# INDIA IN FILM

AL&C 30, Mead 115 (Stirn), T Th 2:00-3:20

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Films: Except for films to be viewed in class (Kal Ho Naa Ho) you are expected to view all assigned films (marked by  $\star\star$ ) in their entirety in advance of the class in which they will be discussed. All films will be on reserve in Frost on DVD and/or VHS and available in streaming (DVD only).

**Reading:** There will be a handout and reading for each of the starred  $\star\star$  films below, available along with the syllabus on the course website as an e-reserve, plus supplemental readings.

**Attendance:** in class is expected & will be monitored and factored into grade.

**Papers:** Keep a logbook with writings on each of the starred  $\star\star$  films in the course. The logbook will be turned in several times during the semester. Several short papers (2–3 pages on films and topics as assigned, due in class in which film is discussed), hard copies only, 2 multiple choice exams in class and a final exam involving viewing of film segments. Papers may be e-mailed only as a backup copy.

NB: Late work will be marked down.

# Syllabus

#### Week 1

#### Tuesday, 26 January. Fantasy/(Un)Reality/Filmic Reality

Thinking about film; "reading" film. Screening in class and begin viewing/discussion of Kal Ho Naa Ho in class Thursday, 28 January. India Specific / Human Universals

In-class film screening of **Kal Ho Naa Ho** and discussion, social values, gay vs. straight, characters, stereotypes, family, marriage, the wedding as event, moms & mothers-in-law, religion (Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Moslem), the DESHI concept.

#### Week 2

## Tuesday, 2 February. Visitors & the West

America as portrayed in an Indian film, **Kal Ho Naa Ho**. Acculturation & the wisdom and the values of Mother India. Feeling & affection. The 9 traditional Indian emotions (rasas), love & sexuality in film and the reality of South. Asian life. The role of songs & dance in Bollywood film, Think about viewing **Gunga Din** for next week.

**Thursday 4 February. How Characters Establish Their Indianness** Transformation and the reestablishment of homeland values, Bollywood's love of plot twists. Life, death, & rebirth. Self/Other, caste, community.

## Week 3

Film: View ★★ Gunga Din

## Tuesday, 9 February. The Myths of Empire

Rulers and the ruled, Stereotypes British and Indian, the Mysterious EastYogisTigersElephantsCobras. Colonialism, the exotic stereotypes. **Elephant Walk, Around the World in 80 Days, Indiana Jones, Octopussy**. Reading: xerox: Edward Said: "Orientalism" (selections).

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## Thursday, 11 February. High Colonialism/Western Self/Asian Other

The structure of the British regime, social interaction of rulers and 'natives,' the colonialist psyche, memsahibs & nabobs, rajas and pariahs. Discuss: **Gunga Din** (1939).and Laurel and Hardy's **Bonnie Scotland**.

**Short Paper 1 Due.** (Gunga Din). Discuss the concepts of 1. Good Indian. 2. Bad Indian, and 3. Sahib (Britisher) as seen in the film. Give specific examples..

#### Week 4

Films: view ★★ Black Narcissus and ★★ Bhowani Junction

Tuesday 16 February. Indo-British Authors: East/West Interface

Michael Powell's celebrated **Black Narcissus** (1947), based on Rumer Godden's novel, places culture-shocked nuns battling disorientation and temptation to do good among the natives in an isolated Himalayan nunnery. Eastern sensuality meets British repression. Edw. Said and Freud are our guides...

## Thursday 18 February. Caste, The Freedom Struggle, Identity East or West. Indian but Which Indian?

Discussion of **Bhowani Junction** (1962), shot in Pakistan. Based on John Masters' best-selling 1956 novel, Holly wood dives into the Indian sub-continent in pre-independence turmoil, individuals search for humanity, identity, love bypasses community, religion, race, country. Who says opposites don't attract?

