

Media and Religion in India

[SAST-208 RELS-268 RELS-568 SAST-608, FILM-322]

Fulfills Distribution Requirement in History and Tradition

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30am-12:00pm, in Williams Hall, Room 1

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Course Synopsis: In this course we'll explore how cultural life and ideals in India are expressed through various media. Our aim is to acquire a familiarity with a variety of media forms—including traditional architecture, devotional poetry-music, visual-sensorial worship, modern film, recorded music, clothing, and live performance. We will situate these media within important cultural fields such as religion, primarily, but also politics, popular culture, and global culture, exploring past and present expressions. Though much of our study will immerse us in India's past, our endeavor is to understand contemporary India and its culture through selected media.

Requirements: You're required to attend all classes and screenings, read all outside materials carefully and thoughtfully, and engage with the subject matter in class and in your writing. This means that during class you're expected to participate enthusiastically and outside of class to complete your readings conscientiously. Each week you'll be asked to compose a **short reaction** paper (2 pages) based on the readings and/or screenings. These are to be emailed to me on Monday by 10pm, except on weeks when we screen a film; on those weeks, the reaction paper will be due on Wednesday by 10pm. In addition, for one class in the semester, you'll give an **informal presentation** on the reading and **lead discussion** for the remainder of the class. At the end of the term, you'll write a **twelve to fifteen (10-12) page paper with a thesis** on a subject of your choice, which should be printed and submitted; no electronic submissions. I strongly encourage students to consult with me during their writing and research process, which includes providing at least one draft of the essay to me during the second half of the semester.

Screenings: Occasionally during the semester, in lieu of reading homework, you will be asked to screen a video on your own time before class. The videos are available at Rosengarten reserve, and can be screened at many places throughout Van Pelt library. During weeks when you watch a film, our class will meet only once, rather than twice, in that week. I encourage students to arrange screenings together in small groups.

Grading: Fifteen percent (15%) of your grade will depend on your attendance and the quality of your classroom participation; twenty percent (20%) will be based on the quality of your weekly reaction papers; and twenty-five (25%) percent will depend on your day of presentation and leading discussion; and forty percent (40%) will hinge on your final critical review paper.

Materials available at House of Our Own:

- Babb, L. and Susan Wadley, eds. 1995. *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chatterjee, Gayatri. 2001. *Mother India*. London: British Film Institute Press.
- Hawley, J. S. and Mark Juergensmeyer. 1988. *Songs of the Saints of India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mehta, Gita. 1979. *Karma Cola*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rudolph, S. H. and Lloyd I. 1983. *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- **Optional:** Dehejia, Vidya. 1997. *Indian Art*. London: Phaidon Press. [Optional because it is rather expensive.]
- **Recommended Reading:** Tarlo, Emma. 1996. *Clothing Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Films Screened:

- *Ramayan* (1986, Ramanand Sagar, dir.; 8 Vols.)
- *Meditation: The Art of Ecstasy* (1998, VisionQuest Media; 46 min.)
- *Guru Busters* (1995, Robert Eagle, dir.; 55 mins.)
- *Father, Son, and Holy War—Trial by Fire* (1993, Anand Patwardhan, dir.; approx. 60 mins.)
- *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan, dir.; 2h55m)
- *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977, Manmohan Desai, dir.; 2h56m)
- *Bombay* (1995, Mani Ratnam, dir.; 2h15m)
- *Gandhi* (1982, Richard Attenborough, dir.; 2h22m)
- *Guide* (1965, Vijay Anand, dir.; 2h47m)

Copies of each book will be on reserve at the library.

Articles will be available in a printed bulk pack at the Wharton business school's copy shop. Please bring reading materials to class on the day we discuss them.

SYLLABUS

THE REIGN OF THE RAMAYANA

Week 1: Introduction

- I. [1/11] Introduction to the course and its aims.

No Reading for 1/13

- II. [1/13] In Class screening of episodes from the TV *Ramayan*.

Reading for 1/18: "Introduction" by Lawrence Babb in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* [1-20].

Week 2: Was the Revolution Televised?: The TV *Ramayan*.

- I. [1/18] Lecture: The Ideas of Media and Religion.

Reading for 1/20: "All in the (Raghu) Family," by Phil Lutgendorf in *Media and the Transformation* [217-249].

- II. [1/20] Lecture: What are Nationalism and the Nation?

Reading for 1/25: *Amar Chitra Katha: Ramayana* series (available online at: http://www.askasia.org/students/virtual_gallery/exhibitions/).

Week 3: Comic History: The *Amar Chitra Katha*.

- I. [1/25]. Lecture: Religion and Nationalism

Reading for 1/27: "The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*," by Fran Pritchett in *Media and the Transformation...*[76-106].

