Tip up seats are installed for all classes except the lowest which consists of wooden benches.

Cinema at the Time of War

The building boom of the 1930s was thrown into crisis with the events of the Second World War and the Indian independence pitted back to back creating a very dramatic moment in history. Fortunes were made overnight as scarcity of essential raw materials created a speculation game that a shrewd few capitalized on. The lack of patronage, or even any serious engagement on part of the State, turned the Indian film industry into a perfect pot to invest the illegal war profits. Film actors were the largest recipients of this 'black' money and that created the Star system in India, edging out the old studio system where actors were contracted on monthly salary by studios. The wave of migration, due to partition and post-independence urbanization, had brought in people from other regions across the subcon-

tinent. Suddenly there was an abundance of talent and personnel and with the studio system collapsing the new trend was of one-hit wonders – lavish big budget films with prominent stars and song sequences produced by independent freelance producers, who were not attached to any studio. In order to impose a system over the market that was reeling under the speculative economy of the war, the State (the colonial British government, and after 1947, the independent Indian State) imposed various taxes and other stringent rules on financial activities. Despite its orphaned status vis-à-vis the State the film industry too came under the scanner. In 1943 the British State made it compulsory for cinema theatres to exhibit war propaganda films made by the government, cutting down on feature presentation slots. Not only was it mandatory for theatre owners to screen them, but they also had to pay for the films. This practice was discontinued post independence, but only for a year. In 1948 the independent Indian State established Films Division (FD), which was a titrated version of the British Information Films of India (IFI) under which the documentaries were produced. While IFI charged the theatres between Rs. 2 to 30 per week to buy these films, FD charged Rs. 5 to 150 for what they deemed was a service . Propaganda remained the mainstay of documentary. Where earlier it was to advertise the necessities of war now it was to exhibit the progress made by the independent State. The government also charged Rs. 40 per thousand feet of print for reviewing a film by the censor board – a prerequisite before it could be publicly exhibited. This was a 700% increase from what the British State charged which was Rs. 5 per thousand feet. Apart from charging the exhibitors and producers for the aforementioned 'services', the State increased and levied all sorts of Machiavellian taxes on import of raw stock, octroi duty for the transportation of film prints across states, sales tax on cinema equipment and export-import of prints traveling between India and Pakistan. Two years after independence an All India Cinema Protest Day was called where theatres nationwide shut down for a day protesting the State's taxation policies. But the government was unperturbed and launched yet another rule that curbed the growth of the cinema theatres.

In 1950 the Bombay government passed the Bombay Building (Control of Erection) Ordinance in an effort to curb indiscriminate construction by private builders that remained unchecked because of the rampant black-marketeering of raw materials since wartime. The ordinance stipulated that only buildings that served a "public purpose" would be allowed for construction. Cinema theatres came under the category of "non-essential" buildings thus affecting a virtual ban on their construction. This rule would continue for the next decade creating a demand and supply crisis. With the film industry churning out more and more films every year (the Bombay film industry accounted for 60% of the country's production) the demand for exhibition spaces grew. Theatres became coveted, like they were in the 1920s. In the period when the ban was effective only 11 theatres opened in Bombay, compared to 23 that opened during the 1940s. During this period exhibitors became a very powerful lobby in the cinema network and the distribution opportunity began to override the merit of the production.

If in the 1930s the architectural façades of the theatres were the visual markers of Bombay's urban scape, in the 1940s it was the names of theatres that reflected the shift in Bombay's political atmosphere. In early 1940s as the nationalist movement picked up speed and the call for the British to 'Quit India' was declared many cinema theatres changed their names to reflect their allegiance with the nationalist movement. Pathé Cinema on Lamington Road was known for its "love seats" as its seating arrangement comprised of only 6 box seats, presumably to offer an intimate setting for its patrons. This cinema was under the aegis of Pathé Frères from France that had set up shop in Bombay in the 1910s distributing film prints and selling camera equipments. In 1942 it changed hands and was renamed Swastik. Theatres Laxmi and Venus that were established in the 1920s in the textile precinct of Parel (predominantly for the mill workers that worked and stayed in the area) forged their new names as Bharatmata and Jai Hind respectively. Crown Theatre on Falkland Road changed its name to National Theatre. The euphoria of independence gained in 1947 was also reflected in the names new theatres accorded to themselves. In 1949 Bombay's first air-conditioned art deco styled 1100-seater theatre to exclusively screen Hindi cinema opened on Marine Lines. It was patriotically named Liberty alluding to not only the Indian independence, but also to the 'liberty' from showing imported American films. This decade also saw the establishment of arguably Bombay's first triplet theatre called Satyam-Shivam-Sachinam, the name suggestive of the deified political rhetoric of the time. Some theatres even chose to name themselves after the leading political figures of the time. Thus in 1948 Kasturba Theatre was inaugurated in Malad, commemorating Gandhi's wife; and in 1950 Jawahar Theatre opened in Mulund coinciding with the then Prime Minister's first five-year plan.

The Opulent City and its Cinema

After the austerity and frugality of the 1950s, which the State had propounded as the need of the hour, the 1960s burst into colour, literally, as colour prints replaced the B&W ones. The urban middle class, employed in the expanding industries and public sectors, was consolidating and gaining purchasing power. In response, the State was keenly developing its railway and aviation sectors leading to a boom in travel and tourism. The experiences of these travels, layered with heady fantasies of the urban city entered the world of Bombay cinema. Films on the hedonistic and opulent city fashioned after international urban cities across the globe became a formula. The concocted wild city as seen on the silver screen, then, nurtured an aspiration for this heady urban lifestyle.

Raj Kapoor's *Sangam* released in 1964 and it boasted of lavish song sequences shot in international tourist locations of Vienna, Paris and Switzerland. The audience was transported to 'the foreign' in a blink of an eye and people watched engrossed as their favourite stars careened through these international cityscapes sporting continental fashion. In 2012 an octogenarian recounted her memory from the 1960s when she moved to Bombay after marriage. On a Sunday her husband and she went to Sangam Theatre in Andheri to watch a matinee show. The theatre, predictably, was named after Raj Kapoor's super hit film. She didn't remember which film she saw but what she did remember was the moving staircase that transported her to the upper levels in the theatre! Her first encounter with an escalator, she remembers many people at the theatre taking hesitant steps onto the rotating staircase. The wonder of being transported to higher levels effortlessly in a cinema theatre was the gist of what the audience was experiencing while watching films at the time. The installation of an escalator, and other interior decorations like mirror screens etc., are symbolic of the aspirational desire of the consolidating middle class of Bombay. The theatre created a nest for the imagination of cinema to flourish, and flourish it did. When *Mughal-e-Azam* released in 1960 – which is arguably India's highest grossing film till date – a grand spectacle was orchestrated. The print reels of the film were carried atop elephants to the Maratha Mandir Theatre where it was being released, and the actors came dressed in regal costumes riding horses. The façade of the theatre was decorated to simulate the palace of the Mughal emperor so that as people approached the structure it inspired awe and wonder at what they were about to witness *inside* the theatre. Exhibition show places have, since their inception, attracted their audience into their dark caverns much like Aladdin was lured into the cave of jewels. Their methods are spectacular and fantastical and those involve an alteration of reality, as we know it. Be it Al Hambra in the 1910s that spruced up its lobbies with exotic palm trees, or Liberty that announced its exclusive air-conditioned cocoon within which one could watch Hindi films, or Sangam that offered a tireless flight of stairs to transport its patrons, cinema theatres' façades and interiors are manifestations of the aspirational desires of a mass of people.

By 1958 the limits of Greater Bombay had been extended up to Dahisar and Mulund under the Bombay Municipal (Extension of Limits) Act of 1951 in an effort to house the swelling population of Bombay. The city was stretching from the south to the north and was connected across these two poles via three major local railway lines – the Western, Central and Harbour. The Northern suburbs developed haphazardly into residential pockets and the Southern city retained its commercial and administrative districts. In 1964 the tram network of the city (which was concentrated at the Southern end) was shut down as the bulk of the commute was now from the suburbs to the city, borne by the local trains. The stations along these arterial railway lines became important portals of the city through which masses of people traversed every day. Subsequently cinema theatres started coming up in close proximity to the stations. Over time these theatres became synonymous with the neighbourhoods in which they stood and served as the geographical markers for people. The proximity of the theatres to the railway stations could be to capitalize on and lure the traveling workforce of Bombay as they went up and down the city; and also, to ensure that anyone traveling to a particular theatre would not have to search too far once they arrive at the station.

The 1970s are remembered in cinema history as the era of action packed blockbuster films with larger than life heroes. These heroes were literally created larger than life when the industry experimented, albeit for a brief period, with printing films on the wide 70mm print. This phenomenon caused a stir in the exhibition business as the theatres had to be refurbished to accommodate a screen large enough to project this print on. It was an expensive venture and a few cinema theatres that sprang up to quench this demand acquired iconic status. Minerva was one such theatre that was revamped to accommodate a 70mm screen. When *Sholay* (1975) released in Bombay and went on to become a blockbuster, people queued up outside Minerva to buy tickets weeks in advance. Rumour has it that the serpentine queue soon reached the bus stop located outside the theatre, prompting the change in its name to Sholay stop ! The film ran for five straight years in

Minerva. Meanwhile in Goregaon another cinema theatre was inaugurated the construction of which had caused a stir in the neighbourhood. Samrat Cinema was erected in the then pastoral village of Goregaon with a seating capacity of 1500! The plinth on which its foundation was laid was so large that the villagers in the neighbourhood thought that the government had commissioned a super sized stable to house all their cows and buffaloes. And thus Samrat Cinema was locally known as *tabela* cinema (stable cinema).

Cinema theatres became a category in the Bombay Development Plan and their plots were strictly reserved by the State. Thus under the Development Control Regulations (DCR) a cinema theatre could be demolished but another cinema theatre (with the same seating capacity) had to be erected in its place. Theatre owners did not fear this rule imposed by the State as business was steady and theatres were the only avenues available to people for watching cinema. In fact, it was perceived as a welcome protectionist policy.