## Week 5

Films: ★★ The World of Apu [Apur Sansar] and ★★ Charulata

## Tuesday 23 February. The Birth of India's Alternative Cinema: Realism

Student, husband, wife, child, love, life, death, despair, rebirth...universal humanistic themes permeate **The World of Apu** (1952) (B&W), the internationally acclaimed Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray's third masterwork in the Apu Trilogy. Modeling his craft on the great post-WW II Italian art filmmakers such as Fellini, de Sica, Antonioni, and other Europeans (**Roma: Open City**, **The Bicycle Thief**, **La Strada**). The stark B&W realism, humanity, and craft of Ray's cinema is like nothing seen before (or since) in India..

#### Thursday 25 February. The Lonely Wife/Impossible Love

Ray's sensitive study of love developing across taboos [See also **Devdas**, **Dil Se**, **Mr. & Mrs. Iyer**] has been called "the perfect film" in terms of its use of light, sound, cinematography, timing, sound, editing, and dialogue. Based on an autobiographical story by Tagore, **Charulata** (1964) (B&W) established Ray's place as one of a handful of major filmmakers across the world (Kurosawa, Bergman, Goddard, Truffaut, etc.) who were establishing film as a major art form which like painting, sculpture, music, or literature could be taken seriously as part of mankind's cultural heritage.

## ➤ Submit Logbook with entries on all films to date.

#### Week 6

Film: ★★ A Passage to India 1984 (163 min.) English

## Tuesday 2 March: British Imperialism/Us&Them/Ruler&Ruled/

Both E.M. Forster's novel (1924) and David Lean's film **A Passage to India** take us into the heart of the British Raj and the clash of cultures as Indian subject peoples and English colonist rulers attempt to relate and communicate while living in their separate & unequal worlds through the fog of Orientalism, bigotry, and misconceptions. Lean's film is flawed and miscast (Alec Guinness as an Indian Brahmin!) and he changes the ending, but **Passage** is supposed to treat Indians sympathetically. Does it?

#### Thursday 4 March: British Imperialism: An Indian Lens on Self/Other

Bad-guy British rulers hope to squash dumb native Indian villagers in a not-so-friendly game of cricket in **Lagaan** 2002 (225 min.) Hindi, to be partially viewed and discussed in class. At stake in the match is a cruel wager concerning increased exorbitant taxation on the impoverished villagers. Caste prejudice and mastering a foreign sport are dealt with. The village hero prefers the local girl to a besotted English one. But who wins the cricket game? (Think Mighty Ducks, Bad News Bears here!)

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#### Week 7

Film: ★★ Salaam Bombay 1988 (114 min.) Hindi

## Tuesday 9 March: India's Alternative Cinema/The Urban Underbelly

Mira Nair's hard-hitting Oscar-nominated film, **Salaam Bombay**, and the use of street children as actors. The setting is "the Cages," the city's red-light district, and besides the homeless children, the characters are whores, madams, pimps, junkies, hoodlums, and the "respectable" people who exploit them. Nair, one of several extraordinary women Indian contemporary filmmakers, takes realism to a new level.

## Thursday 11 March: Alternative cinema, Some Vignettes

Foreign and Indian independent filmmakers have approached Indian subjects in a variety of ways which break from the conventions of Bollywood and Hollywood. From Conrad Rooks' 1972 **Siddhartha** to Wes Anderson's 2007 **Darjeeling Limited**, from Merchant/Ivory's **Shakespeare Wallah** (1965) to Gurinder Chadha's **Bhaji at the Beach** (1993) or Deepa Mehta's **Fire** (1996), taboos are broken, injustices addressed, and humor is found in unlikely places.

SPRING BREAK — 13 to 21 March

#### Week 8

Film: ★★ Bend It Like Beckham 2002 (112 min.) English, Punjabi...

Tuesday 23 March: How a Nice Indo-English Girl Scores the Winning Goal, Gets Her First Kiss, Educates Her Parents in Biculturality, and Goes to Amherst on a Soccer Scholarship(waitaminute, Amherst isn't in California)
Gurinder Chadha's lighthearted film Bend It Like Beckham touches upon the Indian diaspora and some of the problems faced by the children of first generation immigrants. While parents cling to the traditions of Sikh Punjab, their England-born kids must walk on an East-West cultural tightrope. David Beckham is the British soccer superstar famed for his curving free kicks. The genre shared in India by two acclaimed Bollywood hits: Chak De India! (field hockey) & Lagaan (cricket),

### Thursday 25 March: The Indian Diaspora II USA

In Mira Nair's **Mississippi Masala** (1991) – partially viewed in class – an affluent Indian family is expelled from their home in Uganda and migrates to a small town in Mississippi. "Masala" is a kind of curried Indian stew with a mixture of ingredients. Provocative as always, Nair takes on both American racism and Indian immigrants' caste and color-based prejudices in this gentle love story. Denzel Washington stars and Sharmila Tagore (Apu's bride) reincarnates as a harried Indo-American mom.

