

Film & Ethnography: India, Lost & Found

Spring 2016: ANTH E454 + India Studies I414

Meets: T/R 11:15 a.m.-12:30 p.m. in SB 138

Film screenings: T 6:00-9:15 p.m. in Wylie Hall 015

Prof. Susan Seizer. Email: sseizer@indiana.edu. Phone: 812-856-1986

Office Hours: T 2:00 – 4:00 or by appointment.

A.I. for film screenings: Sarah Dillard Mitchell sardilla@indiana.edu

This course focuses on the films of Indian diasporic filmmakers from the 1980s to the present. In these films India and South Asian diasporic culture more broadly are both harshly critiqued and fiercely loved. Drawing on their own and others' experiences of displacement and difference, the filmmakers whose work we consider offer powerful political provocations as well as historical testimony. Their films invite cultural critique and foster debate concerning the success of India as a modern and 'modernizing' nation, and the politics of treating Indian culture itself as something akin to an iconic commodity that bespeaks 'tradition.'

Our approach to this material will be ethnographic and historical: we focus on the social and cultural context of the actions, events, places and personages that figure centrally in these films and the stories they tell. The focus of the films themselves spans colonial and postcolonial periods, and our readings focus accordingly on continuities between the cultural critiques made from afar and from within India during these respective eras. As gender inequalities continue to figure prominently in critiques of Indian postcolonial modernity, we will pay special attention to the representation of gender roles in the films.

The course has as its conceptual centerpiece the films of two prolific feminist filmmakers who have produced highly acclaimed and controversial films over the last two decades, Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta. While theirs are not the only films we will screen, a primary aim of the course is to develop students' cultural and filmic literacy to the point where you can appreciate the power of these films as interventions into the gendered realities of Indian and diasporic South Asian culture. To this end we will view several touchstone films from other directors and moments in Indian film history.

Films:

Devi, 1960 (dir. Satyajit Ray; 93 min.)

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India, 2001 (dir. Gowariker, 224 min)

The Home and The World, 1984 (dir. Satyajit Ray, written R. Tagore; 140 min.)

Gandhi, 1982 (dir. David Attenborough; 191 min.)

Water, 2005 (dir. Deepa Mehta, 117 min)

Earth, 1998 (dir. Deepa Mehta, 110 min)

My Beautiful Laundrette, 1985 (writer, Hanif Kureishi; dir. Stephen Frears, 97 min)

English-Vinglish, 2012 (dir. Gauri Shinde, 134 min)

Margarita, with a Straw, 2014 (dir. Shonali Bose, 100 min.)

Mississippi Masala, 1992 (dir. Mira Nair, 118 min.)

Bhaji on the Beach, 1993 (dir. Gurindar Chadha, 101 min.)

Fire, 1996 (dir. Deepa Mehta, 104 min.)
Monsoon Wedding, 2002 (dir. Meera Nair, 114 min.)
The Namesake, 2006 (dir. Mira Nair, 122 min.)
Sita Sings the Blues, 2008 (dir. Nina Paley, 82 min)

Books for the course available at IU Bookstore & on 24-hour reserve at Wells Library:

- Desai, Jigna. 2004. *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*. NY: Routledge. (IUCAT ebook: <http://new.iucat.iu.edu/catalog/6442556>)
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton Mifflin.

Requirements for the course:

- **Postings** in Canvas Discussion. Posts on the materials assigned for each class are due BY 9:00 AM ON THE DAY OF CLASS (but please feel free to post before this!). Posts should be a one-paragraph to one-page response to the readings and films assigned for that day's class. I have given framing questions and prompts to help you address the materials for each discussion topic. I encourage you to read each others' posts; thoughtful posts will be appreciated by all! The purpose of these posts is to help you focus your thoughts on the materials for this course, letting you come to class better prepared for in-class discussion. I will mark your posts as either Complete or Incomplete. No late posts will be accepted. However if you turned in a post on time, to which I assigned an Incomplete, you may revise and resubmit that post within a week (just email me to let me know that you have posted your revision). There are a total of twenty-seven discussion topics for the semester and you are allowed to miss two posts over the course of the semester without consequence. Each missed post after this will lower your grade.
- **Extra Credit:** We are very fortunate to have an exhibit at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures this semester that coincides beautifully with our concerns in this course. *Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation* is a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit that explores the Indian American experience and the community's political, professional, and cultural contributions to American life. The exhibition moves past pop-culture stereotypes of Indian Americans to explore the heritage, daily experience, and contributions of Indian immigrants and their descendants in the United States. For more info see <http://www.indiana.edu/~mathers/museumevent.html>. Three lectures connected to the Beyond Bollywood exhibit will be given on Feb. 19, March 10, & March 24 at the Mathers Museum. Students who attend a lecture and write up a 1-2 page report on its relevance to our course will earn extra-credit equal to the value of a class post (i.e. this is a way to make-up for a missed post!) If you are not using this credit to make up for a missed post, the extra credit is worth an extra 1% per lecture added to your final grade for the course.
- **Tuesday night film screenings** are mandatory. We have a set of great films to watch together in this course ☺. If for any reason you cannot attend a screening you are nevertheless responsible for screening the film on your own prior to our Thursday class meeting. If you need to screen a film outside the scheduled time note that all films are on reserve at Wells Library Media

Reserves desk. Please promptly email both me and Al Sarah Mitchell prior to Thursday's class to inform us of when, where & how you screened the film.

- **Attendance and Participation:** Class attendance is crucial to enabling students to build an understanding of the meaning of the powerful political provocations and historical contexts of the work of the filmmakers we will be exploring in this course. You are expected to be at every class, having read the assigned material and having screened the week's film. If you must miss a class for illness or a family emergency you are required to provide a valid excuse, preferably prior to the class meeting. This is a small class, so every student's presence is a vital contribution to our collective learning. Any unexcused absence will lower your course grade by 2.5%.

Basis for grades:

Weekly Postings = 30%

In-class Participation (including participation in class discussions, class attendance, and film screening attendance) = 25%

Midterm Exam due March 1st = 20%

Final Exam due May 3rd = 25%

Week 1

Class 1. Jan 12 = Introduction to course, review of syllabus. Expectations?

- In-class: Prof. Seizer begins discussion of her lecture "Women with Swords, Women with Guns: Fierce Funny Women Onstage in the U.S. and South India" to get us ready for the first film we will screen.

Screening: Devi , 1960 [set in 1860] (dir. Satyajit Ray; 93 min.) In Wylie Hall Auditorium, room 015
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Class 2. Jan. 14

Read:

- Nandy, Ashis. 1995. "Satyajit Ray's Secret Guide to Exquisite Murders: Creativity, Social Criticism, and the Partitioning of the Self," in *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves*. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 237-266.

In-class: Discuss film and reading

Week 2

Class 3. Jan 19

Read:

- B.S. Cohn, 1996. "Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the 19th Century." *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton University Press, pp. 106-162

Screening: Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India , 2001 [set in 1877] (dir. Gowariker, 224 min.)
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Class 4. Jan. 21

Read:

- Pavrita Sundar, 2006. "The Sound of *Dharthi*: The Musical Construction of Land, Nature, and Nation in *Lagaan*." Unpublished paper presented at the South Asia Conference, Madison, WI, Oct. 2007.
- a film synopsis of *Lagaan* with useful translations of Hindi words & song titles can be found at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/lagaan.html>

In-class: Discuss film and reading

Week 3

Class 5. Jan. 26 Discuss the notion of women as embodying tradition, what "the good woman" does and who she is, and the consequent stigma on women who step outside this sanctioned role.

Read:

- Seizer, Susan, 2002. "Offstage with Special Drama Actresses in South India: Roadwork." *Everyday Life in South Asia* (Indiana University Press), pp. 116-131.

Recommended background reading:

- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. Ch. 6, "The Nation and Its Women." *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Princeton University Press, pp. 116-132.

Screening: ***The Home and The World***, 1984 [set in 1905]
(dir. Satyajit Ray; 140 min.)

