Bollywood's Lens on Indian Society

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INTL 448/548
Wednesdays, 4-7:50 pm
229 MacKenzie Hall

Course Syllabus

Film has the ability to project powerful images of a society in ways conventional academic mediums cannot. This is particularly true in learning about India, which is home to the largest film industries in the world. This course explores images of Indian society that emerge through the medium of film. Our attention will be focused on the ways in which Indian society and history is depicted in film, critical social issues being explored through film; the depicted reality vs. the historical reality; and the powerful role of the Indian film industry in affecting social orientations and values.

Course Objectives:
1. To gain an awareness of the historical background of the subcontinent and of contemporary Indian society;
2. To understand the sociocultural similarities yet significant diversity within this culture area;
3. To learn about the political and economic realities and challenges facing contemporary India and the rapid social changes the country is experiencing;
4. To learn about the Indian film industry, the largest in the world, and specifically Bollywood.

Class format

Professor Weiss will open each class with a short lecture on the issues which are raised in the film to be screened for that day. We will then view the selected film, followed by a short break, and then extensive in-class discussion. Given the length of most Bollywood films, we will need to fast-forward through much of the song/dance and/or fighting sequences.

There will be assigned readings for each day which can be found either in the following required texts (available at the UO bookstore) or through hot-links from this class website. Please try to complete all readings before the day in which they will be discussed. Most recommended films are available at Vishnu India Imports (135 E. 29th Ave., Ph: 343-6932) or through Netflix. The required books are:

Akash Kapur *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India* Riverhead Books, 2012
Requirements for Undergraduate students: (percentage of final grade)

- Attendance and class participation (e.g., questions/responses that underscore efforts to understand and engage with course materials). 15%
- Two 3-5 page double-spaced essays exploring cultural issues presented in any two films viewed. The essays should draw upon readings and class discussion as relevant and is due at the beginning of the class after the film is screened. 25% each
- 10 page research paper, due on the last day of class. The paper is to explore any social issue which was raised in a segment of this course. Look at its social origin, and then focus on the way in which this issue is in flux in India today. There are a number of books recommended throughout the syllabus “for further reading.” These are good places to start researching your paper. 35%

Requirements for Graduate students: (percentage of final grade)

- Attendance and class participation (e.g., questions/responses that underscore efforts to understand and engage with course materials) 10%
- Three 3-5 page double-spaced essays exploring cultural issues presented in any two films viewed. The essays should draw upon readings and class discussion as relevant and is due at the beginning of the class after the film is screened. 20% each
- 15 page research paper, due on the last day of class. The paper is to explore any social issue which was raised in a segment of this course. Look at its social origin, and then focus on the way in which this issue is in flux in India today. The research paper should include an in-depth literature review and should be based on primary source research. 30%

All students need to confirm the topic of your term paper by Week 6. While you can begin researching and writing the term paper at any time -- and submit it whenever you would like -- the absolute deadline for turning it in is the last day of class.

Course Outline

Week I, March 30

Introduction to the Course and to Indian Cinema/ Bollywood

Films

"Beginnings" The Story of India with Michael Wood BBC/PBS, 2008 (1 hour)
Larger than Life: India's Bollywood Film Culture Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2005 (57 minutes)

Required Readings
Dwyer pp. 7-11, 12-36
Kapur pp. 1-12
Week 2, April 13  
Revisiting Indian History and Society

**Film**  *Jodhaa Akbar*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008 (213 minutes)

**Recommended films**
*Ashoka the Great* directed by Santosh Sivan, 2001
*Devdas* directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002

**Required Readings**
Dwyer pp. 37-47
Guha, Ramachandra *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* 
Harper Perennial, 2008, pp. 1-15 (will be available through the course website)

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Week 3, April 13  
History from Within and Views of the 'Other': Partition and its Relevance today

**Films**  *Lagaan (Once Upon a Time in India)*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, produced by Aamir Khan Productions, 2001 (224 minutes)

**Recommended films**
*Gandhi* directed by Richard Attenborough, 1982
*Garam Hava (Hot Winds)*, directed by M.S. Sathyu, 1973
*Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*, directed by Satyajit Ray, 1984
*Lage Raho Munna Bhai* directed by Rajkumar Hirani, 2006
*A Passage to India* directed by David Lean, 1984
*Rang de Basanti* directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006
*The Rising: the Ballad of Mangal Pandey* directed by Ketan Mehta, 2005

**Required Readings**
Dwyer pp. 47-64
Dirks, Nicholas “The Home and the World: the Invention of Modernity in Colonial India” in Robert A. Rosenstone (ed.) *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* 
Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 44-63 (available through the course website)
Tejaswini Ganti “From Vice to Virtue: the State and Filmmaking in India” in *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 41-75 (available through the course website)

**For further reading**
Guha, Ramachandra *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* 
Harper Perennial, 2008
Lindley, Arthur “Raj as Romance/Raj as Parody: Lean’s and Foster’s Passage to India” in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 20, No. 1, 1992, pp. 61-66
Wolpert, Stanley *India* fourth edition, University of California Press, 2009
Week 4, April 20  
**Family Norms and Social Change**