Mega Theatres to Mini Theatres to Multi Theatres

Around 40 theatres in the megapolis downed shutters for various reasons, including the State-run Akashvani, Rex, Roxy, Shalimar, Kismat, Lotus, Plaza, Bijlee, Drive-in, New Talkies, Roop, Kalamandir, Amber, Rivoli, Dualat, Dharti, Majestic, Strand, Broadway, Opera House, Apsara, Derby, Shree, Badal, Barkha, Neptune, Radio, Diana, Oscar, Savera, Rajshree, Silver, Minor, Sona, Samarat, Roopam and Darpan

This Indian Express report dated July 12, 1996 marks the fading out of cinema theatres. New technology, once again, signaled change. From the early 1980s the boxed screen of the television started replacing the silver screen of the theatres. When a pair of innocuous commodities – the VHS-VCR – entered the market they heralded the birth of piracy that toppled the distribution-exhibition nexus. With the cheap and accessible technology of video in a few short years piracy of films and music became an epidemic and was one of the main reasons for the audience abandoning the theatres. In the 1990s recording formats changed again and the tape was replaced by the optical disc, which was even cheaper. Piracy of Bollywood films was, by now, a well-developed network catering to not only Indian households but also the Indian diaspora settled across Asia and Europe. It threatened not only the exhibition business but the producers as well whose primary source of revenue was box office collections. Various legal and not-so-legal methods of controlling video piracy by the producers' associations did not yield much result as the insidious attributes of the video technology made it non-industrial and thus slippery. As mode of access to entertainment changed cinema theatres began to lose their status as the primary exhibition sites. By late 1990s the producers stopped fighting a losing battle and joined the bandwagon to reserve prime time on TV for their films. Cinema theatres could no longer find an audience to fill up their large halls and they slipped into disrepair as maintenance costs could not be afforded. In 1996 when "Mumbai's first ultra-modern mini-cinema theatre, Sona" opened in Borivali east, it was with the hopes of breaking this decline.

With the commissioning of 'Sona' the disturbing trend of closure of several cinema halls in the Megapolis may give way to a new phase in show-biz — that of providing clean, wholesome family entertainment in hygienic surroundings

The Development Control Rules (DCR) of Bombay that reserved plots of land exclusively for cinema theatres had now become a bone of contention for theatre owners who were running in losses and demanded a change in land user status. The protectionist policy became draconian overnight and was fiercely objected to, coupled with a demand to reduce Entertainment Tax, which till date is the highest in Maharashtra. In 1992-93 a new set of DCR was released wherein the State allowed for a theatre owner to change his land user status and redevelop it as a commercial establishment provided that a smaller cinema theatre is built on the premises with at least one third of its original seating capacity. It is under this new regulation that Sona Mini was opened. While this move by the State can be perceived as a sympathetic helping hand to the cinema theatre owners, it was not implemented to only offer relief but was a strategic step in opening up plots of land in the congested city to encourage the establishment of commercial properties. In 1991 India liberalized its economic policies to invite private investment and international trade, among other reforms. The thrust of the new government was to increase its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) was introduced where major tax benefits were offered by the State to the investors with an eye to generate more revenue and employment. By 1995 BMRDA (Bombay Metropolitan Regional Development Authority, currently called MMRDA) announced the Draft Regional Plan for 1996–2011 with an aim to turn the newly anointed Mumbai into a "global city" with improved infrastructure. The real estate business boomed during this period and within three years of Sona Mini opening, many theatres in the suburban neighbourhoods of Mumbai were

bought over by real estate groups to be "retrofitted" or remodeled which meant cutting down the seating capacity drastically and refurbishing the interiors for a more modern look. Across four cinema theatres in the western suburbs that were remodeled in the late 1990s, the seating capacity reduced by almost 50%. But this was just a precursor to the beginning of the era of the multiplex.

The concept of the multiplex is to multiply the number the screens and subtract the number of seats, thereby creating several small theatres accommodated on one site. It is with the coming of the multiplex (or multiple screens) that the large theatres of the past were dubbed 'Single Screen Cinema Theatres' or just 'Single Screens'. The Maharashtra government approved its multiplex policy in 2001. The State now favoured the exhibition business by providing massive subsidies and tax exemption to upcoming multiplexes. With such enticing offers from the State itself, the exhibition enterprise, in the new avatar of multiplexes, became a lucrative investment option again. A multiplex is exempt from paying entertainment tax for the first three years since its inception. And after that the tax is introduced slowly with further cuts. But they retained the high rates of entertainment tax (45%) for the single screens without offering them any protection. It is only in 2013 that the tax slab has been amended to include prices of tickets, which means that for lower ticket prices, the tax levied is lesser and vice versa. This move breaks the uniformity of the entertainment tax and recognizes the folly in levying the same tax percentage to all ticket prices. In the new tax slab tickets priced Rs. 251-350 would pay 49.5% as ET, for tickets priced Rs. 351-500 the tax is 51.75%, and for tickets priced above Rs. 500 the tax levied is 54%. But this move still does not protect the single screens whose tickets are rarely priced above Rs. 100. An abolishment of this tax has been one of the major demands made by the Cinema Owners and Exhibitors Association to the State.

Most single screen owners have a 99-year-old lease contract with the State for the land on which their structures stand. The frustration of many owners today also arises from this fact where they are bound by contract to a piece of land whose land user status cannot be changed easily, disabling them from redeveloping their property. On the other hand, the arrival of the multiplex opened the floodgates for real estate speculators. As multiplexes often came attached with malls, the value of land automatically escalated manifold. Theatres were no longer fixed assets but were affixed to immovable properties. Amidst this reconfiguration of real estate in the city the multiplex-within-the-mall became almost incidental.

We feel that owning a fixed asset is not the most optimum method for a cinema company…because that is not our core competence. A real estate company should do that

In Bombay this speculation began in the northern suburbs even though, traditionally, real estate prices have been higher in the southern city limits. One conjecture for this is the shift in the nature of industries that operate in Bombay. From the 1980s the manufacturing industry, the textile mills primarily, began its descent and slowly as the large mills that dotted Parel shut down, huge plots of mill lands, and hands, were rendered vacant. In the 1990s the service industry gathered steam and brought into the city another set of aspiring middle class migrants who settled in the more affordable fringe of the northern suburbs. The city also started shifting its commercial centres from the Southern tip of the city and scattering them in the suburbs (Bandra-Kurla Complex being one such example), disrupting the north-south movement of workers that had iconised Bombay city life. This has resulted in a significant growth of real estate in the suburban district as opposed to the city district where, though the prices are high, they are stagnant. Thus by the 2000s we have two sets of vacant lands in the city – one, the abandoned mill lands in the city; and two, the yet to be developed northern suburban lands. Both these spaces were eventually poached by the mall-cum-multiplex business. Single screen cinema theatres, with their sprawling compounds, became only yet another casualty in the exercise.

Indian Cinematograph Committee Report 1927-28

The Exhibitors, in every case, start with having determined theor policy according to the nature of the locality in which they own a place of exhibition, and cater to the public accordingly. In the Bombay Presidency, though competition is at its best, the Exhibitor has as good a scope as can be wished, for finding out his own pictures. The Cinemas on this side have to be pucca-built buildings under the Police and the Municipal Rules and Regulations, and we believe, that the public have a more than adequate return on their admission fees. However, the following, among others (and speaking broadly), do operate as obstacles in the way of the Industry as a whole, viz. :-

(1) A policy of charging fantastic and disproportionate rates for publishing advertisements on the part of newspaper owners.

(2) The Entertainment Duty Act.

(3) Municipal Tax on Posters and Public advertisements.

(4) Want of a common language throughout the country.

(5) The prevalence of a large conservative mind that still believes Cinema shows to be wasteful luxury.

1912

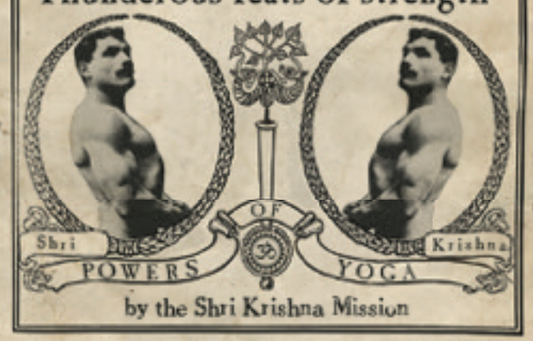
WELCOME ONE to the WELCOME ALL!

TO RIPON THEATRE WITNESS

GRANT ROAD

1. A distinct exhibition of various muscles of the body. 2. Motor will be stopped by the stomach through yoga powers. 3. Various sorts of yoga postures will be shown. 4. A sword shall be given to the artist and chest by two persons and the actor shall resist the force by yoga powers. 5. Different sorts of cloth swinging exercises shall be exhibited. 6. Weights of 200 lbs. shall be thrown on the chest from the height of 30 ft. 7. Two full loaded bag carts will cross the forearms. 8. Weight of 280 lbs. shall be lifted by teeth through will power. 9. Two packs of playing cards shall be torn together. 10. The straight body will be thrown Horizontally from the height of 5 ft. and the actor will bear the shock.

Thunderous feats of strength



by the Shri Krishna Mission

at 9-30 P. M. Standard time on Saturday the 9th of March 1912 A. D.
and at 4 P. M. Standard time on Sunday the 10th of March 1912 A. D.

Notice. 1.The smoking is strictly prohibited. 2. Doors will open at 8-30 P. M. Standard Time, the feats will begin at 9-30 P. M. Standard Time.

N. B. Persons wishing to see the hardness of body's muscles personally on stage shall have to purchase special tickets worth Rs. 5.

Children below the age of 10 shall have to pay half the charges.

★ RATES OF TICKETS ★

Reserved Stalls 2 lines.. 3 Rupees ★ Reserved Box 2 lines.. 2 Rupees
Box... 1 Rupee 8 Annas ★ Stalls 2 lines.. 1 Rupee
Stalls back lines.. 12 Annas ★ Gallary.. 8 Annas ★ Pit Ladies.. 4 Annas
Prostitutes... 1 Rupee

Men behaving unsentlemanly

1952

HIGH COURT 50 Rs.
O. O. C. J.
Suit No. 1211 of 1950.

Persons desirous of purchasing any one or more of the undermentioned properties are hereby requested to send in their offers in sealed covers to the undersigned at his office at High Court Annexe, High Court, Bombay, so as to reach the undersigned by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, 2nd December, 1952.

LOT NO. 1.

All that piece of non-agricultural land with the Cinema Theatre standing thereon and known as "JAWAHAR TALKIES" situate in Kurla near the Railway Station containing an area of 1973 Sq. Yds. together with machinery, equipment, furniture, fittings lying and being therein, bearing Plot No. 84, Scheme No. XVII CST.

