

Class and the City in Indian Cinema

Course Code: L-EA-0097, Credits: Four

Instructor:

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Course Description

This course will examine imaginaries and understandings of class and cities in Indian cinema. How are struggles for earnings and mobility in the city - of migrants, workers, and middle classes - represented in Indian cinema? In what ways is the city viewed as a space of ethical deviations and compromises? How does class shape experiences of friendship, family, and erotic love? What visions of politics, justice, and hope arise in Indian cinema? The course will explore these questions in commercial, art, and documentary films (in Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi, with English subtitles), along with readings in history, anthropology, and cinema studies. Screenings will include films by Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Satyajit Ray, Yash Chopra, Muzaffar Ali, Sudhir Mishra, and Anand Patwardhan.

Course Requirements and Grading:

1) Class Participation (20%)

Note: Please do not use laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices in class.

2) Midterm Exam (50%)

There will be a midterm exam in Week 8.

3) Final Exam (30%)

There will be an in-class final exam in Week 15.

Course Google Drive Link: TBA

Schedule

Week 1: Critical Visions in Indian Cinema

Arjun Appadurai, “The Cinematic Soteriology of Bollywood.” In Peter van der Veer, ed. *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century*, pp.404-414. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015.

Suggested:

Ashis Nandy, “Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum’s Eye View of Politics.” In Ashis Nandy, ed. *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, pp.1-19. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Philip Lutgendorf, “Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, 3 (2006):227-256.

Angelika Malinar, “Arguments of a Queen: Draupadi’s Views on Kingship.” In *Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata*, eds. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black, pp.79-96. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Week 2: Modernity, the City, and Cinema

Film: *Shree 420*. Dir. Raj Kapoor. 1955. 164 min. [\[Link\]](#) [\[Google Drive\]](#) [\[Prime Video\]](#)

Vinay Lal, “Modern India and the Claims of the City.” In Vinay Lal, ed. *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in its Plenitude*, pp.xiii-xliv. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Suggested:

Tejaswani Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, pp.1-52. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: A History of an Enchanted City*, pp.25-43, 63-67, 75-79, 104-116, 128-157. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, Third Edition, pp.231-247. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Radha Rajyadhyaksha, “The Migrant on Celluloid.” *The Migration Story*, January 12, 2024. [\[Link\]](#)

Week 3: Distortion and the City

Film: *Pyaasa*. Dir. Guru Dutt. 1957. 139 min. [\[Link\]](#) [\[Prime Video\]](#)

Carol Salomon, “Baul Songs.” In Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Religions of India in Practice*, pp.187-208. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Suggested:

David N. Lorenzen, “Bhakti.” In Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds. *The Hindu World*, pp.185-209. New York: Routledge: 2004.

Sipoy Sarveswar and M.P. Terence Samuel, “In a Small Village in Bengal, a Celebration that Combines Various Religious Traditions.” *The Wire*, January 19, 2024.

Week 4: The City and Beyond

Film: *Apur Sansar*. Dir. Satyajit Ray. 1959. 107 min. [\[Link\]](#) [\[Google Drive\]](#)

Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye, The Biography of a Master Film-Maker*, pp.100-104. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004.

Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination*, pp.15-24 (“The Decline in the Imagination of the Village”). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Suggested:

Film: *Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road)*. Dir. Satyajit Ray. 1955. 126 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#)

Film. *Aparajito (The Unvanquished)*. Dir. Satyajit Ray. 1956. 110 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#).

Week 5: Anxiety and Agitation

Film: *Pratidhwandi*. Dir. Satyajit Ray. 1970. 105 min. [\[Link\]](#)

Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye, The Biography of a Master Film-Maker*, pp.200-206. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004.

R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others*, pp.74-80. New Delhi: Vision Books, 1987.

Suggested:

Film: *Angry Young Man*. Dir. H. Shamsuddin. 1970. 20 min. [\[Link\]](#) (no subtitles)

Sumanta Banerjee, “Reflections of a One-Time Maoist Activist.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 33, 3-4 (December 2009):253-269.

V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, pp.280-283, 299-329. New York: Vintage, 2011.

Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, Third Edition, pp.247-257. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Kanad Sinha, “The Matanga King Trisanku and History from Below.” In *Textual Lives of Caste Across the Ages: Hierarchy, Humanity and Equality in Indian History*, ed. Prathama Banerjee. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

Week 6: Partition and the City

Film: *Garm Hawa*. Dir. M. S. Sathyu. 1973. 135 min. [\[Link\]](#) [\[Google Drive\]](#)

Ashis Nandy, “The Invisible Holocaust and the Journey as an Exodus: The Poisoned Village and the Stranger City.” In *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination*, pp.98-140. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Suggested:

Film: *Naseem*. Dir. Saeed Mirza. 1995. 89 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#)

Urvashi Butalia, “Community, State, and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India.” In Mushirul Hasan, ed. *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, pp.178-207. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Shyam Benegal, “Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema.” In *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sundar Rajan, pp.225–238. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*, pp.91-106. New Delhi: Tulika, 2009.

