’Screening India‘ - Movies from India at the SAI

In April 2002, the Department of Anthropology began screening Hindi films on a fortnightly basis during the semester. Summer semester 2003 marks the third round of this program, which has proven to be a great success among staff and students from different departments at the South Asia Institute, as well as afficionados of Hindi films from other institutes of Heidelberg University.

Our goal is to expose people to the diversity of visual and narrative practices in India by presenting them with a selection of mainstream Hindi films both old and new, as well as films from the "parallel cinema". Likewise, every other fortnight Thomas Lehmann from the Department of Modern Indology screens Tamil films. The screenings have been particularly appreciated by students taking Hindi and Tamil language classes, as well as students enrolled in classes on popular culture and media anthropology.

Even though the films can certainly also be enjoyed as a leisure activity, our intention is to use them more directly for educational purposes. One key focus of the film screenings and discussions around them are related to gender issues, nationalism and social change. For example, the film series in the winter semester of 2003/2004 will be thematically organised around the concept of the "Mega-Cities", which will connect it to two modules taught on this topic during the semester in the Departments of Anthropology and History of South Asia. Other kinds of research and educational involvement with Indian cinemas include a workshop with ethnographic filmmakers Judith and David MacDougall, well-known for their films Photowallahs (1991) and The Doon School Project (2001-2003), which the Department of Anthropology organized in June 2002 in cooperation with the Institute of Anthropology at Heidelberg University. In January 2003, filmmaker Dorothee Wenner (Berlin) presented a talk on the actress "Fearless Nadia" at a local cinema hall, followed by the screening of the film Miss Frontier Mail (1936), and in February 2003, the Departments of Anthropology and History at the South Asia Institute invited the filmmaker, writer and activist Suma Josson (Mumbai) to screen her latest documentary film on the Gujarat violence of 2002. In summer semester 2003, Nicole Wolf from Frankfurt/Oder held a seminar on gender and documentary filmmaking in India, as part of a series of seminars that will be conducted in the coming years. A course on theatre and film in India will be offered to advanced students in the winter semester of 2003/04 by Christiane Brosius and Martin Kunz from the Department of Anthropology.

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Film Hoardings in Delhi - Photo: Christiane Brosius