Class 6. Jan. 28.

Read:

- Weidman, Amanda. 2010. "Playback and Performance: The Female Voice and Public Femininity in South India." *American Ethnologist*, forthcoming. Manuscript pp. 1-47

In-class: view clips of playback singers and music videos from Tamil cinema to accompany Weidman's essay, and discuss film and readings

Saturday, Jan 30, 7 PM @ Mathers Museum of World Cultures
Exhibit Opening: *Beyond Bollywood*

Week 4

Class 7. Feb. 2

Read:

- Gandhi, M.K. 1910. Ch. XIII, "What is true civilization?" and Ch. XIV, "How can India become free?" in *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 66-74.
- Ashis Nandy, 1983. "The Psychology of Colonialism," pp. 48-55 (on Gandhi). *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Delhi: OUP.

Recommended:

- Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph, 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition*. U of Chicago Press, pp. 157-192 (on Gandhi).

Screening: **Gandhi**, 1982 [set in 1925-1947]
(dir. Richard Attenborough, 140 min.)

Class 8. Feb. 4

Read:

- Salam, Reihan. "Meet the Hindustani Malcolm X." *Slate Online*, posted Mon. March 26, 2007 (pp 1-2)

In-class: Discuss film and reading

Inaugural Exhibit Lecture: Thursday, February 4th @ 5 p.m.
"Re-Presenting Indian America: Race, Inequality, and the So-Called 'Model Minority'"
Pawan Dhingra, Professor and Chair of Sociology and Professor of American Studies
at Tufts University, and Smithsonian Institution curator of *Beyond Bollywood: Indian
Americans Shape the Nation*

Week 5

Class 9. Feb. 9

Read:

- Parameswaran, Radhika. 1996. "Coverage of 'Bride Burning' in the Dallas Observer: A Cultural Analysis of the 'Other'." *Frontiers XVI*, N.2/3, pp. 69-100.

Additional recommended reading (optional):

- Parameswaran, Radhika. 2008. "Reading the Visual, Tracking the Global: Postcolonial Feminist Methodology and the Chameleon Codes of Resistance." Chapter in *Handbook of Critical Indigenous Methodologies*. Editors: N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, & L. Smith. (pp. 407-428) .

In-class: *Guest visitor: Prof. Radhika Parameswaran (Journalism) joins us to discuss her essays and issues of cross-cultural representation of Indian women.

Screening: **Water**, 2006 [set in 1938] (dir. Deepa Mehta, 117 min.)

Class 10. Feb. 11

Read:

- Burton, David F. 2013. "Fire, Water and the Goddess: The Films of Deepa Mehta and Satyajit Ray as Critiques of Hindu Patriarchy." *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 17, Iss. 2, Article 3. Available at:
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol17/iss2/3>

Week 6:

Class 11. Feb. 16

Read:

- Herman, Jeanette. 2005. "Memory and Melodrama: the transnational politics of Deepa Mehta's 'Earth'." *Camera Obscura* 58, V20, N1:107-147.

Screening: **Earth**, 1998 [set in 1947] (dir. Deepa Mehta, 110 min.)

Class 12. Feb. 18

In-class: *Guest visitor: Prof. Rebecca Marring (Religious Studies) joins us to discuss the film and the issues of religious sectarianism it raises.

Week 7

Class 13. Feb. 23

Read:

- Desai, Jigna. 2004. "Between Hollywood and Bollywood," Ch. 2, pp. 35-69, [*esp. pp. 58-61, on *My Beautiful Launderette*], in *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*.

Screening: ***My Beautiful Launderette***, 1985
(writer, Hanif Kureishi; dir. Stephen Frears, 97 min.)

Class 14. Feb. 25: On Being Black in Britain

In-class: *Guest Visitor: Prof. Ranu Samantrai (English) joins us to discuss film in the context of Thatcherism, and the issues raised by the growth of postcolonial diasporas

Read:

- Hall, Stuart. 1992. "New Ethnicities," in 'Race', *Culture and Difference*. Eds. James Donald & Ali Rattausi. London: Sage Publications. Pp. 252-258.
- Sinead O'Connor's lyrics to her 1990 hit song "Black Boys on Mopeds"
<http://www.vagalume.com.br/sinead-oconnor/black-boys-on-mopeds.html#print>

Watch:

- Her performance of the song:
<https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?p=black+boys+on+mopeds+sinead+o%27+connor&ei=UTF-8&hspart=mozilla&hsimp=yhs-001>

****Midterm exam: question up on Canvas Assignments.**

The midterm asks you to select ONE of the questions provided on which to write a 5-page, double-spaced paper in doc format. The midterm paper should be submitted on Canvas on March 1st at noon.

Week 8

Class 15. March 1 –

- In-class screening: "Essential Arrivals" documentary by the U of MI Sociology dept about Indian-Americans in Michigan in 2015.

Midterm exams due on Assignments tab on Canvas by noon.

March 1st Screening: ***English-Vinglish*** (2012)
*NOTE: this screening is in the IU Cinema @ 7:00 pm

Class 16. March 3

*Performance artist Fawzia Mirza will visit class as our guest lecturer and show her recent short films.

- Post on English-Vinglish

March 3rd Performance event:

Fawzia Mizra's one-woman play, "**Me, My Mom, & Sharmila**"
5:30 PM, Mathers Museum of World Cultures

Week 9

Class 17. March 8: our skins

Read:

- Prashad, Vijay. 2000. "Preface: Karma Sutra: The Forethought," *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Minn, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii-xi.

March 8th IU Cinema Screening:
"**Margarita, with a Straw**" 2014 (dir. S. Bose, 100 min) 7 PM

Class 18. March 10

Read: Crip Queer/Queer Crip

- Sandahl, Carrie. 2003. "Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *GLQ* 9:1-2, pp. 25-56. Durham NC: Duke U Press.

Post on film viewing & reading

In-class: Discuss film

5 pm @ the Mathers Museum: Lecture by Vijay Prashad,
"Karma of Brown Folk: 15 Years Later"

***** SPRING BREAK MARCH 13-20 NO CLASS *****

Week 10

Class 19. March 22

Read:

- Purnima Bose & Linta Verghese. 2001. "Mississippi Masala, South Asian Activism, and Agency." *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the "Real."* Ed. By Wendy Kozol and Wendy Hesford. Urbana: U. of Illinois Press. 2001:137-168.

Optional reading:

- Desai, Jigna. 2004. "When Indians Play Cowboys: Diaspora and Postcoloniality in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*" Ch 3, pp. 71-99, in *Beyond Bollywood*.

Screening: **Mississippi Masala**, 1992 (dir. Mira Nair, 118 min.)

Class 20. March 24

In-class: Discuss film and reading

5 pm @ the Mathers Museum: Lecture "The Bengali Harlem/Lost Histories Project: Documenting Early Stories of South Asian Muslim Immigration to the U.S." Vivek Bald will draw from his book *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (2013), and present material from his ongoing documentary film "In Search of Bengali Harlem" and web space "The Lost Histories Project," to explore the stories of South

Asian Muslim peddlers and seamen who settled in the U.S. during the Asian Exclusion era, between the 1890s and 1940s.

Week 11

Class 21. March 29

Read:

- Desai, Jigna. 2004. "Homesickness and Motion Sickness: Embodied Migratory Subjectivities in Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach*", Ch. 5, pp. 133-157

Screening: ***Bhaji on the Beach***, 1993 (dir. Gurindar Chadha, 101 min.)

Class 22. March 31

Read:

- Malik, Sarita. 1996. "Beyond the Cinema of Duty? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s." in *Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. By Andrew Higson. Ch. 13: 202-215.

In-class: Discuss film and reading

Week 12

April 4th @ 4:00 pm: Attend the lecture by author Jhumpa Lahiri
Whittenberger Auditorium

Class 23. April 5 – **NO CLASS MEETING**

**Post on Jhumpa Lahiri's lecture! Please give me a report as I have to miss it.*

Read:

- *Begin reading:* Desai, Jigna. 2004. "Homo on the Range: Queering Postcoloniality and Globalization in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*." Ch. 6 in *Beyond Bollywood*, pp. 159-191.

