

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Proposal for a New Course

1. Course no.: ENG4xxx (level 2 UG course)

2. Course title: Non-mainstream narrative cinemas in India

3. Per-week Lectures: 3 (L), Tutorial: 0 (T), Laboratory: 0 (P), Additional hours: 0 (A)

Credits (3xL+2xT+P+A): 9

Duration of course: Full semester

54 Proposing department: HSS/English

Other departments/IDP which may be interested in the proposed course:

Other faculty members interested in teaching the proposed course:

5. Proposing instructor: Syed Feroz Hassan

6. Course description:

A) Scope

This course will introduce students to a range of Indian films that have variously been described as arthouse, alternative, independent or indies, and non-mainstream. It will begin by providing a brief genealogy of these terms and their resonance with, but also the difficulty of adapting them to, the Indian context.

The history of these cinemas will be examined alongside the emergence of institutions such as film societies, film festivals and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) / National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), while foregrounding shared formal and thematic concerns in different phases and categories that emerge from this history.

The emergence of the Film Society Movement in the 1950s will form the backdrop to the discussion of films by Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen from West Bengal in the first phase. A second phase will link up the consolidation of the movement with the emergence of state-sponsored filmmaking through the NFDC. Films by directors such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, Girish Karnad, Shyam Benegal, Jabbar Patel, Sai Paranjpye, Girish Kasaravalli, Ketan Mehta, Govind Nihalani and Saeed Mirza will be used to discuss broadly shared concerns around realism in style and a socio-political imperative in the choice of subjects. These will be placed against relevant aspects of Indian history from the late 1960s to the early '90s.

The discussion of this second phase will also have a separate section to briefly discuss some attempts at non-state sponsored funding for such cinema. A couple of prominent instances of the

co-operative model of production (Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* (1977) and Benegal's *Manthan* (1981)) will figure in this discussion alongside rare instances of private/corporate financing as in the case of some of Benegal's films or those produced by Shashi Kapoor.

A parallel body of work from the same period will look at the work of filmmakers such as Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani who sought to develop a more experimental and non-realist narrative mode.

The penultimate section will look briefly at English-language cinema in India using examples from films of Merchant-Ivory, Aparna Sen, Pamela Rooks, Pradip Kishen and Dev Benegal.

The final part of the course will look at the decline of state funding and the film society movement after economic liberalisation in India from the early 1990s. The focus will be on the re-emergence of non-mainstream cinemas in the current, digital era.

B) Contents

S. No.	Broad Title	Topics	No. of Lectures
1.	Institutional origins	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Film Society Movement 2. The first editions of the International Film Festival of India 3. The influence of Italian neo-realism 4. The discourse of film authorship 	3
2.	New cinema in Bengal: Ray, Ghatak and Sen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aspects of Satyajit Ray's oeuvre: neo-realism, heritage cinema and social realism 2. Ritwik Ghatak and the search for a radical popular aesthetic 3. Mrinal Sen and the legacy of the militant film style 	9
3.	State-sponsored realism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The establishment of FFC / NFDC, film archives and a national film institute, plus the consolidation of the film society movement 2. The primacy of social realism in the work of representative filmmakers 	12

S. No.	Broad Title	Topics	No. of Lectures
		3. Alternate funding models for this mode	
4.	Experimental narrative cinema	The films of Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani	5
5.	English language films in India	1. Significance of attempts at English language production 2. The early films of Merchant-Ivory and the films of Aparna Sen, Pamela Rooks, Pradip Kishen and Dev Benegal	6
6.	Non-mainstream cinema post Liberalization	1. The decline of the film society movement: causes and consequences 2. Global festival financing and the new independent cinemas 3. Some new aesthetic and thematic patterns	5
Total			40

C) Pre-requisites, if any: None

D) Short summary for inclusion in the Courses of Study booklet

This course will introduce students to a range of Indian films that have variously been described as arthouse, alternative, independent or indies, and non-mainstream. It will look at a variety of filmmakers such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, Mani Kaul, and many others to identify the varying aesthetic and social significance of these films over the past seven decades of film history.

7. Recommended books:

Textbooks: Readings will include selections from the following:

- a) *Deep Focus: Reflections on Cinema*, by Satyajit Ray (Harper Collins 2013)
- b) *Rows and Rows of Fences: Ritwik Ghatak on Cinema* (Seagull 1987)
- c) *Montage: Life, Politics, Cinema*, by Mrinal Sen (Seagull 2018)
- d) *India's Film Society Movement*, by V. K. Cherian (Sage 2016)

- e) *The New Indian Cinema*, by Aruna Vasudev (Macmillan 1986)
- f) *Shyam Benegal*, by Sangeeta Dutta (British Film Institute 2019)
- g) *South Asia in Alternative Cinema(s)*, Ed. Vivek Sachadeva et al (Routledge, 2025)

Reference Books: *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Indie Cinema*, Ed. Jayjit Sarkar and Anik Sarkar (Routledge 2025)


8. Any other remarks: None

Dated: 11-05-2025

Proposer:



Dated: 12-06-2025

DUGC/~~DPGC~~ Convenor: 

The course is approved / not approved.

Chairman, SUGC/~~SPGC~~

Dated: