REL 295:
God(s), Sex and the Movies in South Asia

Tuesday (Steiner 106)
& Thursday (Bucksbaum 161)
2:15-4:05
Film Screenings: Tuesday, 7-10 p.m.
ARH 201 (the “CEC”)

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Course Description

Arguably India is internationally known best for two things: Bollywood and religion, with—thanks to the *Kama Sutra*—sex coming in as a close runner-up. Unfortunately, knowledge of these three elements of Indian culture often remains shallow since it ignores the ancient traditions of performance, religious inspiration and complex notions of beauty, pleasure and love that form the South Asian background to all three. By bringing these three elements together in terms of their interrelations, this course seeks to examine how these three unlikely bedfellows—God(s), Sex and the Movies—have historically been intimately joined in South Asian culture in ways that may change the way we think about all three.

Required Texts (available in the Grinnell Bookstore)

*Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*, Vijay Mishra  
*Love Song of the Dark Lord (Gita Govinda)*, Barbara Stoler Miller, ed.  
*Mother India*, Chatterjee  
*The Ramayana*, R. K. Narayana  
*Victory to the Mother*, Kathleen Erndl

All other readings will be made available either ahead of time as a handout or through E-Reserve ((E) on syllabus) on the course Blackboard.

Office Hours

Monday & Wednesday, 9-11 a.m. If you would like to meet with me during office hours, please sign up ahead of time on the weekly schedule, which will be posted on my office door. If you have a regular scheduling conflict with my office hours, please let me know within the first two weeks of class.

Course Requirements

The following components will comprise the final grade for this course. Please let me know within the first full week of classes if, for any reason, you believe that special considerations need to be taken into account in evaluating your performance this semester (e.g., a learning disability, medical condition, etc.). I would be glad to talk with you about this.

Attendance and Participation (20%)

Students are expected to attend the class punctually and regularly, to ask informed questions, actively participate in discussion, and to respect each other, the professor, and guests. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class; it is students’ responsibility to be sure to sign this sheet every class. Since late arrivals and early departures disrupt class, I will count two tardies, two early departures, or any combination of the two as an absence. More than two unexcused absences during the course of the semester will have a significant, adverse effect on your final grade. For an absence to be “excused” requires: an e-mail from you before the class meets alerting me of your coming absence and the reason for it, as well as documentation from a relevant source (Health or Student Services, etc.). Note: Oversleeping (or over-napping) is not a relevant excuse for missing class.
**General Seminar Preparation**

To facilitate students’ ability to actively join in more in-depth discussion, the class will switch to a seminar format on several Thursdays during the term. If these discussions are to be successful, students will need to have seen the films and carefully read the assigned texts, and **to have relevant texts in hand (including those posted on E-Reserve) in class** in order to actively take part in discussion.

**Film Screenings and Reading Requirements**

Most weeks during the term, a film will be shown. Screenings are always scheduled starting at 7:00 p.m. in ARH 201 (the “CEC”) and can last up to around 3 or more hours (i.e., the movie won’t be done sometimes until 10:30 p.m.—Bollywood movies are long!). These screenings are required components of this class (in addition to approximately 100-200 pages of reading per week). Consider this requirement carefully before making your final decision to take this class. To help students be aware of weeks that have movies or readings on the longer side (or both), I have marked that week with *** in the Course Schedule below.

**Blackboard Discussion (10 %)**

On the weeks that class includes a seminar (see class schedule), **all students are required to post** on the class Blackboard “Discussion Board” by **12 a.m. on Wednesday night**. What you post is largely up to you: you can respond to a question posed by the seminar leaders for that week, take the discussion in a different direction, pose your own questions to the group, or sometimes just use the post as a space to work through your reactions to films and readings. However, I will evaluate both the consistency and quality of your posts as a part of determining your grade for this aspect of the course. In general, posts should always be at least a substantial paragraph in length but not more than a page, show an awareness of other people’s thoughts, questions and reactions, and be adequately detailed (i.e., I expect at least 2-3 direct references to specific film scenes and/or ideas (complete with page numbers and/or quotations) from our texts).