- II. [1/27] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 2/1: "Introduction: Mountains, Rivers, People," "Seeing' the Divine: Image and Temple," "Sacred and 'Profane': The Nagara Temple," by Vidya Dehejia in *Indian Art* [4-8; 135-152; 153-182]

VISUAL CULTURE IN RELIGION, POLITICS, AND HISTORY

Week 4: Temples and Mosques

I. [2/1] Lecture: Icons and the Aniconic

Reading for 2/3: “Linear Abstractions: Art and the Sultans of India,” and “Visions of Paradise: The Luxury of Mughal Art,” by Vidya Dehejia in *Indian Art* [247-272; 297-334]

II. [2/3] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 2/8: Sunil Kumar, *The Present in Delhi's Pasts*, Chapter One [1-61].

Week 5: The Past as Politics

I. [2/8] Lecture: History, Archeology, and Politics in Contemporary India

Reading for 2/10: Sunil Kumar, Chapters Two-Four [62-131].

II. [2/10] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 2/15: “Introduction,” by A. K. Ramanujan; Basavanna and Mahadeviyakka poems in *Speaking of Shiva* [19-55; 61-90].

CRAZY LOVE: SUFIS, BHAKTAS, AND MODERN GURUS

Week 6: Songs and Sass: Basavanna, Kabir, and Mira

I. [2/15] Lecture: Class, Caste, and Literature

Reading for 2/17: “Introduction,” Chapter Two and Chapter Five by J. S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer in *Songs of the Saints of India*, [3-8; 35-62; 119-142].

II. [2/17] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 2/22: “Lives of Sufi Saints” and “Conversations of Sufi Saints” by Carl Ernst; “Teachings of Two Punjabi Sufi Poets” by Mustansir Mir [495-529].

Week 7: Pir Pleasure: Sufism and Ecstatic Islam

- I. [2/22] Lecture: Orientalism, Then and Now

Reading for 2/24: “Recorded Sound and Religious Music: The Case of *Qawwali*,” by Rgula Burckhardt Qureshi in *Media and Transformation...*[139-166]

- II. [2/24] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 3/1: First half of *Karma Cola* by Gita Mehta.

Week 8: The Medium of the Mystic

- I. [3/1] In class screening of *Meditation: The Art of Ecstasy* (1998; 46 min.) and *Guru Busters* (Robert Eagle, dir.; 1995?, 55 mins.).

Reading for 3/3: Finish *Karma Cola*.

- II. [3/3] Presentation and Discussion.

Readings for 3/15: “Yes to Sita, No to Ram!: The Continuing Popularity of Sita in India,” by Madhu Kishwar [234-249].

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Gender and Body as Media

- I. [3/15] In Class screening of *Father, Son, and Holy War—Trial by Fire* (1993, Anand Patwardhan, dir.; approx. 60 mins.)

Readings for 3/17: “Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism,” by Joseph S. Alter in *Modern Asian Studies* [557-588].

- II. [3/17] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 3/24: *Mother India* by Gayatri Chatterjee, entire.

Screen for 3/24: *Mother India* (1957: 2h55m)

MODERNITY, HINDUISM, AND FILM

Week 10: The Feminine Nation: *Mother India*

I. [3/22] *Screening—No Class*

II. [3/24] Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 3/31: “Bombay Films: The Cinema as Metaphor for Indian Society and Politics,” Akbar Ahmed, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2. (May, 1992). [289-320]. *Note this is available only at the blackboard site*

Screen for 3/31: *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977: 2h56m).

Week 11: Comedy and Community: *Amar Akbar Anthony*

I. [3/29] *Screening—No Class*

Reading for 3/31: “Introduction” and “Indian Cinema,” by Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, in *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film*. [7-41]

II. [3/31] Presentation and Discussion.

Screen for 4/7: *Bombay* (1995: 2h15m)

Week 12: Prem and Politics: *Bombay*

I. [4/5] *Screening—No Class*

Reading for 4/7: “*Bombay* and Its Public” by Ravi Vasudevan [186-211].

II. [4/7] Presentation and Discussion.

Screen for 4/14: *Gandhi* (1982: 2h22m)

Week 13: Karma Chameleon: *Gandhi*

I. [4/12] *Screening—No Class*

Reading for 4/14: *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma* by Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph, entire.

II. [4/14] Presentation and Discussion.

Screen for 4/21: *Guide* (1965: 2h47m)

Week 14: Old Religions in a New Country

I. [4/19] *Screening—No Class*

Reading for 4/21: “Market Forces at Work: Religious Themes in Commercial Hindi Films,” by Steve Derne in *Media and the Transformation...*[191-216]

II. [4/21] Presentation and Discussion.

FINAL PAPERS DUE MAY 6, 4PM, IN MY MAILBOX IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIA STUDIES.