**Film** *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (Sometimes There's Happiness, Sometimes Sadness)*
- directed by Yash Johar, 2001

**Recommended films**
- *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* directed by Manmohan Desai, 1977
- *Baghban (The Gardener)* directed by Ravi Chopra, 2003
- *Billu Barber* directed by Priyadarshan, 2009
- *Bunty aur Babli* directed by Shaad Ali, 2005
- *Hum Tum (You and I)*, directed by Kunal Kohli, 2004
- *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehta* directed by Karan Johar, 2006
- *Kal Ho Na Ho*, directed by Nikhil Advani, 2001
- *Salaam Namaste* directed by Siddharth Anand, 2005

**Required Readings**
- Dwyer pp. 64-78, 207-222
- Kapur pp. 15-44, 82-92

Week 5, April 27  
**Gender Norms, Social Change . . . and Fantasy**

**Film** *Laaga Chunari Mein Daag (Journey of a Woman, or There Seems to be a Stain on her Shirt)*
- directed by Pradeep Sarkar, 2007, 137 minutes

**Recommended films**
- *Lajja* directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, 2001
- *Mirch Masala (Hot Spices)* directed by Ketan Mehta, 1985

**Required Readings**
- Dwyer pp. 184-191
- Kapur pp. 66-81

**For further reading**
- Forbes, Geraldine *Women in Modern India* Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Jeffery, Patricia and Amrita Basu (eds.) *Appropriating Gender: Women’s Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* Routledge, 1998
- Mankekar, Purnima *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: an Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* Duke University Press, 1999

Week 6, May 4  
**Religion in Flux**

**Film** *PK*
- directed by Rajkumar Hirani, 2014

**Recommended films**
- *Bombay* directed by Mani Ratnam, 1995
- *Om Shanti Om* directed by Farah Khan, 2007
**Required Readings**
Dwyer pp. 79-92, 97-115, 116-150  
Kapur pp. 92-118

**For further reading**
Brass, Paul *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* University of Washington Press, 2005  
Varshney, Ashutosh *Ethic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* Yale University Press, 2002

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**Week 7, May 1**  
**India, Pakistan and the Kashmir Conflict**

**Film**  
*Bajrangi Bhaijaan* directed by Kabir Khan, 2015

**Recommended films**
*Fanaa* directed by Kunal Kohli, 2006  
*Henna* directed by Randhir Kapoor, 1991  
*Khamosh Pani (Silent Waters)* directed by Sabiha Sumar (Pakistan), 2003  
*Veer Zaara* directed by Yash Chopra, Yashraj Studios, 2004

**Required Readings**
Amitabh Mattoo and Souresh Roy “Summer of Discontent: Considering Conditions in Kashmir”  
*Harvard International Review*, Winter 2011, Vol.32(4), pp. 54-58 (will be available through the course website)  
Ananya Jahanara Kabir “The Kashmiri as Muslim in Bollywood’s ‘New Kashmir films’”  
*Contemporary South Asia* Vol. 18, No. 4, December 2010, 373–385 (will be available through the course website)

**TBA**

**For further reading**
Bose, Sumantra *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* Harvard University Press, 2005  
Hiro, Dilip *The Longest August: The Unflinching Rivalry Between India and Pakistan* Nation Books, 2015  

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**Week 8, May 18**  
**Social Pressure and the New Economy**

**Film**  
*Three Idiots* directed by Rajkumar Hirani, 2009 (170 minutes)

**Recommended films**
*Guru* directed by Mani Ratnam, 2007  
*Khoobsurat* directed by Habib Faisal, 2014  
*Salaam Bombay!* directed by Mira Nair, 1988  
*Youngistaan* directed by Syed Ahmed Afzal, 2014

**Required Readings**
Dwyer pp. 97-115, 223-247
Tejaswini Ganti “From Slumdogs to Millionaires” in Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 77-118 (accessible through the course website)

For further reading
Kumar, Shanti Gandhi meets Primetime: Globalization and Nationalism in Indian Television University of Illinois Press, 2006
Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India Cambridge University Press, 1998
Rothermund, Dietmar India: The Rise of an Asian Giant Yale University Press, 2009

Week 9, May 25 India’s Changing Cities and the Growing Fear of Terrorism
Film A Wednesday directed by Neeraj Pandey, 2008 (104 minutes)

Recommended films
Dhobi Ghat (Mumbai Dairies) directed by Kiran Rao, 2010
Khuda Kay Liye (In the Name of God) directed by Shoaib Mansoor (Pakistan), 2007
My Name is Khan directed by Karan Johar, 2010

Required Readings
Dwyer pp. 93-96
List of the world's largest cities (India has 3 in the top 20) (linked to the course website)

Week 10, June 1 Bollywood!
Film We’ll screen a quintessential, though new, Bollywood film: Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani directed by Ayan Mukherjee, 2013 (160 minutes)

Required Readings
Dwyer pp. 248-258