“Bollywood”’s India: An Introduction to Indian Cinema

A selective introduction to Indian (in particular Hindi-Urdu language) cinema, this course offers a brief history of its development and addresses several subjects relevant to understanding its attractions:

- the cultural and aesthetic difference (from Hollywood, for example) represented by its narrative and performative structures (its song-and-dance sequences, mixing of filmic genres, etc.) and, thus, the social and cognitive orientation these solicit and/or depend on from this cinema’s spectators;
- this cinema’s engagement with, and crafting, of issues relating to national identity, especially those that relate to gender and sexuality, community, class, and caste;
- the state’s role in this cinema’s development;
- this cinema’s implication in and reflection of globalizing trends in society, culture, and economy.

In addition to examining Indian (Hindi-Urdu) cinema’s formal/aesthetic properties and relationship to the culture and history of the postcolonial Indian nation, this course, through the readings assigned and class discussions, seeks to inculcate a self-reflexive understanding about one’s viewing practices and taste when engaging (in this instance) a non-Eurocentric aesthetic and socio-cultural formation.

This course may also count towards the major in CINE, CMPL, EAST, and GSFS.

Note: This first iteration of the course has been planned in conjunction with EAST 309: Chinese Popular Cinema and Public Intellectualism, and a symposium on Asian Cinemas in a Global Context that has, in turn, been organized in conjunction with Professor Tom Gunning’s lecture, “Why Cinema Has Not Yet Been Invented,” on March 13 at 8:00 p.m. for the English Department’s Lectures on English and American Literature. You should plan to attend both this lecture and the symposium on Saturday March 14. You should also plan to attend the inaugural lecture by Taiwanese documentary filmmaker, Ho Chao-ti, for Oberlin Shansi Jacobson-Cocco Distinguished Lecture on Saturday March 14 at 8:00 p.m. Finally, you should plan to attend the screening of one of two documentaries by
Ho Chao-ti on March 12 at 8:00 p.m. in Craig Lecture Hall, Science Center or March 13 at 4:30 p.m. in Dye Lecture Hall, Science Center.

**Required text:**


In addition, the following required and recommended readings are available on Bb; the books in which some of the essays appear have been put on reserve:


Sarkar, Bhaskar. “Metafiguring Bollywood: Brecht after Om Shanti Om,” in Meheli SEn and Anustup Basu (eds.) Figurations in Indian Film. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 205-225-


Schedule:

**Week One (February 2, 3, 4)**

**Monday:** Introduction to course: Expectations regarding attendance, class participation, and written assignments; discussion of its focus—what it will (and will not) cover—and how it will proceed in terms of its coverage of post-independence Indian cinema; brief introduction to this cinema’s “pleasures and popularity”

**Readings:**
Ganti, “Introduction,” Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Indian Cinema (Available on Bb); Gopalan, “Introduction,” The Cinema of India: 1-10; Jaikumar, “Bollywood Spectaculars” (available on Bb); Prasad, Ideology: 43-45; 51 (available on Bb); Thomas, “Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity” (available on Bb);

**Tuesday:** Screening: Bombay Talkies (2013)

**Wednesday:** Discussion of Bombay Talkies

**Readings:**
Gopal, “Sentimental Symptoms” (available on Bb); Majumdar, “The Embodied Voice” (available on Bb)
Recommended: Mishra, Jeffrey and Shoesmith, “The Actor as Parallel Text in Bombay Cinema” (available on Bb)

**Week Two and Three (February 9, 10, 11; 16):** “[Some] Meanings of Bollywood.”

**Monday:**
*Readings:*
Prasad, “Surviving Bollywood” (available on Bb); Rajadhyaksha, “The Bollywoodization of the Indian Cinema” (available on Bb); Sarkar, “The Melodramas of Globalization.” (available on Bb)