1969

SANGAM

Kurla Road, Andheri (East)
Luxuriously Air-Conditioned
and
The only Cinema in India having an
"ESCALATOR"
(The Moving Staircase)

Rates of Admission
Rs. 2/- U. Stalls 1.50, Stalls 1/-

NOW SHOWING
S. Mukerji's
SAMBANDH
Eastmancolor

Today morning at 9-30
At Reduced Rates
Bal. Rs. 1.30, U. Stalls 1/-, Stalls 0.75
Fun for the entire family
LAUREL & HARDY'S

1952

When Kumkum (now called Geeta) cinema hall opened in Worli in 1952, the area was full of local dadas, all of whom presumed it was their birthright to get tickets on demand. When several such dadas were thrown out by tough ushers, riots broke out in the streets and the theatre management had to organize police protection and a special escort home for the ushers and other staff.

1975

New cinema stoned

An irate crowd waiting to buy tickets at the new Vile Parle cinema theatre, Bahar, threw stones and attacked the security men...The police said the advance booking could not be started as the theatre had still not got the license

Nearly 25 people threw stones at the theatre and injured six security men. Three men armed with a knife and razors attacked the manager of the cinema as he tried to save a security guard from assault.

1982

Shedding A|C

Cinema Theatres in Bombay which were at one time rushing ahead with installing air conditioning plants are now seeking municipal permission to operate their halls without air-conditioning. Power cuts are too frequent for them to ensure regular service to patrons and when the air-conditioning is switched off, the audience reacts strongly.

In order not to take the blame the proprietors of theatres are asking for permission to withdraw air-conditioning. Since the theatres are designed with air-conditioner plants, the permission is sought to make appropriate alterations, like providing exhaust ducts and raising of ceilings. Kalpana theatre in Kurla and Amar in Govandi are understood to have received such permission. Natraj theatre at Chembur is awaiting clearance. Hanajr, Rupam and Sharda are said to be among the theatres applying for exemption of air-conditioning. Whether there will be a reduction

1997

The Last Reel

A landmark of Sion, Rupam cinema, is no more. Overnight, the cinema hall has been razed to the ground...There is speculation that a commercial complex with swanky restaurants and bars is going to be built at the site. For several years, Rupam had catered to the needs of the residents of Sion, Koliwada, CGS quarters, Dharavi and Matunga...But over the years, it became a victim of neglect. The scene outside the hall was vitiated by blackmarketeers and gang rivalry...Following its demolition there is no cinema hall between Aurora in Matunga and Vijay Talkies in Chembur. Even Vijay Talkies is an apology of its earlier self, since it is today an adjunct of a commercial complex.

1999

Presenting, ladies and gentlemen – The Bowling Company – India's premier leisuPresenting, ladies and gentlemen – The Bowling Company – India's premier leisure centre. 30,000 square feet of state-of-the-art fun – that's a first for Mumbai, we can tell you!

In 1991, it (Ambar-Oscar-Minor) was replaced almost overnight by India's first department store, the now ubiquitous Shopper's Stop. Promoted by Zodiac and the Raheja Group, it was a tiny as department stores go at just 4,000 square feet. Yet, it attracted people in hordes (many of whom came to take in the 'smell of an American style' department store), added floor after floor and grew into a 25,000 sq ft store over time. … But there's no debate on one thing: Shopper's Stop was the first pan-India retail chain—the one that stirred the retail revolution that's sweeping the country now.

filmindia

Vol. 4 AUGUST 1938

METRO INSULTS THE NATION

The Home Member & The Police Commissioner Must Act.

"Management reserves the right to admission" is the condition under which a patron of the Metro Cinema, Bombay has to buy his entertainment. no other cinema in Bombay, not even the palatial Eros, has this condition printed on its ticket of admission. But in the case of Metro, even on the ticket which costs Rs. 2-4-0 this irritative notice is printed. That means that even after paying a patron is suspect. The question which suggests itself is whether the Metro Cinema is a private club or a public place of entertainment. In the rules under which the Commissioner of Police grants a license for cinema houses in Bombay, there is no provision for this illogical and highhanded condition of admission.

1942

NEW CINEMA HOUSE FOR BANDRA

Bandra's newest and most up-to-date cinema house New Talkies opens tomorrow with Pancholi Arts Pictures' popular musical "Khazanchi" starring Romola and Manorama. That excellent form of showmen Bhopatkar Theaters who have been managing the Plaza; Bharat Mata, Saraswati and New Venus cinemas with such excellent results will also run the New Talkies at Bandra. Messrs. S.G. Bhopatkar and H.S. Bhopatkar are expert showmen whose rise is due solely to their fine service, their personal attention in catering for the tastes and comfort of their patrons and their far sighted arrangements to secure the very best productions for their circuit.

1971

For Your Convenience
During The Blackout
The Show Timings Of All
Cinemas Are Changed From Today

METRO :From Today—
10.30 A.M., 1.30 & 4.30 P.M.
Ad. Booking:
8.30 A.M. To 5.30 P.M.

OPERA HOUSE
Daily 11, 1.30 and 4 p.m.
Plans 9.30 To 12.30, 3 To 6

PLAZA 10-30, 1-15 4 P.M.
OSCAR (Andheri) BASANT (Chembur)
Daily—10.30, 1.15, 4 P.M.

