

# HOLLYWOOD/BOLLYWOOD & INDIAN RELIGIONS

Spring 2021

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**Lectures:** available via Avenue on Mondays and Wednesdays

**Office Hours:** By Appointment (telephone, Zoom, or Skype)

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## **Course Description**

In this course we will explore depictions of Indian religions on film. Taking a semi-comparative approach, we will unpack key issues in the study of Indian religions as they play out in both Western (Hollywood) and South Asian (Bollywood) cinema.

## **Course Objectives**

By the end of the course students should be able to demonstrate:

- 1) an ability to view films through the disciplinary perspectives of Religious Studies
- 2) a working knowledge of doctrinal issues in Indian religions
- 3) a familiarity with basic attributes of Indian storytelling through cinema
- 4) a familiarity with bibliographic and citation conventions for film

## **Required Materials and Texts**

- All required readings will be made available to students on Avenue to Learn by the first day of class. Links to video lectures will also be made available in Avenue to Learn, and will be released on Mondays and Wednesdays.
- Additionally, students are required to view the following films: *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan, 2007), *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999), and either *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000) or *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho, 2019). These films will not be made available to students via the course page.
- How you access these films is entirely up to you. *Parasite* is available to stream through Criterion via the McMaster Library catalogue. Three of these four films (*Om Shanti Om*, *The Matrix*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) are available on Canadian Netflix at the time this syllabus is being composed. Alternatively, all of these films are available for rental on iTunes for a total of less than \$20. Cheap DVDs may be purchased through secondhand sellers, and two of these films are still available through the secondary market on VHS. It really doesn't matter to me in which format you view these films, just be sure to do so.
- Contact me by Week 2 if you are having issues accessing the films and we will come up with a solution together. Please take note of the content warnings and ratings of the films before viewing them. If you are not comfortable viewing any these films for any reason, please contact me by Week 2 and we will make other arrangements for you to succeed in the class.
- Completing the required course readings and viewing the required films should allow students to pass this class. Those students who would like to thrive, i.e. receive a grade in the A or B ranges, are encouraged to read and watch materials well beyond those outlined in this syllabus based on their own research interests. Suggestions for further reading and viewing will appear in lectures and in some cases be made easily available to students on the course page on Avenue to Learn.

## **Class Format**

This course is online and asynchronous. Lectures will be made available through Avenue to Learn on Mondays and Wednesdays. Students are required to keep up with readings, assignments, and other learning tasks as assigned.

## **Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. 25% Secondary Literature Assignment (due May 19th)
2. 30% Research Assignment (due June 2nd)
3. 30% Take-home Test (due June 14th)
4. 15% Participation & Engagement

## **Course Evaluation – Details**

### **Secondary Literature Assignment (25%), due May 19th**

Students will read either Rachel Dwyer's chapter "Hinduism," or Francisca Cho's chapter "Buddhism," in *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, edited by John Lyden (2009). Both readings are available for free on McMaster's library catalogue.

Students will answer questions on the chosen reading that assesses their understanding of: 1) the author; 2) the sources the author uses; and 3) the arguments the author makes.

Essentially, this assignment gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to read secondary literature on religion and film at an undergraduate level.

Further instructions and a rubric will be provided to students on the first day of class.

### **Research Assignment (30%), due June 2nd**

Students will complete their choice of:

- 1) a short film review of a movie not found on this syllabus;
- 2) a short, podcast-style review of a film not found on this syllabus; or
- 3) submit notes on the similarities and differences between a Hollywood film of their choice and its Bollywood remake (or vice versa).

Students will be provided with around 20 relevant academic film reviews as PDFs on Avenue to Learn as examples to help with choices 1 and 2. Students can find a list of Hollywood films and their Bollywood remakes in the assigned reading for May 10th to get them started with choice 3.

Further instructions and a rubric will be provided to students on Avenue by no later than the start of Week 2.

### **Take-home Test (30%), due June 14th**

On May 31st, students will be provided with detailed instructions for completing the take-home test. Students will also receive a rubric in advance of the due date.

Students will be given three short essay questions. They must answer two of those questions and submit their responses by midnight on June 14th. The questions will test the students' overall understanding of the assigned films and readings in this course as they relate to the study of Indian religions and film.

Failure to engage critically with the assigned films, course readings, and lecture content will result in a low or failing grade. Students are therefore encouraged to keep up with readings and lectures, taking adequate notes with their own observations as the course unfolds. Suggestions for note-taking practices will be made in lectures.