**Seminar Leadership (10 %)**

Students are required to sign-up **in pairs** as seminar leaders for one week of the term. Seminar leaders have the following four responsibilities: 1) preparation and posting of an agenda of questions to the “Discussion Board” (Pioneerweb) by 9 p.m. Wednesday night; 2) preparation of a short (2-3 page) seminar paper to be presented to the group (including copies for all seminar participants) at the beginning of seminar; 3) active presentation of your own thoughts and questions, and active leadership of the discussion in seminar; 4) short (1 page) reflection on presentation/discussion to be handed in with agenda and seminar paper by Friday of that week.
Essays (30%)  
Students will be asked to write two short (4-5 page), clearly-focused essays. I will circulate a list of essay questions related to our readings and films from which students may select. Students are also permitted to write on a topic of their own design, provided they come to speak with me about it before writing.

Final Paper (30%)  
Students will write an in-depth final paper (15 pages). This paper assignment will include several steps and deadlines which will be described in the second half of the term.

Note on Handing in Assignments  
All assignments must be submitted in hard copy form either in class or to my mailbox in Steiner. No e-mail copies will be accepted in place of a hard copy. If you would like your final paper returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with it when you hand it in.

Academic Honesty  
For a helpful discussion of and practical guidelines for following Grinnell’s Academic Honesty policies see: http://web.grinnell.edu/WritingLab/CitationGuides/achondiscuss.html
Class, Reading and Screening Schedule

Week 1

1/23  Introduction

1/25  Movies, Sex and God(s)

Read Vijay Mishra, Chapter 1, “Inventing Bombay Cinema,” pp. 1-33

Week 2 ***

1/30  Movies, Myth and Religion

Read Lyden, “Existing Approaches to Religion and Film,” “Myths about Myth” pp. 11-78 (E)
Mishra, Chapter 2, “Melodramatic Staging,” pp. 35-59

2/1  Krishna and Rasa

Read Haberman, Acting as a Way of Salvation, Chapters 2, 3 and 4, pp. 12-60 (E)

Week 3

2/6  Mirabai’s Story

Film: Meera, Gulzar, 1979, 120 min.

2/8  Loving the Dark God (Seminar)


Week 4 ***

2/13  Gurus, Saints and Shiva

Read Narayan, The Guide

Recommended reading:
Mishra Chapter 4, “Auteurship and the Lure of Romance,” pp. 89-123
2/15  Indian Saints (Seminar)

    Read Narayan, *The Guide*

Week 5

2/20  Goddesses

    Film: *Jai Santoshi Ma* (Hail, Mother Santoshi), V. Sharma, 1975, 138 min.

    Read Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, pp. 18-44, 135-152.

2/22  The Goddess of Satisfaction (Seminar)


    Recommended reading:


Week 6

2/27  Women and Goddesses

    Film: *Devi* (“The Goddess”), Satyajit Ray, 1960, 93 min. (yes, it’s an ‘art film’)

    Read Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, pp. 61-134, 153-163.

3/1  Is the Goddess a Feminist? (Seminar)

    Read Erndl “Introduction” and “Is Shakti Empowering for Women”? (E)

Week 7 ***

3/6  Indian Nationalism

    Film: “Mother India,” Mehboob Khan, 1957, 172 min.

    Read Chatterjee, *Mother India*
3/8  Woman as Nation

Read Mishra, Chapter 3, “The Texts of ‘Mother India,’” pp. 61-87.

Guest, Dr. Anne Monius, Harvard University

Week 8

3/13  Indian Epics

Read, Narayan’s Ramayana

3/15  Ramayana (Seminar)

Read, Narayan’s Ramayana

Spring Break, March 17-April 1

Week 9

4/3  Many Ramayanas

Film: Ramayana, Ramanand Sagar, 1987-88, TV Serial.

Read Lutgendorf, “All in the (Raghu) Family,” pp. 217-53 (E)

4/5  The Rule of Rama (Seminar)


Week 10

4/10  Islam in India


Read Gottschalk, “Indian Muslim Tradition,” pp. 201-245. (E)

4/12  *Purity and the Prostitute* (no seminar)


**Week 11**

4/17  *Partition*


Read Rita Menu, *Borders and Boundaries* (E)

4/19  *Seminar*

Read, Veena Das, “National Honor and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children” (E)

**Week 12**

4/24  *Manly Men*

Film: *Deewar* (“The Wall”), Yash Chopra, 1975, 174 min.


4/26  *Seminar*


**Week 13 ***

5/1  *Imperial India*

Film: *Lagaan* (“The Tax”), Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001, 3 hrs. 45 min.

Read Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemies* (E)

5/3  *Seminar*

Read Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemies* (E)
Week 14

5/8    Final Paper Workshop

Film: TBA

5/10    Final Class