2007

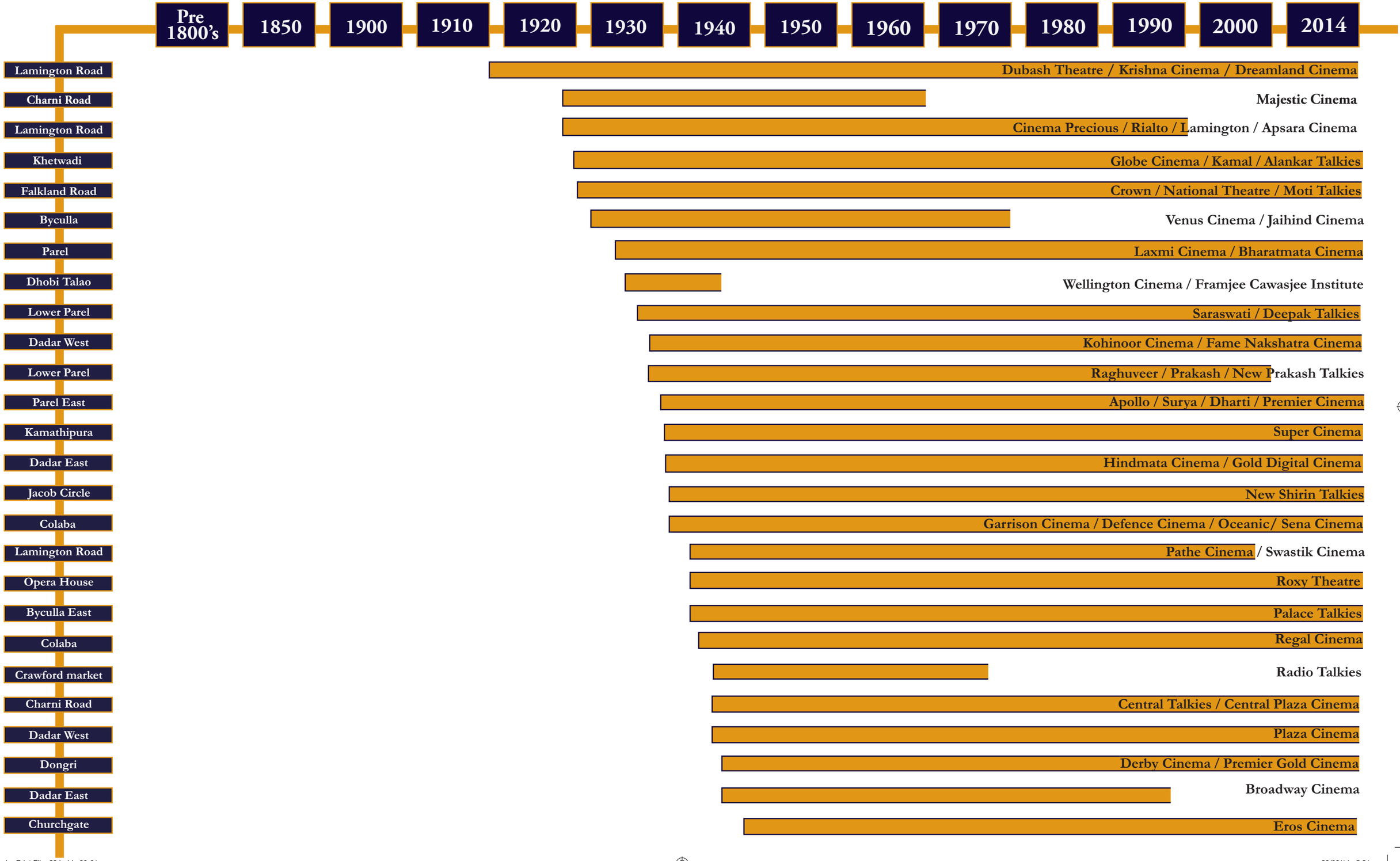
CINEMAX INDIA –INITATING COVERAGE

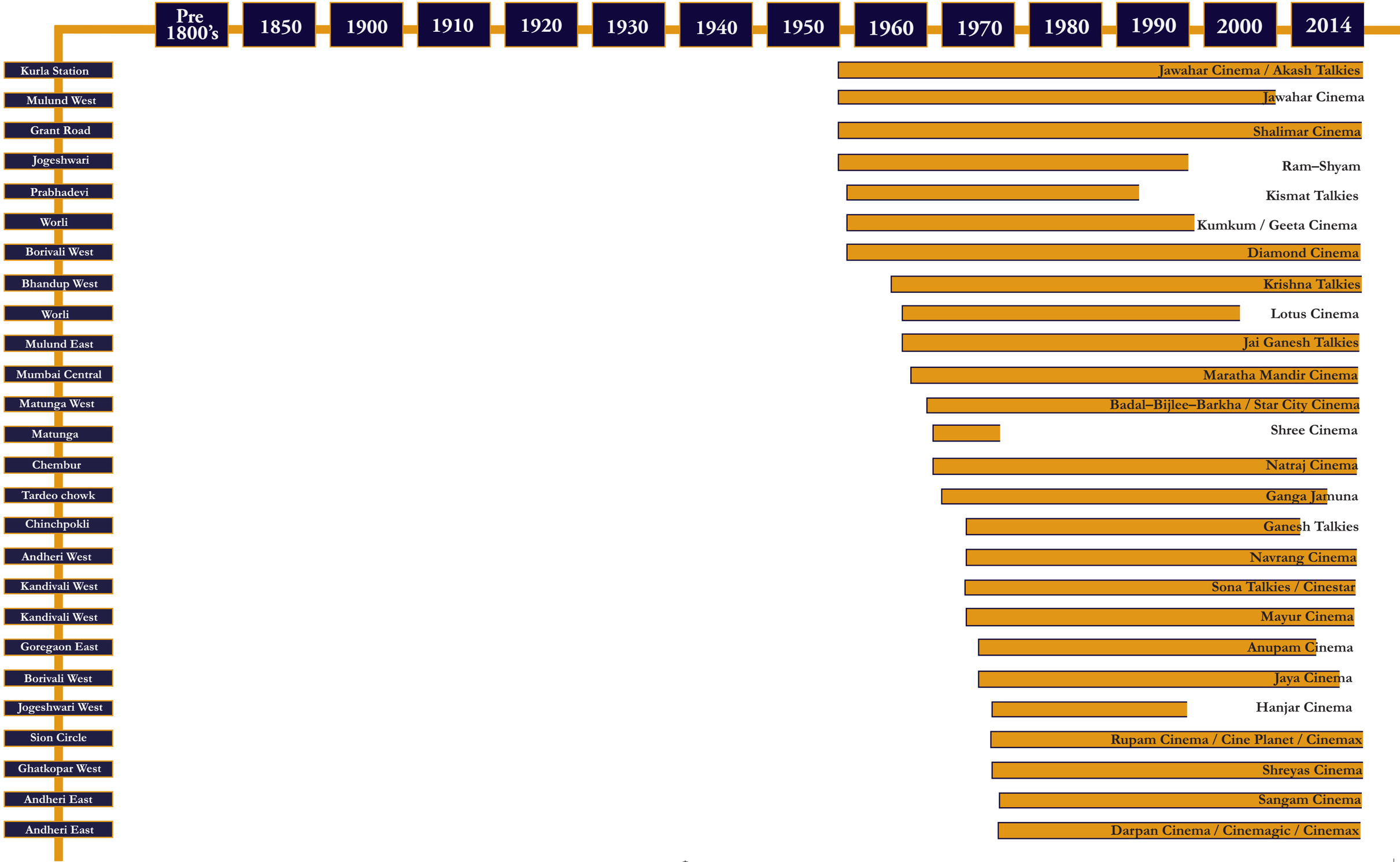
Cinemax India is a part of Kanakia group which has a track record of over 20 years in real estate development. The promoters entered into the film exhibition industry with the acquisition of a single screen theatre named Samrat at Goregaon, Mumbai in 1997, which wa subsequently retrofitted.

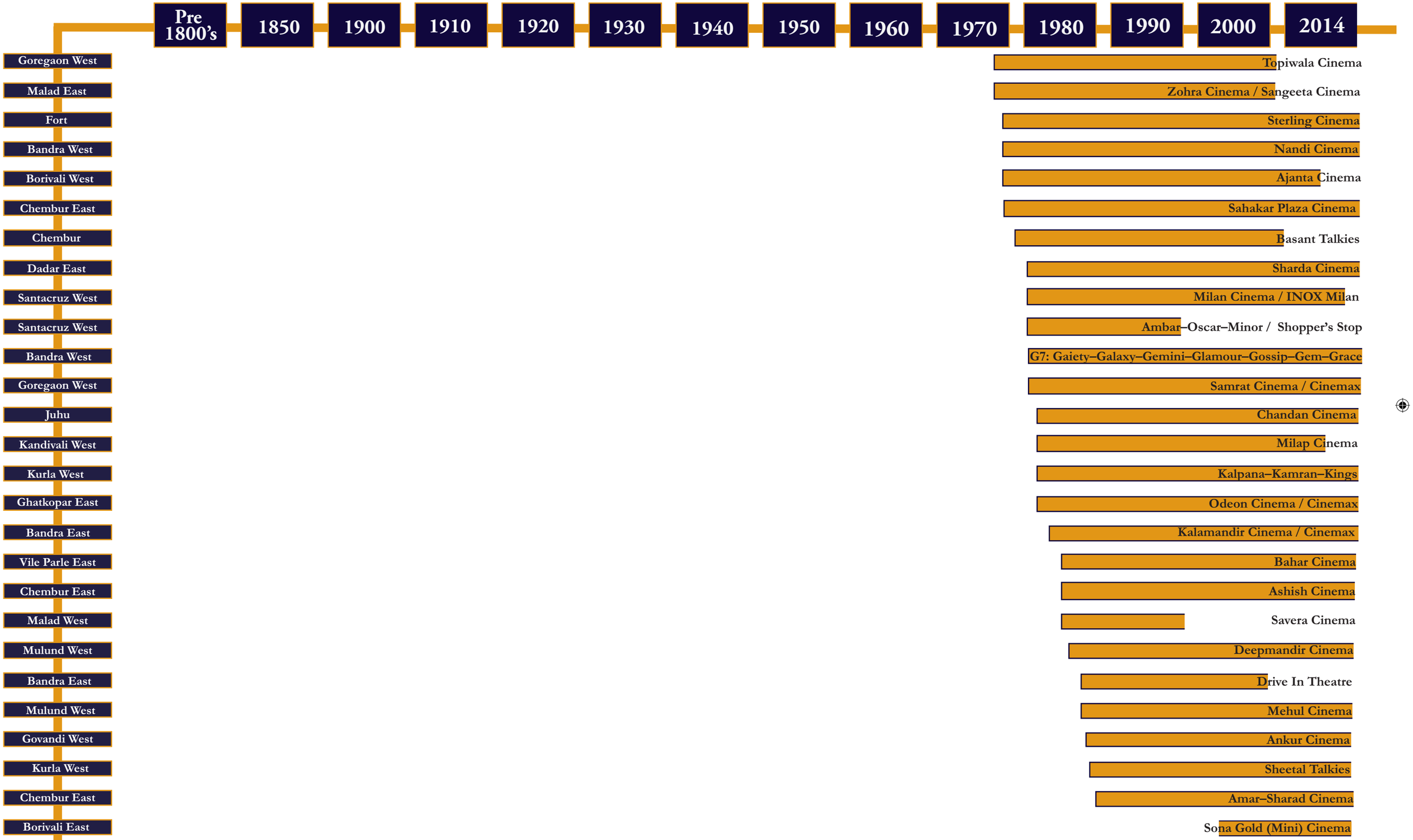
The company (Cinemax) has an experienced team of professionals to assess the potential of a location after evaluating its demographic trends in terms of catchment areas, purchasing power and competing alternatives. This helps Cinemax zero in on relatively untapped locations and gain the first-mover advantage.

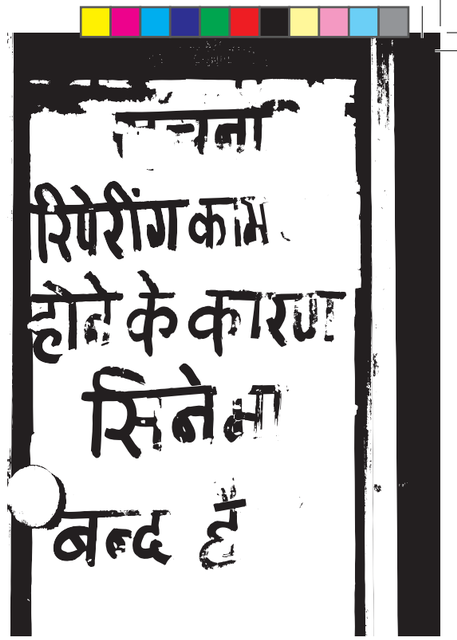
RELIGARE

Rise and Fall of Cinema Theatres: the 20th Century Listing









Rehabilitation of Cinema Theatres in Post Industrial Mumbai

BY PANKAJ JOSHI

With the decline of the textile mills and their eventual closure the manufacturing industry shifted out of the city, followed by a huge expansion of the service industry. This shift is predominantly visible in forms of consumption as well as forms of the corresponding built fabric. This has changed the way Mumbai functions now as opposed to the pre-1990s phase. This change is not a static long term phenomenon but a transitory city phase where a predominantly industrial / manufacturing city evolves into a post-industrial service hub and continues to morph from the predominant finance function to a hybrid mix of financial services, informal / formal services and the cultural industry economy of media and film, advertising, printing, and its myriad different forms.

This shift is also seen very evidently in the public culture and imagination of the city with its direct impact on the consumptive spaces such as the local eateries, cinema theatres and drama houses, shopping centres, music and dance based public events, advertising and media platforms, heritage and environment; shifting from the iconicity of the single to the genericity of the multiple. This list is unending and while it may seem apocalyptic, urban theorists argue that these city phases are the real testing grounds for public culture to demonstrate its grit and perseverance. However the lopsided and often deceitful dominance of the enabling environment against public culture spaces has its worst effect in the erasure of single screen cinema theatres in Mumbai.

The city economy, especially the informal economy, behaves akin to molten lead in a sand cast which readily and rapidly moulds itself to the grain of the cast. Whereas the physical city with its real estate languor resists, denies, distorts and slowly forges to come to terms with this post service industry economy and wakes up to a cultural industry economy. As the city grapples with the pressure of this morph the resultant collateral damage seems to be the cultural spaces which are not being able to survive the onslaught of the exiting service economy and its artificial ethos. The dilemma in this transitory phase of the city is that if we are not able to retain the cultural spaces, then the city would find it extremely difficult to reorganise its critical capacities, create new capacities and provide the necessary incubatory support for the newly emerging phase of cultural industry economy of Mumbai. Loss of the cinema theatre sites / buildings also equates to the loss of *imageability* in the city. Cinema theatres have been, and are, major landmarks in Mumbai. Most of their locations are major nodes in cities – for eg. Metro Cinema junction, Bahar bus stop, Bharatmata signal etc. Taking a cue from Kevin Lynch's seminal work *Image of the City* (1960), it can be affirmed that city users understand their surroundings in consistent and predictable ways forming mental maps using five elements – paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Therefore loss of these landmarks would definitely affect the *imageability* of the city and *wayfinding* in it. These losses would definitely deprive Mumbai of its rich visual city-form and community character.

Are Single Screen Cinema Theatres Culturally Significant?

Cinema theatre as a space for inclusive public culture is very well documented in various ways. However does it stand scrutiny to the criteria for listing these sites / buildings as culturally significant or heritage buildings / sites? We can examine the sites of single screen cinema theatres against this criterion for listing as prescribed by DCR no. 67 (Development Control Regulations for Greater Mumbai 1991)

3) (a) value for architectural, historical or cultural reasons: **A**

Architectural A (arc)
* Metro, Regal, Eros, Plaza, Liberty, New Empire are architecturally significant as the earliest Art Deco theatres in the country. The Art Deco style, born in France, filtered into India in the 1930s. It boasts of the second largest number of Art Deco buildings in the world, most of which are concentrated in the city of Mumbai.