### **Participation (15%)**

In some lectures, students will receive instructions for tasks to complete via the discussion board on Avenue to Learn for a participation grade. This will happen at least five times this term. Although instructions will appear in lectures on an ad hoc basis, tasks must be completed by the due date indicated on the syllabus in order to fully count towards a student's participation mark. Students will earn 3 points for a task completed correctly and on time. 1.5 points for a task completed correctly but late. 1 point for a task completed incorrectly, regardless of whether it was late or on time. No points will be awarded for tasks that were not attempted. There will be no make up opportunities.

## **Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

### **Week 1 (May 3rd)**

#### **May 3rd – Introduction to the Course**

Reading: none

#### **May 5th – Definitions and Disciplinary Considerations (part one)**

Reading: Mishra, Vijay. 2010 "Hinduism and Film: Bollywood." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism 2*: 636–651

### **Week 2 (May 10th)**

#### **May 10th – Definitions and Disciplinary Considerations (part two)**

Reading: Ostrowski, Ally. 2016. "Found in Translation: From Hollywood Hits to Bollywood Blockbusters." In *Journal of Religion & Film* 11(4): Article 4

Work Due: Participation One

**May 12th – Writing in Film and Religion (part one)**

Reading: Lyden, John. 2009. "Introduction." In *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*: 1–10

**Week 3 (May 17th)**

**May 17th – Writing in Film and Religion (part two)**

Reading: TBD

Work Due: Participation Two

**May 19th – Bollywood *Masala*: Melodrama the Megagenre (part one)**

Film: *Om Shanti Om* (2007). Director: Farah Khan

Reading: Erndl, Kathleen. 2013. "Woman Becomes Goddess in Bollywood: Justice, Violence, and the Feminine in Popular Hindi Film." In *Journal of Religion & Film* 17(1): Article 1

Work Due: Secondary Literature Assignment

**Week 4 (May 24th)**

**May 24th – Victoria Day [no lecture]**

Reading: none

**May 26th – Bollywood *Masala*: Melodrama the Megagenre (part two)**

Reading: Shastri, Sudha. 2011. "'The Play's the Thing, Wherein I'll Catch the Conscience of the King': Intertextuality in *Om Shanti Om*." In *Journal of Film and Video* 63(1): 32–43

Work Due: Participation Three

**Week 5 (May 31st)**

**May 31st – Indian Religions in Hollywood: Keanu Reeves (part one)**

Film: *The Matrix* (1999). Directors: The Wachowskis

Reading: Suh, Sharon. 2020. "Once the Buddha was Born as Keanu Reeves: The Shaping of Buddhism in American Film and Popular Culture." In *CrossCurrents* 70(3): 276–88

Work Due: Participation Four

**June 2nd – Indian Religions in Hollywood: Keanu Reeves (part two)**

Reading: Ford, James. 2000. "Buddhism, Christianity, and the Matrix: The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary Cinema." In *Journal of Religion & Film* 4(2): Article 1

Work Due: Research Assignment

## Week 6 (June 7th)

### June 7th – Asian Films as “Best Picture”: Why Not Bollywood? (part one)

Film: Either *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Director: Ang Lee; or *Parasite* (2019). Director: Bong Joon-ho

Reading: Shedde, Meenakshi. 2006. “Bollywood Cinema: Making Elephants Fly.” In *Cineaste* 31(3): 24–9

Work Due: Participation Five

### June 9th – Asian Films as “Best Picture”: Why Not Bollywood? (part two)

Reading: Baker, Geoff. 2006. “Portraying the Quest for Buddhist Wisdom?: A Comparative Study of The Matrix and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.” In *Journal of Religion & Film* 10(1): Article 3

## Week 7 (June 14th)

### June 14th – Final Thoughts on the Course

Reading: none

Work Due: Take-home Test

## Course Policies

### Submission of Assignments

Unless specifically instructed to do otherwise, all assignments should be submitted on Avenue as .doc(x) or .pdf. Do not submit assignments by email!

### Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C

<b>MARK</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

### **Late Assignments**

As this course is being delivered online in a condensed Spring semester, there is little room for late work. However, we are in the middle of a global crisis and students may quickly find themselves with much more pressing concerns than an undergraduate assignment. Likewise, your instructor may suddenly find himself with much more pressing concerns than grading work that has been handed in late.

If you need an extension on an assignment, contact me as soon as possible. Late assignments that have not been granted an extension may receive a penalty of 5% a day for 5 days. If a deadline passes and I have not heard from a student within 5 days, I will not accept the assignment except in extraordinary circumstances.

### **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.



## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://sec-retariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://sec-retariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection**

**Some courses may** use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., online search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## **Courses with an Online Element**

**Some courses may** use online elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses online elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

## **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

## **Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work**

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

## **Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## **Copyright and Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

## **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.