Pankaj Mishra, “The Need for Roots Brought Home the Modern Era’s Disconnections with the Past and the Loss of Community.” *The Guardian*, August 18, 2013.

Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917-1947)*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Ali Usman Qasmi and Meghan Eaton Robb, eds. *Muslims Against the Muslim League*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Rakhshanda Jalil, “Burqa: Moving Tombs for Muslim Women.” In *But You Don’t Look Like a Muslim: Essays on Identity and Culture*, pp.19-23. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019.

Maryam Sikander, “Naming and Belonging: A Personal History of a North Indian Muslim Clan.” *India Forum*, March 6, 2020.

Week 7: Ethics, Epics, and Politics

Film: *Deewaar*. Dir. Yash Chopra. 1975. 165 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#) [\[Link\]](#)

Vinay Lal, *Deewaar: The Footpath, the City and the Angry Young Man*, pp.17-36. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011.

Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds. *Religions of South Asia: An Introduction*, pp.18-19 (“Dharma”). New York: Routledge, 2006.

John D. Smith, *The Mahabharata*, pp.594-596 (“The Water Offerings”). New York: Penguin, 2009.

Week 8: Midterm Exam

Week 9: Migrants, Islam, and Bhakti

Film: *Gaman*. Dir. Muzaffar Ali. 1978. 114 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#) [\[Link\]](#)

Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, pp.13-59. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Vidya Rao, “The Voices of Bhaktas and Courtesans: Gender, Love and Renunciation in Thumri and Bhakti Poetry.” In Kavita Panjabi, ed. *The Politics and Poetics of Sufism and Bhakti: Love, Loss and Renunciation*, pp.183-209. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2011.

Suggested:

Film: *Together We Sing*. Frontline. 2024. 12 min. [\[Link\]](#)

Nonica Datta, “The Forgotten History of Hussaini Brahmins and Muharram in Amritsar.” *The Wire*, September 30, 2019.

Rakhshanda Jalil, “Live Like Ali, Die like Husain!” In *But You Don’t Look Like a Muslim: Essays on Identity and Culture*, pp.179-184. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2019.

Aoun Hasan, "History of Taziya in India: The Symbol of Muharram Mourning." *Sahapedia*, October 9, 2020.

Anand Patwardhan, "Why is Faisal Khan, a Human Rights Activist, in Prison for an Act of Peace?" *Indian Express*, December 5, 2020.

Vidya Rao, "A Sense of Community: A Journey of Shared Mourning during Moharram." *The India Forum*, February 5, 2021.

Week 10: The Slum, the City, and Hope

Film: *Dharavi*. Dir. Sudhir Mishra. 1991. 112 min. [\[Google Drive\]](#)

Jeremy Seabrook, *In the Cities of the South: Scenes from a Developing World*, pp.49-73. New York: Verso, 1996.

Suggested:

Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: A History of an Enchanted City*, pp.337-339. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Week 11: Criminality and Politics

Film: *Vaastav*. Dir. Mahesh Manjrekar. 1999. 145 min. [\[Prime Video\]](#)

Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: A History of an Enchanted City*, pp.291-302. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

R. K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata*, pp.167-170. New Delhi: Vision Books, 1987.

John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna, The Butter Thief*, pp.3-13. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Week 12: Caste, Religion, and the City

Film: *Jai Bhim Comrade*. Dir. Anand Patwardhan. 2012. 182 min. [\[Link\]](#)

Anand Teltumbde, "Strategy of Conversion to Buddhism: Intent and Aftermath." In *The Radical Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*, eds. Suraj Yengde and Anand Teltumbde, pp.219-239. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2018.

Badri Narayan, "BR Ambedkar Isn't Just an Icon of Democratic Politics: He's also a Folk Icon." *Indian Express*, April 15, 2021.

Suggested:

Vidyut Bhagwat, "Bombay in Dalit Literature." In Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner, eds. *Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture*, pp.113-125. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Vinay Lal, "Travails of the Nation: Some Notes on Indian Documentaries." *Third Text* 19, 2 (March 2005):175-185.

Yogendra Yadav, "Recovering the Radical in Ambedkar." *Indian Express*, April 15, 2025.

Week 13: Concluding Thoughts

Week 14: No classes

Week 15: Final Exam