#### Week 9

Film: ★★ Dil Se (From the Heart) 1998 (164 min.) Hindi

## Tuesday 30 March: Love and Terrorism

Superstar actor Shahrukh Khan (playing a radio journalist) is smitten by a mysterious goddess of the mountains in director Mani Ratnam's **Dil Se**. Santosh Sivan's cinematography of the Himalayan landscape of Ladakh, west of Tibet, expansive. The song sequences to music of A.R. Rahman are extraordinary and the images sexy in an arty way (in one, the lovers sing and cuddle while explosions of an army vs. insurgent battle rages in the background.) Then back to Delhi for the dénouement.

## Thursday 1 April: MTV-Type Videos Were Invented in Bollywood

Continued discussion of **Dil Se** with an analysis of several songs. The important role which music plays in mainstream Indian cinema, with examples from a variety of films. Song & dance as entertainment, expansion of plot and character, romance, and a surrogate for sex in the "item number" and "gana."

## Week 10

**Film:** ★★ Water 2005 (115 min.) Hindi (also English version)

## Tuesday 6 April: Women's Rights in a Changing Society

The Indian/Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta is no stranger to controversy. Each film of her Elements Trilogy deals with aspects of the plight of Indian women, two-faced violent protests in India from Hindu fundamentalists: **Earth** (1995) deals with the horrendous riots that broke out between Moslems and Hindus/Sikhs at partition and independence in 1947; **Fire** (1998)

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was criticized for its frank and sensitive treatment of a lesbian relationship, and **Water** (2005) for addressing the problem of the treatment of widows by traditional Hindus. During the initial filming of **Water** in Benares, a fanatic fundamentalist mob destroyed the half-million dollar set, forcing the filmmaker to shift the shoot to Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

## Thursday 8 April: Water (Continued)

The film is set in the 1930s: a widowed child bride is placed in a home for widows in the holy city of Benares on the sacred river Ganges. The home is run by a noxious and autocratic "madam" who has a side business with her hijra (transvestite) sidekick selling sex to the corrupt wealthy men in the suburbs across the river. Widows are considered inauspicious for life and may not remarry. Prostitution may be the only alternative. Love appears (and disappears). Mahatma Gandhi makes a cameo appearance in a remarkable finale (along with those unforgettable Indian trains).

#### Week 11

Film: ★★ Gandhi 1982 (188 min.) English

## Tuesday 13 April: Mahatma Gandhi/The Struggle for Freedom

Discuss David Attenborough's biographical epic film **Gandhi**. Comparison with actual newsreel footage. How was freedom from British rule attained largely through this extraordinary man's tactics and beliefs? In what ways has or could Gandhi's radical non-violent activism influence a violent and oppressive world in recent years and today?

### Thursday 15 April: Special Guest V.R. Devika from India

V.R. Devika, a well-known dance critic, cultural activist, educator and scholar who coordinates the Prakriti Foundation in Chennai (Madras), India, brings her specialized knowledge of Mahatma Gandhi and his influence on Indian culture and life as well as rare footage of Gandhi & the Freedom Movement.

## Week 12

Film: ★★ Sarkar 2005 (120 min.) Hindi

#### Tuesday 20 April: A Mumbai Godfather/Indian Film Noir

Starring the superstar father-son team of Amitabh and Abhishek Bachchan, Ram Gopal Sharma's **Sarkar** (2005) does not have a single song-and-dance. Dark, taut, and violent, it is adapted from the Hollywood 1940s-1950s Hollywood genre of B&W crime/detective drama known as *film noir*. It is one of the rare Bollywood films where a hero sends a heroine packing. Discussion of the genre (writer Raymond Chandler was a master) with examples drawn from American *film noir* such as **Double Indemnity**, **The Big Sleep**, **Body Heat**, and Bollywood's **Jism**.