Historical A (his)
* Edward Talkies in Kalbadevi dates back to the 1880s when it opened as a drama house. It converted to a cinema theatre in the 1930s and is still running as a single screen outfit with ticket rates between Rs. 18 and Rs. 28.
* Liberty Cinema, inaugurated in 1949 and named after the newly acquired independence of the nation, was the first high end theatre to exclusively screen Hindi films.
* The distinct looking seven storied building attached to Naaz theatre has functioned as the film bazaar for the film distributors for Indian territory and abroad.

Cultural A (cul)
* Bharatmata Cinema, located in the erstwhile textile mill district of Parel, screens Marathi cinema exclusively. It is hailed as one of the few spaces in the city where Marathi culture gets prominence over the gentrified Bollywood culture.
* Maratha Mandir opened in 1958 and held the premiere of *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), where the film prints were carried by elephants and Dilip Kumar arrived on horseback decked in battle costume. This theatre witnessed silver and golden jubilee weeks for legendary films like – *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), *Pakeezah* (1972) and *Coolie* (1983). It has been showing *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) continuously since its release in 1995 to an eager audience.
* The path breaking Marathi film *Sant Tukaram* first opened at Hindmata Talkies in 1937 and Dada Kondke's first film *Sogandya* premiered at Kohinoor Cinema in 1971.
* Many single screen cinema theatres had the convention of holding special matinee shows for women and children. This gave the home bound women an access to public culture.

3) (b) the date and /or period and /or design and /or unique use of the building: **B**

Period B (per)
* The now closed Capitol Cinema building was constructed in 1887 as Gaiety Theatre and it boasts of a distinct Victorian architecture. It is a Heritage Grade II structure.
* In the 1840s the British government demarcated a large area (around the current Grant Road) as the entertainment district and named it Play House (hybridized as Pila House by the locals). The half a dozen theatres on

and around the Patthe Bapurao Marg (Falkland Road) are the first theatres to come up in this area. They have metamorphosed from being tin shed structures that showed variety programmes to drama houses for Marathi Sangeet Natak and Parsi theatres to eventually cinema theatres.

Design B (des)

* Royal Opera House (the first Opera House in the country) located on Charni Road opened in 1912 and its exterior façade contains elements of baroque and Indian architecture. Additions were made to the structure till 1915. In 2012 World Monuments Fund put Royal Opera House in its list of endangered buildings. And subsequently in 2013 the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee approved its restoration plans.
* The 1926 structure of Deepak Talkies in Parel is unique in its use of Burma teak and natural stone and it has no concrete or cement element in it. In 2013 the owner of the theatre restored it to its original glory, with an expansive courtyard of paver blocks, ornamental wooden pillars and polished natural stone.

Use B (use)

* All cinema theatre buildings are unique and significant in their usage as they provide a homogenous viewing space for a heterogeneous mass of people across class, caste, gender and age group.

3) (c) Relevance to social and economic history: **C**

Social History C (sh)

* During the independence movement of the 1940s many cinema theatres changed their names to show their allegiance to the independence movement. For example Laxmi and Venus theatres in Parel changed their names to Jai Hind and Bharatmata; in later years, Jawahar and Kasturba Talkies were named after Jawaharlal Nehru and Kasturba Gandhi.

Economic History C (eh)

* A typical single screen cinema theatre has many employees that are employed by the theatre management and operate within the premises of the theatre – Projectionist, Usher, Manager, Security Guard, Electrician, Ground Keeper, Ticket Seller, Sweeper, Canteen boys etc. But an active cinema theatre also generates substantial employment and livelihood practices around its periphery like snacks and beverages carts, knick knack sellers, music and DVD shops, games like horse rides and merry-go-rounds, fashion clothes and accessories shops, photo studios, restaurants and bars etc. These small enterprises are ancillary to the cinema theatre and will disappear if the cinema theatre shuts down.

3) (d) Association with well known persons or events: **D**

Persons / Events D (bio)

* Cinema theatres have always been venues for important cultural events right from Dadabhai Naoroji visiting the Victoria Theatre (later Taj talkies) in 1893 for a Goan *zagor* performance to Films Division screening the funeral of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at Regal Cinema on the same day in 1950 to Regal then hosting the third Filmfare Awards in 1955, all the way to Liberty Cinema hosting the Mumbai International Film Festival in 2013.

3) (e) A building or groups of building and / or areas of a distinct architectural design and / or style, historic period or way of life having sociological interest and / or community value: **E**

Community Value E (cv)

* Gaiety-Galaxy-Gemini, a triplet cinema theatre opened in 1972, and in 2000 four smaller theatres were added to its complex – Gossip, Gem, Grace and Glamour. This cluster of theatres is synonymous to the mixed culture of Bandra-Khar-Vile Parle area and is widely visited by people from all classes and language groups. Bollywood film stars often attend shows in these theatres in disguise to judge the audience response to their films.
* Kalpana-Kamran-Kings is another triplet cinema theatre in the Kalina-Kurla area that plays a similar role in the socio-cultural life of the people from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

3) (f) The unique value of a building or architectural features or artifact and / or being part of a chain of architectural development that would be broken if it were lost: **F**

Architectural Features F (af)

* One of the biggest architectural achievement of Mumbai has been the Art Deco movement of the 1930s. What is unique about the Deco movement in Bombay is that it merged with the Indian and Islamic styles and a new Deco-Saracenic style was created. Cinema theatres like Regal, Eros,

Metro, Liberty, Plaza, New Empire are part of this chain which includes other buildings like the New India Assurance building and the residential apartments that dot Marine Drive.

3) (h) Represents forms of technological development: **H**

Technological Development H (tec)
* Cinema theatres stand testimony to the changing technology in the cinema industry at the production, distribution and exhibition stages of a film. When silent cinema changed to talkie cinema, theatres had to install new sound projecting systems. Similarly when film prints were replaced by digital prints the distribution pattern changed and film projectors became obsolete machines, with films now being beamed via satellite to the theatres. As a space of public entertainment cinema theatres are always agile and adaptable to technological development.

It is evident from this list that cinema theatres do qualify under several criteria for listing a heritage site and based on these criterion they can be listed as Grade I (as prime landmarks of Mumbai), Grade II (regionally or locally important landmarks of Mumbai) and Grade III (determines the character of the locality etc.) heritage buildings in Greater Mumbai. Listing these sites will enhance the imageability of these buildings and empower them with incentives that are proposed to be applicable to Heritage sites / buildings in Greater Mumbai. An additional advantage of listing these sites is that the owners can change the user status of the balance property for financial gain, enabling them to sustain the theatre. Moreover the proposed incentives for listed heritage sites may enable the theatre owners to avail Heritage TDR for balance and bonus development rights, Heritage TDR for repair, waivers in property taxes and local authority charges as well as avail soft loans for maintenance and part adaptive reuse of the cinema theatre sites.

Development Planning and Cinema Theatres

The Development Plan for Mumbai is the single largest and most important planning activity which affects the city over a long period across generations (although a Development Plan is effective for 20 years the preparation and finalization does stretch the period to more than 30 years). The revision of the Development Plan for 2014-34 is ongoing with the existing land use plan and preparatory studies being made public following an intervention by more than 100 civil society groups, institutions and organizations. The opening up of the plan process also brought to light the omnipresent fact that the amenities in the city are woefully inadequate and would not be anywhere near national standards in the plan period.

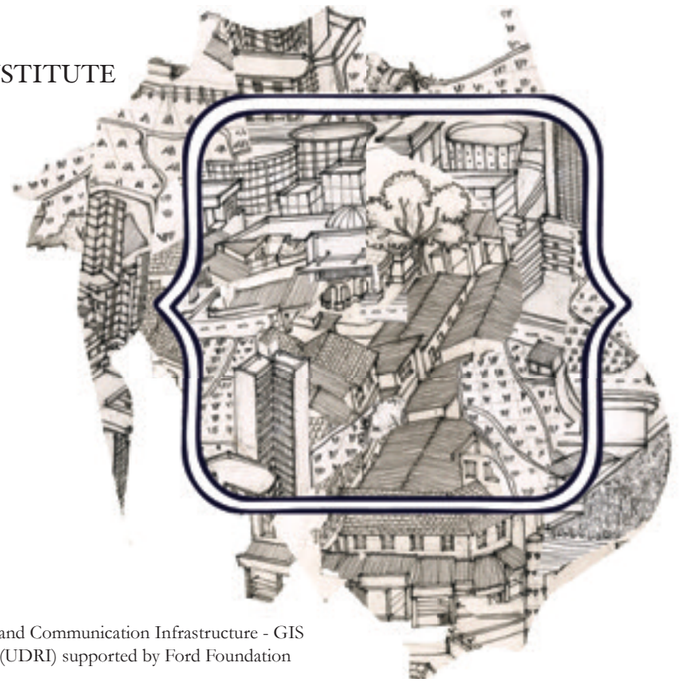
Cinema theatres are one of the most important catalysts for the sustainability of a neighbourhood as well as for making of a city level public realm. This public realm is not just in terms of physical amenity but it also assists in building a city's imagination and identity. These *sarvajanik* (open to all / no differential treatment for caste, class, creed, community and gender) public spaces are an essential part of the creation of amenity space. The earlier Development Plans (1967 & 2001) had recognised this amenity potential and marked these sites in colour (red) thereby placing them under the category of city level amenity. These cinema theatres were structured organically on the dominant demography of city localities. The same would have to be followed for the revision of the Development Plan for 2014-34. Mumbai had 70 cinema theatres for the population of 29,94,020 by 1951, the standard ratio of 1 cinema theatre per 1,00,000 people* was adequately met, with each theatre catering to a locality of approximately 43,000 people. But in 2011 Mumbai had only 76 single screen cinema theatres for the population of 1,25,00,000. This ratio since then has escalated to 1 cinema theatre per 1,64,473 people.

*The standard of 1 cinema theatre for a population of 100000 is prescribed by the Urban Development Plan Formulation and Implementation (UDPFI) Guidelines 2006, Ministry of Urban Affairs, Government of India for all Development plans in India.