**Tuesday:** Screening: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995)

**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Dilwale*
*Readings:*
Sharpe, “Gender, Nation, and Globalization” (available on Bb); Uberoi, “The diaspora comes home” (available on Bb)

**Monday:** Global(ization) vs. International?
Film clips from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* and *Shri 420*
*Reading*
Punathambekar, “Bollywood is Useful” (available on Bb)

**Week Three and Four (February 17, 18, 23, 24, 25):** the Indian “Social” (1950s and 60s)

**Tuesday:** Screening: *Awara* (Raj Kapoor; 1951)

**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Awara*
*Readings:*
Chakravarty, *National Identity*: 131-142 (available on Bb); David Desser, “Shree 420), Chapter 9 in *The Cinema of India*: 96-105; Prasad, *Ideology* 57-87 (available on Bb); Vasudevan, “Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities” (available on Bb)

**Monday:** Discussion of *Awara* (contd.)

**Tuesday:** *Sujata* (Bimal Roy; 1960)

**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Sujata*
*Readings:*

**Due on Friday February 27:** Essay One (3-4 pages)

**Week Five (March 2, 3, 4):**
**Monday:** The Song and Dance Number: some examples of “musical” sequences in popular cinema.

*Readings:*
Majumdar, “The Embodied Voice” (available on Bb); Sarkar, “The Mellifluous ‘Illogics’ of the ‘Bollywood Musical’” (available on Bb)
Recommended: Creekmur, “Picturizing American Cinema” (available on Bb)
Tuesday: Screening: *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957)
Wednesday: Discussion of *Pyaasa*
Readings:
Cory Creekmur, “*Pyaasa*/Thirst,” Chapter 10 in *The Cinema of India*: 106-110;
Griffiths, “Discourses of Nationalism” (available on Bb); Rockwell, Daisy. “Visionary
Choreographies” (available on Bb); Vasudevan, Ravi, “Dislocations” (available on Bb)

Thursday March 5: Special Screening in preparation for symposium on Asian Cinemas in a Global Context; *I Wish I Knew* (Jia Zhangke, 2010)—time and location TBD

We will use *week 6* to prepare for the symposium. The screening on Thursday is part of this. We will meet on *Monday March 9* to discuss the film *(Reading: Kuei-Fen Chiu and Yingjin Zhang, “New Chinese-Language Documentaries” [available on Bb]).

No screening on *Tuesday*, but we will meet on *Wednesday March 11* to discuss essays by the other panelists: Basu, Berry, Gunning, N. Majumdar, R. Majumdar, Tze-Lan Sang, and Sarkar—all available on Bb.

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**Week Seven (March 16, 17, 18)** Art Cinema: The Example of Satyajit Ray
**Monday:**
*Readings:*
Biswas, “Introduction” (available on Bb);
Dirks, “Home and the World” (available on Bb)
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*; Satyajit Ray, 1985
**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*

**Readings:**
Vasudevan, “Nationhood, Authenticity, and Realism” (available on Bb)

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**Spring Break (March 21-29)**

**Week Eight (March 30, 31, April 1): Crisis of the State and New Indian Cinema**
**Monday:** *Readings:*
Amladi, “*Nauker ki Kameez/The Servant’s Shirt,*” Chapter 24 in *The Cinema of India*: 246-256;
Binford, “The Two Cinemas of India” (available on Bb); Needham, “Introduction” *New Indian Cinema* (available on Bb); Prasad, *Ideology of Hindi Cinema*: 160-216 (available on Bb)
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Ankur (The Seedling)*; Shyam Benegal1974
**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Ankur (The Seedling)*
**Readings:**

**Due on Friday April 3:** Essay Two (3-4 pages)

**Week Nine (April 6, 7, 8): Crisis of the State and Popular Cinema**  
**Monday:** clips from *Sholay* (1975)  
**Readings:**  
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Deewar* (1975)  
**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Deewar*  
**Readings:**  
Mazumdar, “From Subjectification to Schizophrenia” (available on Bb) Thomas, “Melodrama and the Negotiation of Modernity” (available on Bb); Virdi, “Deewar/Wall (1975): Fact, Fiction, and the Making of a Superstar” (available on Bb).