Prof. Seizer will be present at the screening of *Fire

Screening: ***Fire***, 1996 (dir. Deepa Mehta, 104 min.)

Class 24. April 7: Indian context and entailments of *Fire*

Read:

- *Finish reading:* Desai, Jigna. 2004. "Homo on the Range: Queering Postcoloniality and Globalization in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*." Ch. 6 in *Beyond Bollywood*, pp. 159-191.
- Dave, Naisargi. 2011. "Indian and Lesbian and What Came Next: Affect, Consumerism and Queer Emergences." *American Ethnologist* V38:4, Nov., pp. 650-665

+ two short newspaper articles:

- "India Decriminalizes Gay Sex" 3 Jul 2009, *The Times of India*, by Manoj Mitta & Smriti Singh
- "Indian Court Overturns Gay Sex Ban," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2009, by Heather Timmons and Hari Kumar

Week 13

Class 25. April 12

Read:

- Desai, Jigna. 2004. "Conclusion: Migrant Brides, Feminist Films, and Transnational Desires." Ch. 8, pp. 211-229, in *Beyond Bollywood*.

Recommended:

- Sharpe, Jenny. 2005. "Gender, Nation, and Globalization in 'Monsoon Wedding' and 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' in *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* Vol. 6 Issue 1, p58-81

Screening: **Monsoon Wedding**, 2002 (dir. Mira Nair, 114 min.)

Class 26. April 14

Read:

- Shukla, Pravina. 2008. Ch. 15, "The Wedding", pp. 347-372 in *The Grace of Four Moons*, Indiana University Press (incl. subsections on "Getting Married in India", "The Engagement", "The Bride's Trousseau", "The Dowry", "Making the Bride Beautiful", "The Ladies' Sangeet" and "The Wedding" -- all topics in the movie.)

In-Class: *Guest Visitor Prof. Pravina Shukla (Folklore) joins us to discuss the film and its representation of a contemporary Indian wedding.

Week 14

Class 27. April 19

Read:

- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. *Interpreter of Maladies*. HarperCollins. All the stories are interesting so it's hard to select just a few to assign. Minimally, read the first three stories, pp. 1-66, and the last story, pp. 173-198. (Two others I'd like you to read if you have time are "Mrs. Sen's" and "This Blessed House," pp. 111-157.)

Screening: **The Namesake**, 2007 (dir. Mira Nair, 122 min.)

Class 28. April 21

Read:

- Narayan, Kirin. 2002. "Placing Lives Through Stories: Second-Generation South Asian Americans." In *Everyday Life in South Asia*, ed. Diane P. Mines & Sarah Lamb. Indiana University Press, pp. 425-439.

In-class: Discuss film and reading

Week 15

Class 29. April 26

Read:

- Mankekar, Purnima. 1999. "Mediating Modernities: The Ramayan the Creation of Community and Nation." In *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* (Durham:

Duke U Press), pp. 165-223

Screening: <i>Sita Sings the Blues</i> , 2008 (dir. Nina Paley, 82 min)
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Class 30. April 28 – last class meeting

In-class: Discuss film

- Consider the filmmaker's subject position: she is using her own reverse diasporic experience, as her informants are her own diasporic NRI friends. Paley finds resonance and sustenance for her own experiences in Hindu mythology and feminist critiques of it.
- Review themes of the course, and DISCUSS WRITING: AUTHORIAL VOICE, GRAMMAR, STRUCTURING ESSAYS, ETC!

*TOPIC FOR FINAL PAPER AVAILABLE ON CANVAS

Final Exam due Thursday, May 5 by NOON

*Paper topic on intertextuality: 6-8 page paper (double-spaced in 12 pt. font) in which you discuss three films and the intertextuality between them. More on this assignment to come! It will be due on Canvas Assignments.