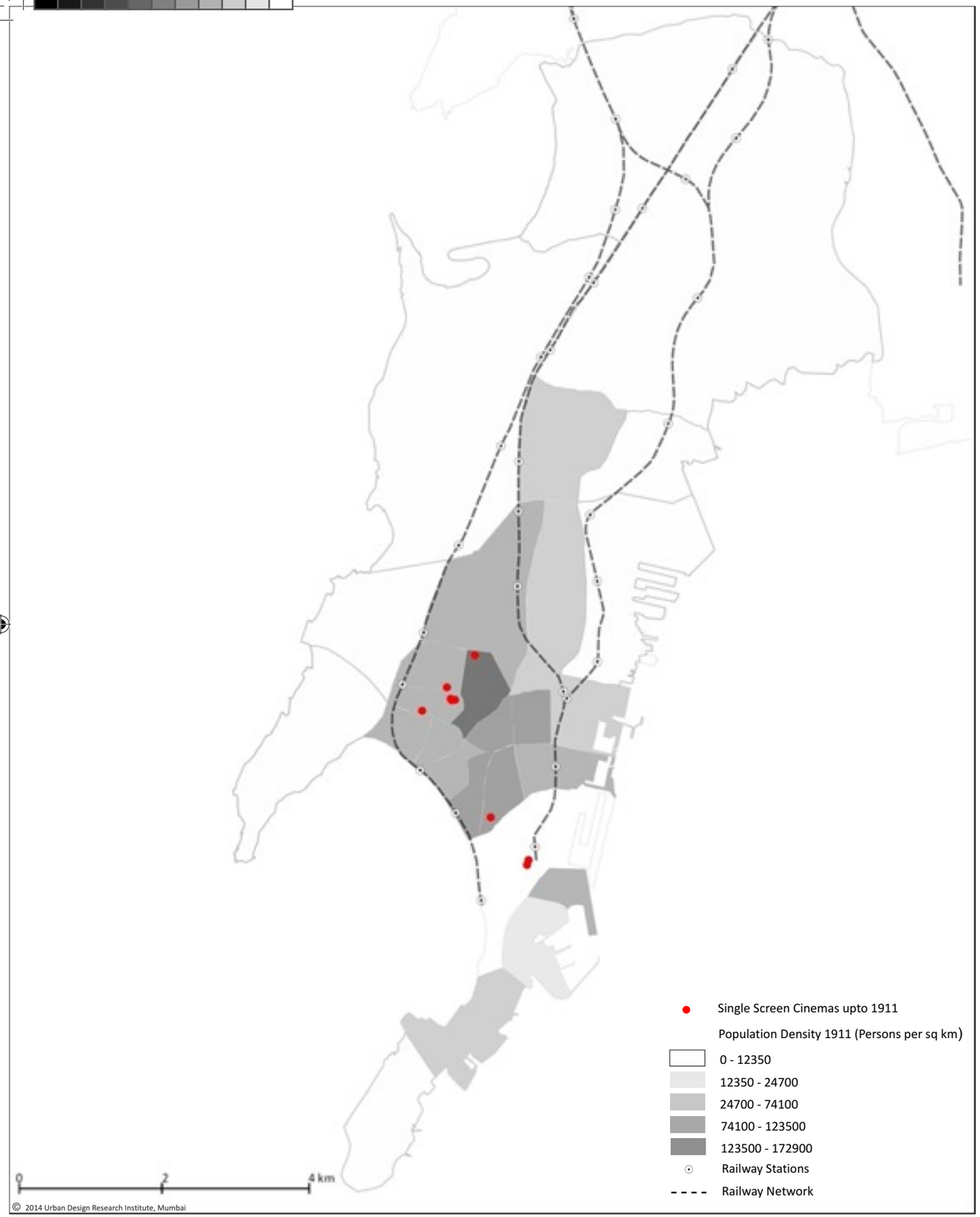
This inadequacy can be corrected if the plots earmarked for / as cinema theatres in the development plan 1981-2001 (sanctioned period 1993-2013) continue with added incentive to adaptively reuse the plots, buildings and the augmented potential on the same site and /or in the same area /ward. Identifying the culturally significant sites / buildings and providing financial and legislative support to them as a significant heritage site would definitely assist and improve their longevity. The revision of the Development Plan for 2014-34 should, through land use zoning, reservation of plots and through mixed-use-mechanism, aim to achieve at least the standards prescribed in UDPFI 2006. An atmosphere comprising of an enabling environment, financial incentives, legislative amendments and local authority / State authority support will ensure that the single screen cinema theatres make a smooth transition into Mumbai's future and will retain their unique characteristic of being a public space, first and foremost.

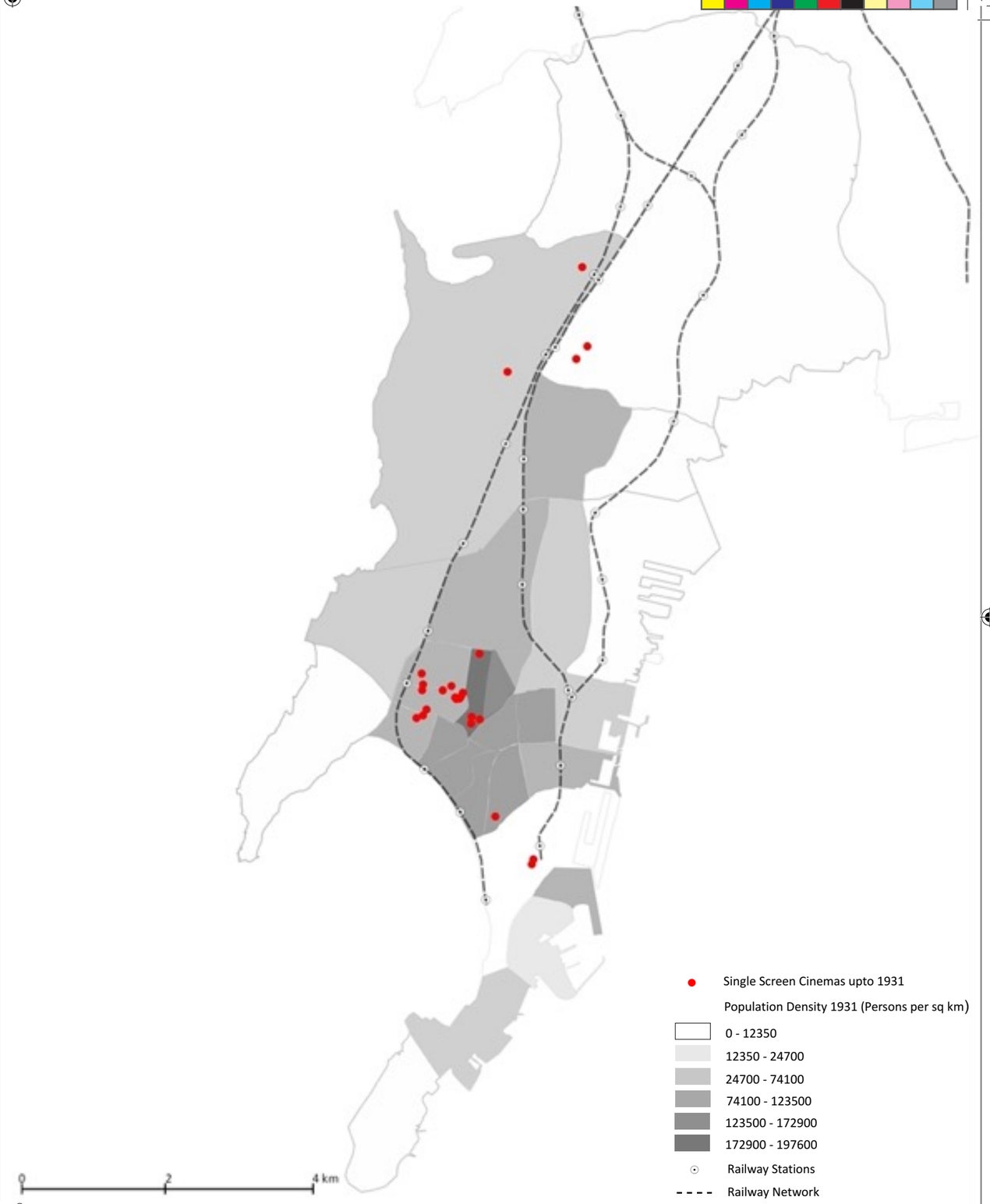
Mapping Single Screen Cinema Theatres: 1911 to 2001

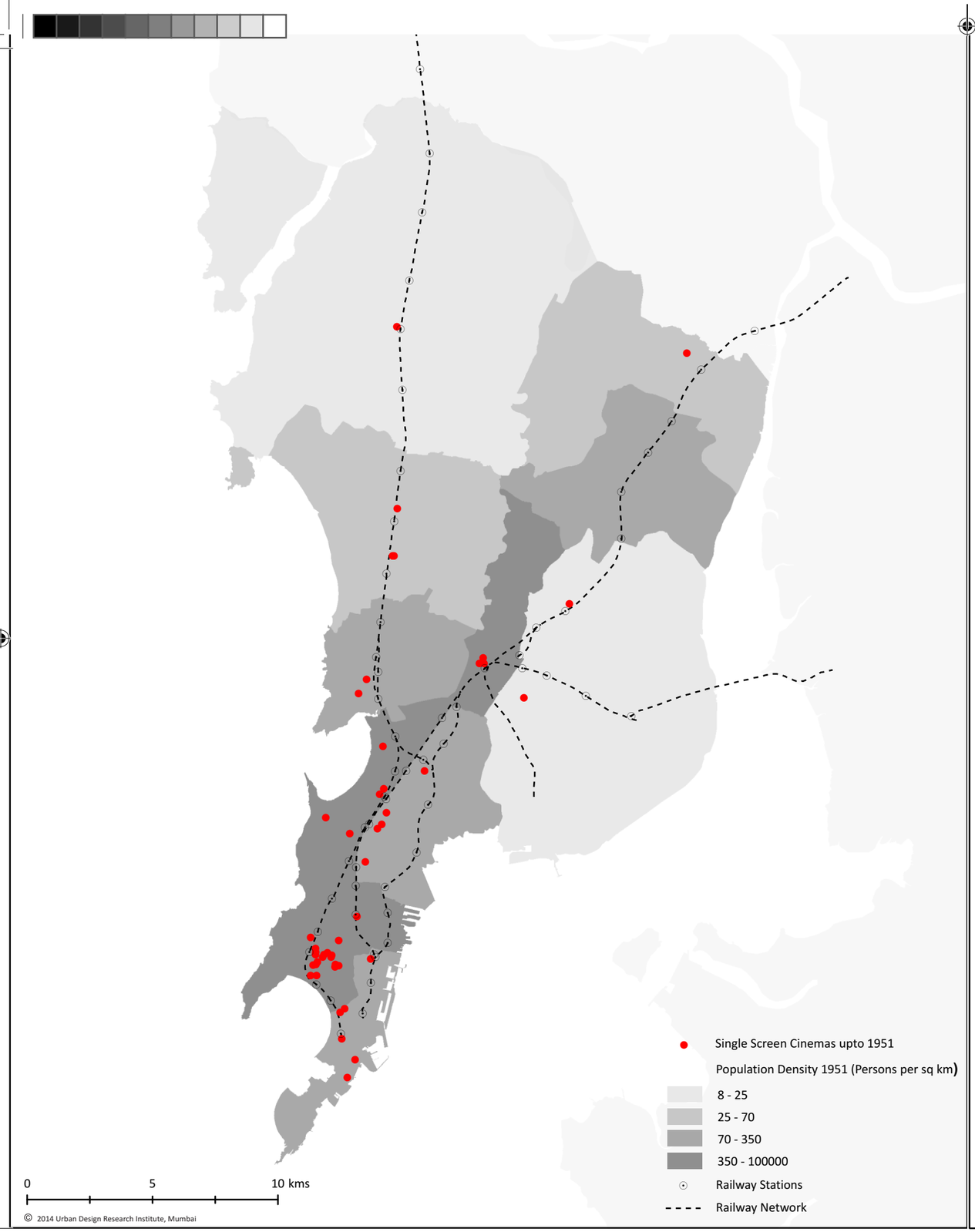
BY URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