**Week Ten (April 13, 14, 15)**  
**Monday:**  
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Satya* (Ram Gopal Verma, 1998)  
**Wednesday:** discussion of *Satya*  
**Reading:**  
Mazumdar, “Gangland Bombay” (available on Bb)

**Week Eleven (April 20, 21, 22)**  
**Monday**  
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam, 1998)  
**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Dil Se*  
**Readings:**  
Kabir, “Allegories of Alienation” (available on Bb); Basu, “The Music of Intolerable Love” (available on Bb)

**Week 12 (April 27, 28, 29)**  
**Monday**  
**Tuesday:** Screening: *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan, 2007)  
**Wednesday:** Discussion of *Om Shanti Om*  
**Reading:**  
Sarkar, “Metafiguring Bollywood: Brecht after *Om Shanti Om*” (available on Bb)

**Note: Special class, Thursday April 30:**  
Screening: *Life of Pi* (Ang Lee, 2012)

**Monday May 4:** Discussion of *Life of Pi*
Reading: Coe, “Competing Narratives” (available on Bb)

Tuesday May 5:

Wednesday

Due Wednesday May 13: Essay 3 (3-4 pages)

Method of Instruction, Requirements and Evaluation:
The course will be conducted through discussion to which student participation is crucial and thus a core requirement.

• In order to participate consistently and well, you must attend class regularly. **More than two unexcused absences typically result in a lower final grade.** In case of illness or some other serious emergency, be sure to let me know as promptly as you can.
• Since our discussions will be organized around assigned film viewings and readings, it is imperative that (1) you attend all screenings (after all, one of the significant “pleasures” of this cinema derives from collective viewing). Individual viewing will be permitted, but only in extenuating circumstances and only if you can present a valid excuse. These films are long (often 3 hours long!), so come prepared; (2) read the assigned essays/chapters for the day carefully and come prepared to discuss, question, argue and, possibly, re-evaluate your own take on the readings in light of the discussion. A stimulating and dynamic learning environment depends on a willingness not only to articulate your views clearly and responsibly, but also on to listen to others carefully and to be challenged.

Written work:

• You will write three short essays (3-4 pages), which will synthesize your thoughts on the films, readings, and class discussions. Each essay should include discussion of at least two films and incorporate the relevant readings assigned for the discussions preceding and following the screening of these films.

**Essays will be due in my office by noon on the following days:**

**Friday February 27:** Essay One (it will address films and readings covered through week 4);

**Friday April 3:** Essay Two (it will address films and readings covered after week 4);

**Wednesday May 13:** Essay Three (it will address cover films and readings covered after week 8.

Each essay will count for 15% of your grade.

• (2) You will write four responses—each tied to the discussion of a specific film screened that you will help facilitate—two before spring break and two after. Primarily in the nature of a comment designed to produce a robust discussion,
these responses should be no more than a page in length, can be formatted as bullet points (i.e., linear argument not necessary). You may incorporate the readings, but it is not necessary to do so. You will sign up for the discussions you will facilitate (and thus responses you write) in the first week of class. Each response and your facilitation of accompanying discussion will count for 10% of your grade.

• (3) Deriving from your required participation in the symposium on Asian Cinemas in a Global Context, you will write a 2-3 page paper that either: (a) in response to the essays by panelists reflects on your own reading and understanding of these—more a record of your thinking about/metabolizing their claims/conceptual apparatus/narrative architecture than a thesis driven piece; or (b) reflects upon one of the two panels—for example: what you thought of the presentations and discussions that followed; how these squared (or not) with your prior readings of the essays; what you learned from it that enables you to reassess what you have covered in the course thus far, etc. This response will count for 15% of your grade.