

(Re)viewing India: Cinematic Representations of Gender, Religion and the Nation

FINA 555

Instructor: Katherine Hacker

Fall 2002

Description

From Mehboob Khan's 1957 epic *Mother India* to Deepa Mehta's 1998 controversial *Fire*, this seminar is a cinematic exploration of the complex, entangled, and often politically charged issues of gender, religion and nationalism in contemporary South Asian society. Mahatma Gandhi, an important voice in the nationalist movement in India in the 1920's and 30's, felt that sexuality and desire were intimately connected to social life and politics, and that self-control translated directly into both public and private power. Cultural and social attitudes concerning celibacy, for example, complicate our understanding of sexuality in a South Asian context. The selected films concern themselves with the ways in which these contradictory, contested and unstable categories are negotiated and (re)presented to the spectator. In addition to a thematic coherence, films address particular moments of crisis and rupture in colonial and post-colonial India. Ashish Nandy has written that "studying popular film is studying Indian modernity at its rawest, its crudities laid bare by the fate of traditions in contemporary life and arts." The politics of 'tradition', and its alter-ego modernity, identity formation and difference, the related vexing issue of communalism, diaspora and displacement will all come within our purview this year. Foundational texts and more recent scholarship - with particular attention to South Asian voices - offer us discursive strategies and alternative ideologies for interrogating the complex cluster of meanings around 'India,' framed within and inscribed in celluloid.

The offering of this graduate seminar is particularly timely as we (a joint effort with a group of committed graduate students from the Film course I offered in 1999) received an award from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund to establish a South Asia Film Archive at UBC. Beginning this summer with the design of a web page, students in FINA 555 will have opportunities to contribute in substantive ways to this exciting new initiative.