

# Introduction to Humanities

## Lecture 4

- Culture –expressive and symbolic human activities
- Literary production, visual and aural production, art and artisanal practices, pop culture and ephemera
- What is legit Culture?

# Cinema Cinema

- Indian Literature, Painting, Music, Dance has greats – old and new
- Largest Cinema Producing/Consuming country in the world
- But is it legit?

# Early Days

- Dadasaheb Phalke – *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) – First Film
- Ardeshir Irani – *Alam Ara* (1931) – First Talkie
- First Bangla feature in 1917
- First South Indian feature in 1919
- 1927 – 108 films made, 1931 – 328 films made

- V. G. Damle, Shantaram, S. Fatehlal, P.C. Barua
- Mythologicals, religious stories in the 20s
- Influenced by folk story telling techniques – Lavani, Jatra, Parsi Theatre
- Dowry, Widow remarriage, Untouchability, Polygamy, Child marriage – 30s, 40s
- By the 1940s, a studio system is in place churning out films in Oriya, Panjabi, Marathi

# Independence

- 1940s – studio system shaken up by the Partition
- Writers, Artistes, technicians relocate
- Studio lots are assigned to different countries
- Time for individual contracts
- Investment is scarce
- 1950s & 60s see the “Golden Period”

- Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, K. Asif, Abrar Alvi
- Romance/melodramas/Socials, Muslim Socials, great songs, socialist nation-building concerns
- 1970s – The Emergency, Manmohan Desai, Prakash Mehra, Sippy brothers – the angry young man, Masala pot-boiler

- 1980s – TV, VHS, Piracy
- Audiences move away from theatres
- Infrastructure suffers
- Dubious sources of money
- Art Cinema, Government funding for a certain kind of cinema
- Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Jahanu Barua, Ghatak, Kasaravalli



- 1990s – cinema starts to cater to TV
- Independent producers lose money heavily
- India has 1 screen per 93,000 people
- Single screen theatres, bad equipment
- Liberalization – Global industry players come in
- DDLJ – 1995

# Still not Legit

- Is cinema legitimate cultural production in India?
- Art/Declassè?
- Bad because it is popular? Of the masses?
- Place in the hierarchy of labor/knowledge/culture?
- Just how bad is it?

# Bad Beginnings

- Gandhi – “...I have never once been to a cinema and refuse to be enthused about it and waste God-given time in spite of pressure sometimes used by kind friends. They tell me it has an educational value. It is possible that it has. But its corrupting influence obtrudes itself upon me every day. Education, therefore, I seek elsewhere.” 1926

Source: *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, The* (Delhi, Publication Division, Government of India, 1965) Vol. 32, p. 84-85

## LETTER TO KASTURBA GANDHI

“In Ahmedabad children get headaches, lose power of thinking, get fever and die. It is on the decline now. The disease is caused by going to cinemas, etc.” 1934

*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, The* (Delhi, Publication Division, Government of India, 1965)  
Vol. 57, Item. 340, p. 324

# Not Legit Culture

- Film making gains industry status in 2000
- Banks, financial Institutions, corporate entities can now invest
- Mall culture, Multiple platforms for Screening
  - TV rights, Music rights, International rights, Ancillary rights
- Global goods on the Indian screen, Indian goods on the global screen
- White women bodies dance around the hero

- With globalization, the moral and political thrust changes
- Capitalism is good.
- We invest in the hero's **personal** success story
- The rich are not bad villains, they are aspirational placeholders
- Personal wealth is now a **cultural value**

- Individual talent/genius/spunk over a better world for all
- To be incorporated into a hierarchical order, not to disrupt it
- Artisan/Art dichotomy is no longer an opposition, it is a hurdle

# Is cinema ever important as culture?

- Problems of representation – Sex, Sexuality, Violence, Regional Stereotypes, Caste
- Technological proliferation of images
- Entertainment versus art; escape versus engagement
- Boundaries of “decent” cinema
- Dangerous?



# What came first?

- Reality or Cinema?
- Does it “promote” violence, bad behaviour?
- *Udta Punjab vs Kabir Singh*
- Fantastical mirror

- Where is History Made?
- Production systems vs experiences
- The abundance of Hindi “heartland” material in cinema and OTT today
- Identity as experience, not as systems of producing history
- Romantic versions of poverty, land, life

# Where we began

- Ask questions and interrogate existing conditions of being a human
- Culture – Relationship between human experience, everyday life, social relations and power
- Disrupt the stable acceptance of these relationships