

## Bollywood, Religion, and The Indian Nation

RELG 491-003  
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Fall 2013



### Course Description

Come envision India on the big screen. See the religious and social life of the Indian subcontinent acted out, danced, and sung. Imagine India's history through images of its past. Learn to understand how filmic representations form an integral part of lived experience in India.

This course will explore issues of religious, social, and national identity in India through the lens of the country's cinema. We will interpret a series of Bollywood films, as well as Tamil films and Indian arthouse films, to understand the way narratives and images of India's past, and its social and religious ideals, serve as formative cultural forces. We will look at the tension between religious and secular ideologies in India, and how such ideologies are represented in filmic narratives.

Materials used in this course will include films and secondary readings. There will be weekly film screenings, up to three hours long, outside of the main class times. The films will also be on reserve in the library so that they can be viewed at other times.

## Required Readings and Filmography

*Course Reader* (various book excerpts and articles, available for download as PDF files)

*Mother India* (1957)

*Devi* (1960)

*Guide* (1965)

*Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977)

*Umrao Jaan* (1981)

*Bombay* (1995)

*Earth* (1998)

*Mission Kashmir* (2000)

*Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001)

*Rang De Basanti* (2006)

*Dharm* (2007)

*Naan Kadavul* (2009)

*The Dirty Picture* (2011)

*OMG Oh My God!* (2012)

## Learning Objectives

- Ability to discuss the relationship between religion and popular culture in modern India
- Ability to identify how gender roles, caste expectations, and ritual practice govern Indian life
- Ability to analyze how representations in film reflect specific historical ideologies in India
- Ability to demonstrate a basic familiarity with the narrative conventions of Indian cinema

## Course Requirements, Grading Breakdown

Class Participation	20%
In-class Group Presentation	15%
Midterm Exam	30%
Final Exam	35%

## Class Schedule (Preliminary Topic Outline)

Introductory Class (August 22)

*In the Thrall of "Bollywood": Indian Cinema, the Lay of the Land*

Week 1 (August 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Mother India* (1957)

*Envisioning the Nation*

Week 2 (September 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Devi* (1960)

*Gods Incarnate*

Week 3 (September 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Guide* (1965)

*Perfidy, Sainthood, and Community Practice*

Week 4 (September 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977)

*Narrating the Secular Nation (and the Roots of Hindutva)*

Week 5 (September 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Umrao Jaan* (1981)

*History, Performance, and Women's Agency*

Week 6 (October 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>)

Film Screening: *Lagaan* (2000)

*Remembering the Age of Empire*

Week 7 (October 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Earth* (1998)

*Love, Loss, and Violence: Revisioning the Nation*

**MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 8 (October 15<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Rang De Basanti* (2006)

*The Past in the Present*

Week 9 (October 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Bombay* (1995)

*Communalism and the City*

Week 10 (October 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>)

Film Screening: *Dharm* (2007)

*Purity, Scripture, and the Way of the World*

Week 11 (November 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Mission Kashmir* (2000)

*Terror, Identity, and the Muslim "Other"*

Week 12 (November 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>)

Film Screening: *Naan Kadavul* (2009)

*Ascetics in the World*

Week 13 (November 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>)

Film Screening: *The Dirty Picture* (2011)

*The Male Public and the Female Gaze*

Week 14 (November 26<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup>)

Film Screening: *OMG Oh My God!* (2012)

*Sending up Religion (and the Endurance of Faith)*

Review Session (December 5<sup>th</sup>)

*FINAL EXAM*