➤ Note required reading and Short Paper II due Thursday (below).

## Thursday 22 April: Crime is the profession of Our Caste

And the family actors pop/son team of Bachchans are the "good guys" among the Mumbai Mafia (except for the black sheep bad son, that is!) and the nasty drug smuggler trying to cut in on their territory, the comic sycophant south Indian, and the sinister swamy. \*Since this is "Hoodlum Day" dress like thugs and molls for class. Photographs! Prizes! Prizes!\*

## **W** Short Paper II ~ Due Thursday 22 April.

How does Sarkar draw upon the conventions of Hollywood's *film noir* genre? And in what way is Sarkar's Mumbai underworld different (and specifically Indian)? How do traditional Bollywood themes function... or not? (c. two pages)

- For background read the *Wikipedia* article on *film noir*. Read particularly 1. Problems and definitions.
- 2.1 Literary sources. 3. The classic period, 7. Approaches to defining noir 7.1. Visual style
- 7.2 Structure and narrational devices 7.3 Plots, characters and settings & 7.4.

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#### Week 13

Film: ★★ Mr. and Mrs. Iyer 2002 (120 min.) English, Hindi, Tamil Tuesday 27 April: Caste, Ethnicity, Religion, Sexuality, Violence, Cinema

Increasingly South Asia's popular and alternative filmmakers are attempting to address serious social and political problems. Hindu-Moslem violence, separatism, terrorism, wife and child abuse, sexual preference, drugs, human trafficking, caste prejudice, corruption, treatment of widows, etc., are themes now appearing in films such as **Bombay**, **Lage Raho Munna Bhai**, **Water**, **Samskara**, **Indian**, and **Born into Brothels**.

## Thursday 29 April: Travel/Nightmare/Solitude/Tolerance/Love

Former Satyajit Ray actress-become-great-director Aparna Sen's **Mr. & Mrs. Iyer** stars her daughter, Konkona Sen Sharma, as a young Brahmin Iyer (high caste) mother traveling south with her baby from the Himalayas where she has visited her parents. A family acquaintance also traveling, Raja, whom she doesn't know is a Moslem, is asked to look after her. The bus heads right into the cauldron of fanatic Hindu anti-Moslem riots. Stranded, surrounded by violence, the couple develop an understanding of the common warmth, humor, love, and shared humanity which underlie divisions of caste, ethnicity, and religion.

## Week 14

Film: ★★ Slumdog Millionaire 2008 (121 min.) English/Hindi

Tuesday 4 May: Terrorism Hindu & Moslem

A class showing (in part) of **A Wednesday** 2008 (103 min.) Hindi, written and directed by Niraj Pandey. A thriller and police procedural, the film follows events in Mumbai after a telephone call from a terrorist who threatens to set off bombs around the city if his demands (the release of four Moslems jailed for terrorism) are not met. Gripping and tension-ridden with the clock ticking in a race against time, the film eventually presents the viewer with questions which both India and its individual citizens must struggle to answer, and perhaps we must as well.

## Thursday 6 May: AND THE WINNER IS.....!!!!!!

Directed by Danny Boyle & Loveleen Tandan, and based on a novel by Indian diplomat Vikram Swarup, **Slumdog Millionaire** follows the unlikely ascent of a kid from Mumbai's brutal slums to be winner of the Indian version of the American TV show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire". A series of life experiences seen in flashbacks serendipitously gives him the answers to each of the contest's questions. Bollywood star Anil Kapoor steals the show as the outrageous, hilarious, & corrupt gameshow MC. A beautifully filmed and fast-paced movie, **Slumdog** won a gaggle of prestigious festivals and dominated the 2009 Academy Awards. Among critics there was dismay that **Slumdog** revived a bevy of time-worn negative Orientalist stereotypes. You be the judge.

> TURN IN YOUR FILM JOURNALS ON THURSDAY 6 MAY.

➤ FINAL EXAM TBA.