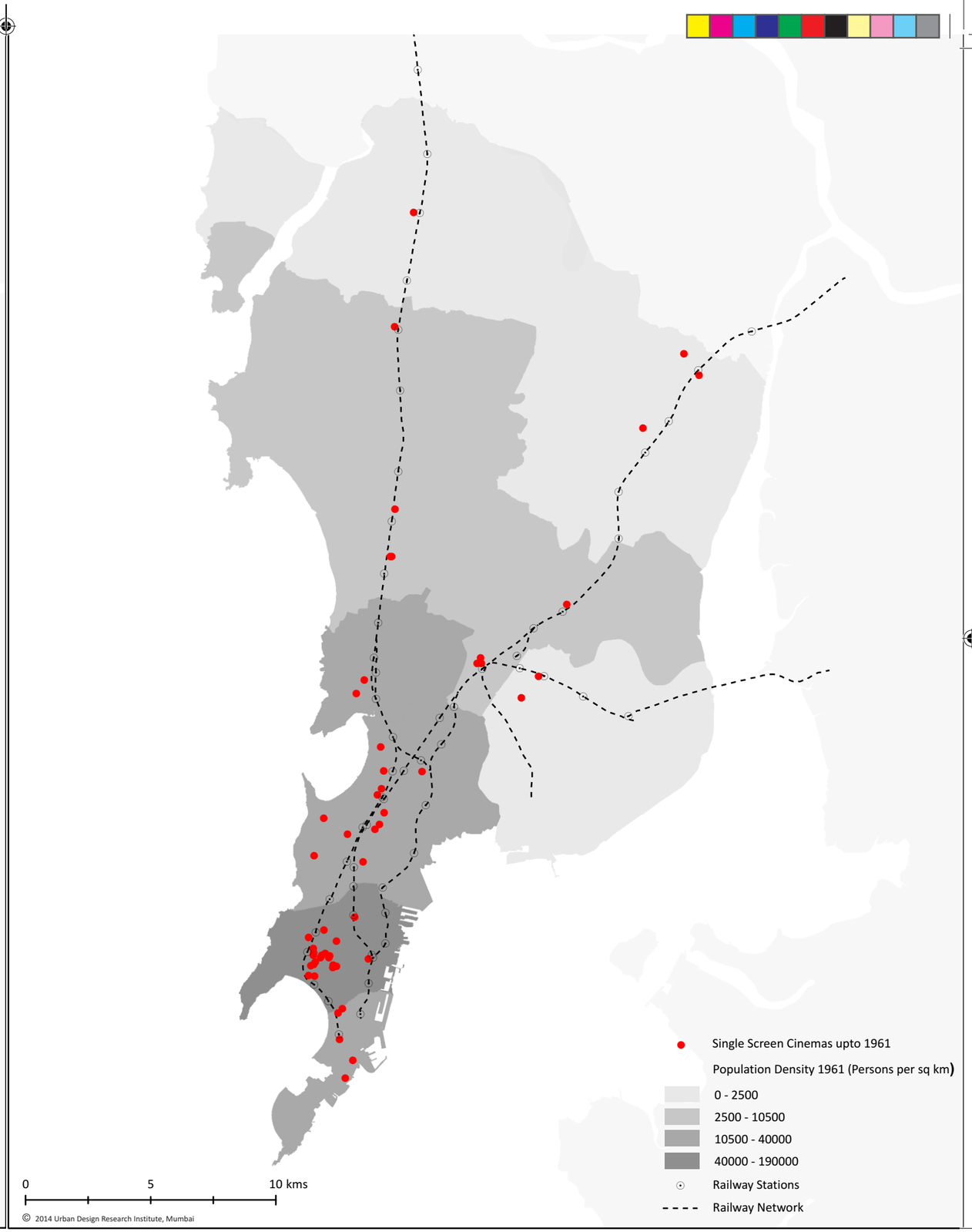


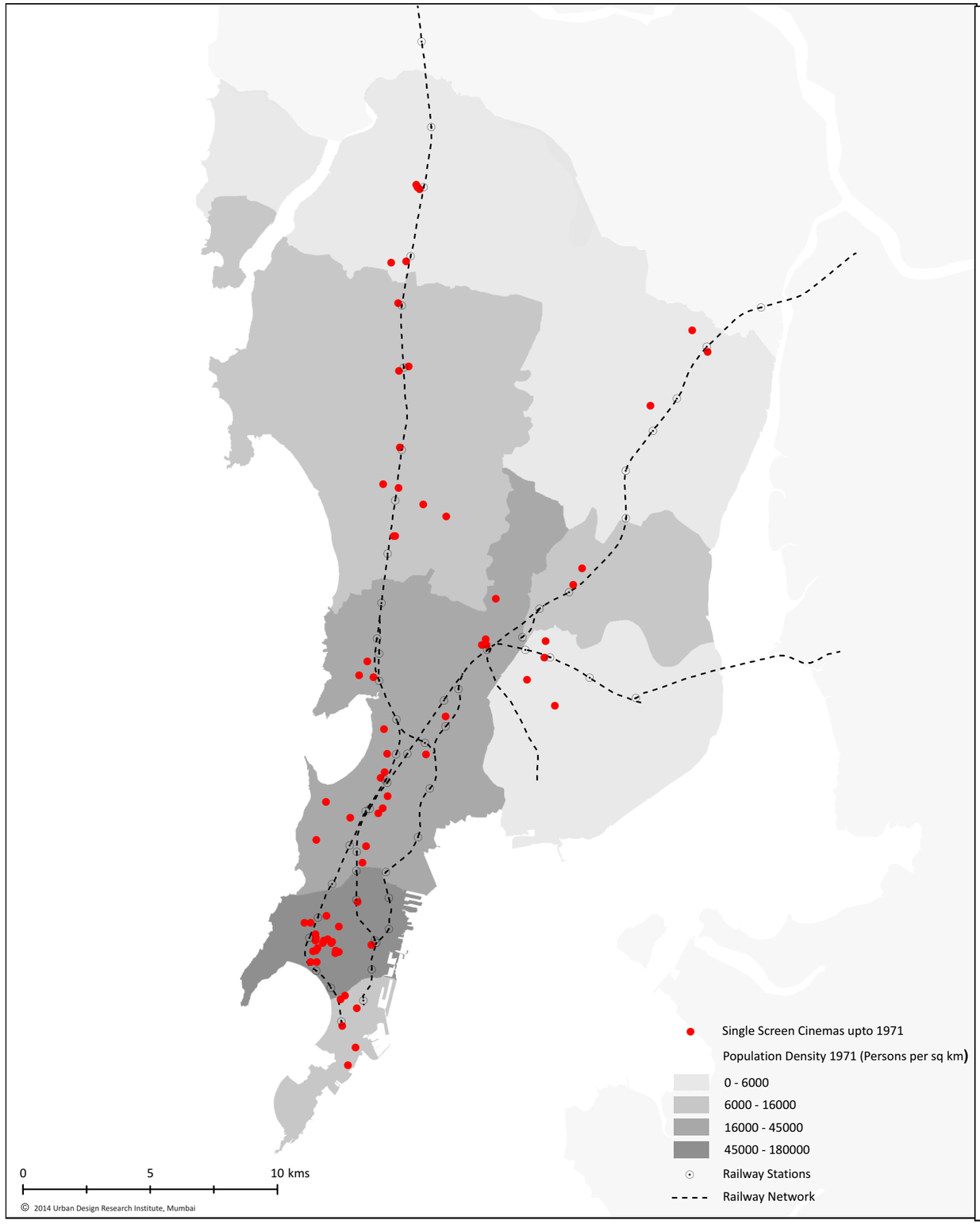
The following maps were made under the Information and Communication Infrastructure - GIS project carried out by Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI) supported by Ford Foundation

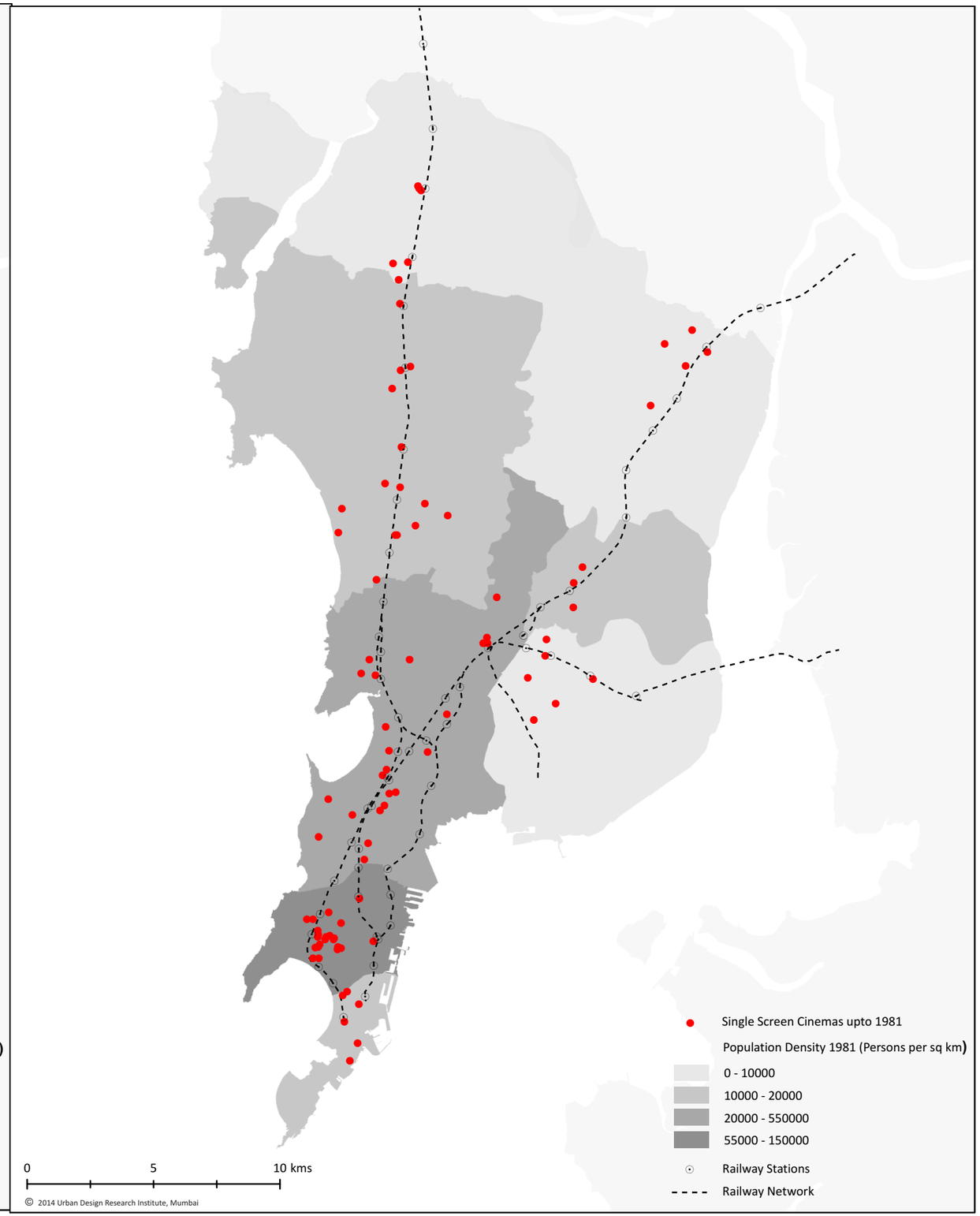


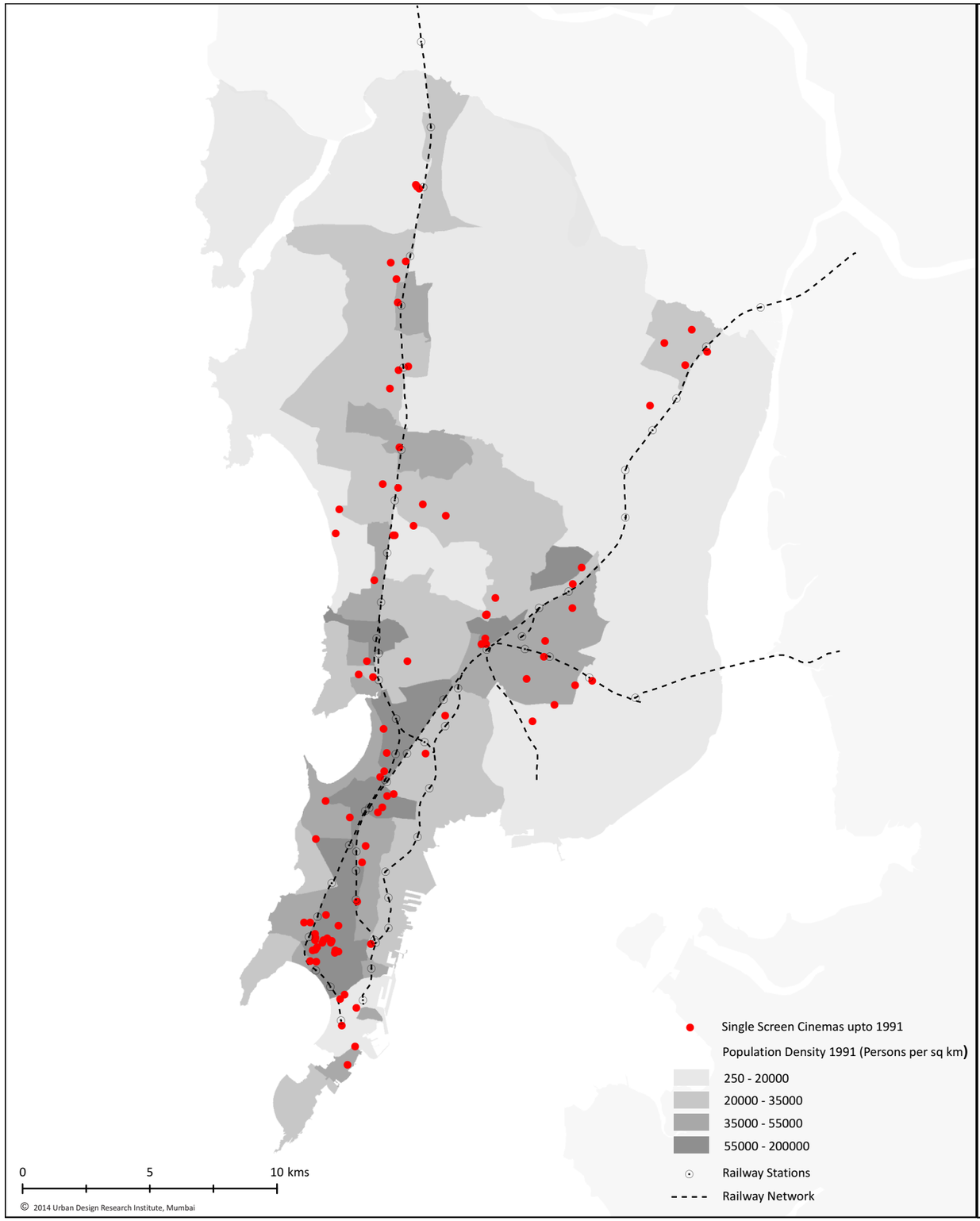


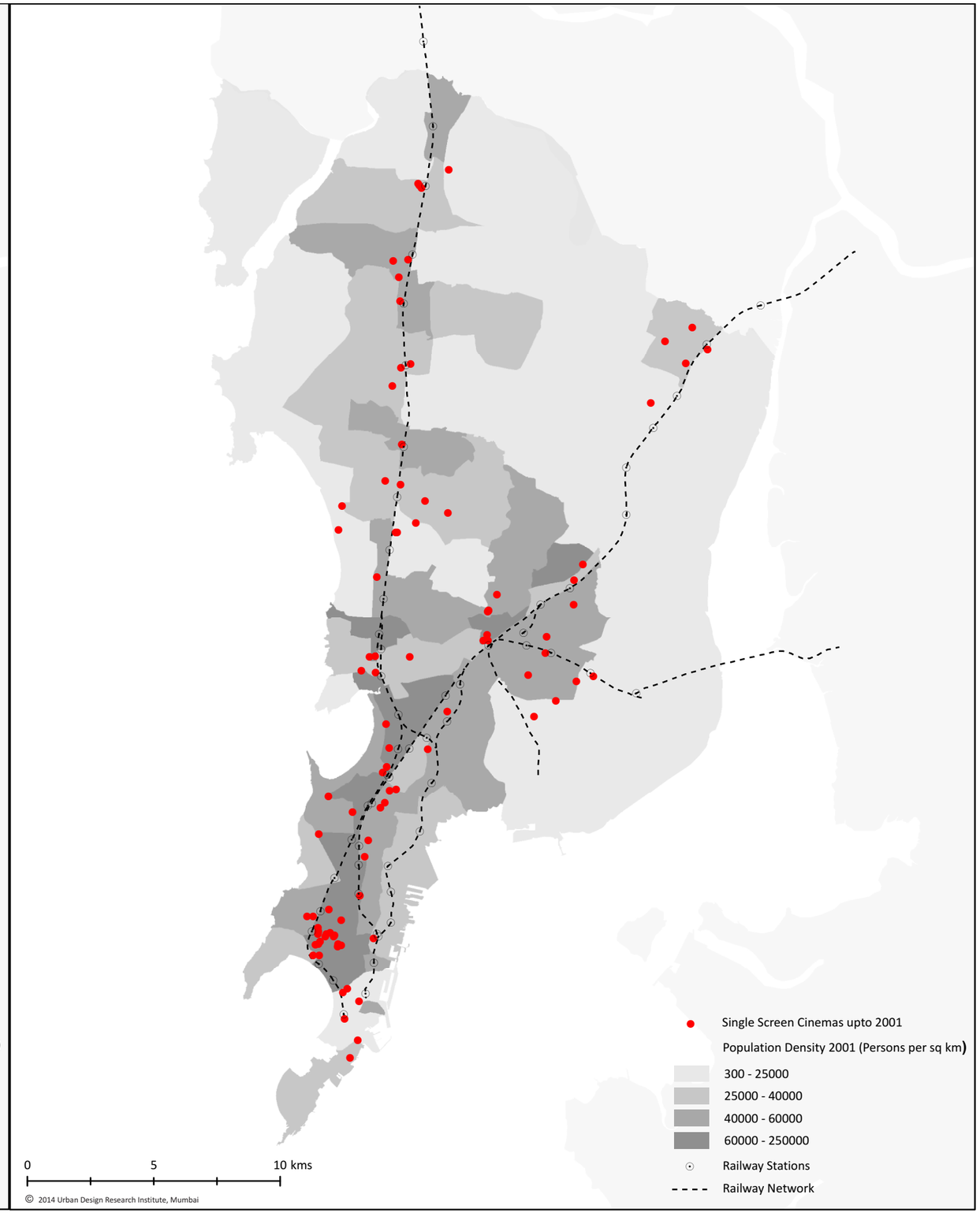












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A publication by

Majlis
1 Christina Apartments, Kalina
Market, Santacruz (East), Mumbai
400029
majlis.culture@gmail.com
www.majlisbombay.org
www.projectcinemacity.com

And

URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Urban Design Research Institute
43, Dr V. B. Gandhi Marg
Kala Ghoda, Fort
Mumbai 400 023
executivedirector@udri.org
projects@udri.org
www.udri.org

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Designed by Afrah Shafiq

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